

**CTPR 535 INTERMEDIATE PRACTICUM IN EDITING**  
USC SCHOOL OF CINEMATIC ARTS

Spring 2021

**Section 18636**

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**Class Meetings:** Tuesdays, 7-10 p.m. **ZOOM - always check email for link**

**Office Hours:** By Appointment - phone, email and Zoom/Skype - please email or call per class instructions

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

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**WELCOME TO THE EDIT!**

Let's start out with a question: What is the most purely "cinematic" craft in filmmaking?

My answer to that question (which many will debate!)...is editing.

All other jobs and departments of a film production have earlier artistic or craft roots - directing comes from the theater, cinematography from photography and painting, sound from the days of radio, set design from architecture, and so on. EDITING, however, is a truly cinematic art, one that literally has changed human consciousness with its invention and evolution. Editing is the first truly "fourth dimensional" art form...it has given us control over the flow, pace, and even the direction of TIME. With this control, we can reshape and enhance story, performance, emotion and rhythm. It's an incredibly powerful craft, and in my opinion, the most central language of film.

Narrative features, documentaries, commercials, animation, television...all forms of cinematic expression meet in the common core of the edit room, and we'll discuss both specific and universal concepts for these and other types of filmmaking.

This course will focus on the brain processes that make the difference between picture editing and *great* picture editing. It will cover both the theory and the technique of editing. You will edit or re-edit, nearly every week, a series of scenes that are designed to gradually expand the types of editing experiences that you have. The accumulation of these editing experiences should give you an overview of the complete process -- aesthetic and the practical -- teaching you to how to make *informed* editing choices.

In addition, you will be given a working knowledge of how to organize an editing room and operate the various tools that you need to make your editing decisions. The bulk of your hands-on editing tutoring will be given by Paul Petschek during two required Wednesday evening Labs (more on these below). You will start out in these Lab classes learning all of the technical aspects that you will need for this class. As the semester continues you will also learn skills that may take you beyond what you do in this class, but are essential if you are to work in any capacity in an editing room today.

Projects will be edited using the USC SCA standard non-linear digital editing machine, **the Avid Media Composer**. You will also get an overview of the entire filmmaking process from the point of view of the

editing room. But our class is primarily a PHILOSOPHICAL class: how to look at a scene as an editor, in order to best bring out your artistic ideas. You will discover editing principles and aesthetics that you can use no matter which format you edit with and what format your project is intended for (television, feature, documentary, etc.). We will include lots of back and forth between all of us on these ideas, plus some special guests who can bring more perspective on what it means to be an editor.

During your time in this class you will be learning as many techniques as possible in order to prepare you to undertake the editing process in other USC courses and in your post-school careers. You will be expected to edit your projects outside of class time and bring them into the class to present and discuss with others. **It's VERY important to keep up with the work assignments - these factor greatly in your final grade!**

Because of the amount of material we need to cover, the 15 weeks (note that our last class happens during finals week on so don't make plans for that night) time period for our classes will get pretty intense. **Be prepared for some classes to go past the official finish time, if we need to finish student edit playbacks and critiques**, but I'll try to keep these rare.

### **CLASS FORMAT:**

The class is structured to give you an overview of how a film is made from the point of view of the editing process (and, recently, more and more things are being made the responsibility of the editing staff). Along the way, you will get a sense of the entire flow of film editing – including its thought processes, technical needs, scheduling, and politics.

The first two weeks will be an introductory phase in which I will discuss a large variety of topics including how the class will work, the process of editing, the nuts and bolts of the editorial process, and present a few pieces of film for examination. We will also discuss variations on the syllabus that we may want to make. I'll also “deep dissect” a favorite scene of mine to examine the editing and how it relates to the story, characters, cinematography, sound design and the rest of the film in its flow. **Watch this carefully, because you'll all be doing this during the semester!**

After that, our weekly meetings will generally include a presentation by one student who will “deep dissect” a scene from a favorite film of theirs, emphasizing the editorial choices made in the creation of that scene. I will also discuss different aspects of editing, using film clips to illustrate the topics. There is a good possibility that we might have guest speakers throughout the semester. No promises, but if they don't cancel out on me, you should have some interesting opportunities for discussion with working professionals besides me. I'll also be providing some “behind the scenes” stories of what I'm working on and the challenges I'm running into, week by week (as much as I'm allowed to tell, depending on my non-disclosure agreements!).

