



USC University of Southern California

Stage Properties – THTR 439

Units: 3

Fall 2021—Tues/Thurs—Noon-150pm

Location: Massman Theater/DRC 120 & TTL

Instructor: Hannah Burnham

Office: SCD 200

Office Hours: By appt.

**Contact Info: hburnham@usc.edu
213.361.1760 cell**

Course Description

Organization, management, and construction of properties for the theatre. Props are not just objects, but they play an integral role in the process of theatrical storytelling.

Learning Objectives

This class is a beginning exploration of the skills and techniques needed to become a successful props master and