There will likely be a number of readings from the web and elsewhere that I'll make available to you digitally (no printed material). There is no formal textbook for this class. I may additionally assign viewings of various web clips, including specific videos on YouTube or Vimeo. These are meant to further ideas we discuss in class, and if they are really central and important, I'll make them required reading occasionally.

**At least half of each class will be devoted to the screening and critiquing of the scenes that you will have edited, in pairs, during the preceding week.** Your fellow class members and I will engage each of you in a critique of your work, and you will return to the editing room during the next week for a second cut. **THIS IS THE CORE OF THE CLASS...showing your cuts for an intelligent (and fun!) discussion/critique with your classmates and learning from those notes. PARTICIPATION IS KEY TO A GREAT CLASS, and will be part of your grade!** A final component of our classes will be

a discussion of the politics of editing — from working closely with directors, producers, musicians and writers, to interactions with the studios and the preview process. Again, I'll tell stories from my own experience, within the boundaries of discretion...and good taste!

Along the way, you're going to learn how to make sense of a lot of footage, how to use your NLE (non-linear editor) in a professional way, how to work better in Avid (we WILL occasionally talk about Adobe Premiere, After Effects and other software), how to think about music, sound and effects to tell your story, and a whole slew of skills that will better prepare you for the more advanced work here at USC and in the "real world".

Just like movie theaters and playhouses, I'm going to ask every one of you to **turn off all cell phones** before coming to class (**AND NO TEXTING PLEASE!**) Please save electronic communications for the mid-class break. Ringing and buzzing phones are really disruptive in class and just plain rude to me and your fellow classmates. Unlike movie theaters and playhouses, I have no problem if you keep your laptops or smartphones/iPads/tablets/phablets etc. **open and active FOR ON-TOPIC INTERNET USE AND NOTE TAKING** during class. We may be checking out quite a few internet resources, so save those bookmarks! I also love it when you take notes, either written or on that laptop. I was a student at USC over 25 years ago...and I took tons of notes and used them for years after. ***Please take notes in class as needed.***

During all phases of the class I encourage questions and comments. We all need to be challenged. That includes me. There are many, many topics open for discussion, and in many cases I'll have real world stories to match your questions and comments, and at the same time, I want to learn from your ideas as well.

## WEEKLY COURSE BREAKDOWN

*Please note, this breakdown is VERY LIKELY to change several times during the course of the semester, depending on the availability of guest speakers or the progress of your own work. **This is only a general draft of the semester - we will move LOTS of these topics around week to week, so don't be surprised!***

1	01/19/21	<b>Intro: Editing as an Idea</b>	<b>Layout of the semester and class, syllabus</b> How to Think Like An Editor. Brief History of the edit. Editing as a time machine!	<b>ASSIGNMENT: Found footage edit gather clips and</b> <b>(to watch for 3rd class "535</b>
2	01/26/21	<b>Editing as an Idea, pt 2</b>	Script analysis. Lined Scripts Demo of scene commentaries Editing hardware history and a look at the Avid	ASSIGNMENT:  Assemble your "535 Film Festival" cuts for next week
3	02/02/21	<b>Working with Shots and Scenes</b>	More on scene construction Genres, beats and rules of three Practical discussion of setting up an edit room, working with AEs, and more	1st week freeform edit due, "535 Film Festival" 1st scene edit assigned

4	02/09/21	<b>Examining The Sequence</b>	Restructuring and rearrangement in sequences. Dailies notes. Television, features, documentaries and other forms of edit politics.	Review 1st scene edits, recut 1st scene, begin second scene edit
5	02/16/21	<b>Music Design</b>	Using music to tell a story. Spotting music What everyone does for music in film, vs unique choices Moving towards a final mix. Musical style. POSSIBLE GUEST COMPOSER!	Review second scene edit, recut 2nd scene edit, begin third scene edit
6	02/23/21	<b>Sound Design/Post Production (Finishing)</b>	Spotting effects. How to use sound to fulfill your scene and script analyses. Pre-mixing, final mixing. Finishing process workflow. Post scheduling.	Review third scene edit, recut third scene, begin fourth scene
7	03/02/21	<b>VFX</b>	Midterm evaluation Manipulating the film image within the context of the script analysis. Traditional opticals, CGI. Blue Screen and how to use it. Plug-in fun - the world of add-ons How an editing team works with creation and editing of VFX/CGI.	Review fourth scene. Catch up on scene evaluations in class and review/Q&A up to now. Recut fourth scene.
8	03/09/21	<b>The Action Sequence</b>	Creating an action sequence. Action threads and subplots. How a scene analysis may differ in an action sequence. How it doesn't.	Review fourth scene recuts, begin fifth scene
9	03/16/21	<b>Documentary Editing</b>	Telling a story with real footage. How it is the same as the dramatic footage we've been studying, how it is different. Style in documentaries. Storytelling in documentaries	Review fifth scene. Recut fifth scene. Begin sixth scene.
	03/23/21	<b>WELLNESS WEEK - NO CLASS</b>	RELAX, THINK, ENJOY, WATCH MOVIES!	Extra time to work this week!
10	03/30/21	<b>Humor in Editing</b>	Structure in comedy editing. Action and reaction. Rule of Threes as it applies to comedy. Setting up beats. Change partners.	Review recut of fifth scene and cuts of sixth scene. Recut sixth scene (for week 12)

11	04/06/21	<b>Experimental Films/ Editing the Boundaries</b>	Structure in less-obviously structured material. Museum films. Films as art. Examples from across the alternative film world. Editing difficult material.	Review sixth scene recuts. Review leftover unwatched cuts.
12	04/13/21	<b>Other Platforms and Software</b>	Discussion of Premiere, FCP X, Resolve, After Effects, Photoshop and other key software More on plug-ins Becoming a “multiple threat” editor	Begin FINAL PROJECT (multiple scene)
13	04/20/21	<b>Short Films: Commercials YouTube, Music videos and more</b>	How short films and videos use the same rules as long form How they differ Impact on editorial style Examples of various genres	Review first section of FINAL PROJECT. Continue to next FINAL PROJECT SCENE.
14	04/27/21	<b>Alternative Distribution, Editor Life, Wrapping Up, Moving Ahead</b>	The real world of new media and distribution How editors can be key players Freelance life. How to define yourself as an editor but not pigeonhole yourself Festivals and deadlines How to market yourself as an editor Farewell inspirations	Continue FINAL PROJECT SCENES
15	05/04/21 or TBD per USC Final Sched	FINAL CLASS/FAREWELL	Open session to view finals, Q&A on any topics of interest, additional resources	FINAL - REVIEW COMPLETE COMBINED FINAL SCENES.

### COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

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Beginning with the THIRD week (the first two weeks will be our freeform “535 Film Fest” assignment), you will be required to edit and/or re-edit a scene **every week**. You will present it at the next class, and accept criticism from your classmates and me so you can re-edit the scenes for a screening during the following week. My comments will be given **verbally** during the class.

**Once during the semester, you will be required to choose a short scene from a project you admire, and analyze it from the point of view of its editing — its style, content, character construction and anything else that we have learned up until that point.** The scene can be from a film of any kind, a television show, a commercial or a music video – whatever. In short, you can choose anything where editing is involved. **You will screen the scene in class and present that analysis following the screening, both written and orally.** You will be expected to bring a copy of the film scene to class **along with your typed report as a PDF file** on the date it is due. We will have the availability to screen from a QuickTime file of *most codecs*, or a *link to YouTube/Vimeo*. My comments will be given verbally during the class. You won't get a written critique.

Students will be required to attend and participate in all classes. **ATTENDANCE WILL BE TAKEN AT EVERY CLASS.** Written explanations will be necessary *in advance* for all excused absences. **Unexcused absences will be reflected in the course grade.** In addition, students will be expected to be at class on time; *lateness will also be reflected in your grade.* Please make use of my email address or phone service number above if you have an unavoidable problem. If you cannot make the class or will be late, let me know by the evening before the class. [**Sorry for all of the bold facing, underlining and italics, but this section cannot be emphasized enough. Responsibility is an important skill for an editor.**]

Since film editors are judged on their ability to complete their work in a timely manner, you will likewise be responsible for completing each stage of every project on time and in a professional manner.

## TEXTS

**There are no official textbooks for this class**, though I highly recommending your purchase or library checkout of another book — Gabriella Oldham's *First Cut: Conversations with Film Editors*. This is an incredible series of interviews with some of the top editors around. There's also a follow up volume with new stories from editors of more recent films. Great resource from years of experience.

There are other texts and web resources that I am going to be recommending – both aesthetic and technical. I'll make those known as we go through the class, and you can read them as further study beyond the class. But there are **NO OFFICIAL BOOKS REQUIRED** for this class.

## GRADES:

*The primary component of your grade will be your weekly editing assignments.* This involves several factors. The first is your ability to complete these assignments every week, whether they are original edits or recuts. The second is your ability to verbally present a cogent case for every editorial choice you have made during the editing of your scenes. I will challenge you on your decisions as often as I can. This is not because I disagree with them. I need to make sure that each decision was conscious and thought out. As the term progresses, this thoughtful aspect of your editing will become more and more important. Third, you will be graded on your progress during the semester. You will be expected to begin to think more like an editor in your work and your discussions of that work. Your thoroughness, completeness and attention to detail any instructions will all contribute to your grade

You will also be judged on your ability to work constructively with others, to accept criticism, and to refine your work on the basis of that criticism.

The above work will constitute **approximately 50%** of your grade. The following skills will also contribute to your grade:

The written and oral analysis of the film scene that you presented to the class (**approximately 10%**)

Prompt attendance at **and participation in** all class meetings. The participation aspect can't be stressed enough. (**approximately 20%**). I will tend to notice those who don't offer contributions to our critique sessions...being quiet and shy in class is not a great strategy! Also note my use of the word "prompt." We will stress professionalization here – so you can actually get work when you leave USC. Being on time is important. In fact, being *early* is important.

In lieu of a final, you will need to complete an edited sequence, constructed from a number of scenes that you will have been editing over the course of the final weeks of the course. (**approximately 20%**).

Meeting all scheduled dates for all projects will be factored into the above numbers. Late weekly class assignments and the final project (especially the final project) will be reflected in your grade. *If you hand it in late, expect me to deduct from your grade.*

There will be no incompletes granted except in the case of severe medical or serious emergency.

**It is your responsibility to be aware of USC's add/drop and withdraw deadlines.**

#### **PRESENTATION OF EDITED MATERIAL:**

We will generally be screening your cuts off the Google Drive space for the class, so be sure you understand WHERE YOUR PROJECTS AND MATERIALS ARE ON THAT SHARED STORAGE. **Just like in the real world, all material must be properly prepared for screening.** It will be your responsibility to make sure that your outputs are complete, with sound, and in viewable condition. You should check your materials *before leaving the editing station* and on a different machine if possible. We will discuss proper leadering and slating at various points during the semester. You will then be expected to leader/slate your projects every week after that.

You will be **required to bring a backup output Quicktime to class (have it ready to share on your desktop in case of Google Drive issues)**. This is a delivery requirement of each project, be sure to reserve some time to output and copy over your Quicktimes to the Google Drive.

#### **OFFICE HOURS AND OUT OF CLASS CONSULTATION**

I'm a working editor and as such am always in the middle of projects. I maintain a home office and will be available via phone, email or Skype BY APPOINTMENT ONLY at times I will make available in our class shopkeeping sessions each week. PLEASE honor these hours and stick to your appointments... I promise to let you know individually if I have to cancel an appointment...please do me that courtesy also! I look forward to talking about both the class materials and the "real world" with you, including updates on various film festivals and theatrical releases (I have several films I worked on out there this year) and more. I look forward to hearing about and seeing some of your previous work during the semester as well.

#### **Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems**

Plagiarism – presenting someone else's ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, "Behavior Violating University Standards" [policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b](http://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b). Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, [policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct](http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct).

#### **Support Systems:**

*Student Health Counseling Services - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call*

[engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling](http://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling)

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

*Student Health Leave Coordinator* – 213-821-4710

Located in the USC Support and Advocacy office, the Health Leave Coordinator processes requests for health leaves of absence and advocates for students taking such leaves when needed. <https://policy.usc.edu/student-health-leave-absence/>

*National Suicide Prevention Lifeline* - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call

[suicidepreventionlifeline.org](https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

*Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP)* - (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call

[engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp](https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp)

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

*Office of Equity and Diversity (OED) | Title IX* - (213) 740-5086

[equity.usc.edu](https://equity.usc.edu), [titleix.usc.edu](https://titleix.usc.edu)

Information about how to get help or help a survivor of harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants. The university prohibits discrimination or harassment based on the following protected characteristics: race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, physical disability, medical condition, mental disability, marital status, pregnancy, veteran status, genetic information, and any other characteristic which may be specified in applicable laws and governmental regulations.

*Bias Assessment Response and Support* - (213) 740-2421

[studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support](https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support)

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions for appropriate investigation and response.

*The Office of Disability Services and Programs* - (213) 740-0776

[dsp.usc.edu](https://dsp.usc.edu)

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

*USC Support and Advocacy* - (213) 821-4710



[studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa](http://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa)

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

*Diversity at USC - (213) 740-2101*

[diversity.usc.edu](http://diversity.usc.edu)

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

*USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call*

[dps.usc.edu](http://dps.usc.edu), [emergency.usc.edu](http://emergency.usc.edu)

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

*USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call*

[dps.usc.edu](http://dps.usc.edu)

Non-emergency assistance or information.

### **Diversity and Inclusion**

Diversity and Inclusion are foundational to the SCA community. We are committed to fostering a welcoming and supportive environment where students of all identities and backgrounds can flourish. The classroom should be a space for open discussion of ideas and self-expression; however, SCA will not tolerate verbal or written abuse, threats, harassment, intimidation or violence against person or property. If students are concerned about these matters in the classroom setting they are encouraged to contact their SCA Diversity and Inclusion Liaison, <http://cinema.usc.edu/about/diversity.cfm>; e-mail [diversity@cinema.usc.edu](mailto:diversity@cinema.usc.edu). You can also report discrimination based on a protected class here <https://equity.usc.edu/harassment-or-discrimination/>

### **Disruptive Student Behavior:**

Behavior that persistently or grossly interferes with classroom activities is considered disruptive behavior and may be subject to disciplinary action. Such behavior inhibits other students' ability to learn and an instructor's ability to teach. A student responsible for disruptive behavior may be required to leave class pending discussion and resolution of the problem and may be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs for disciplinary action.

### **PLEASE NOTE:**

**FOOD AND DRINKS (OTHER THAN WATER) ARE NOT PERMITTED IN ANY INSTRUCTIONAL SPACES IN THE CINEMATIC ARTS COMPLEX**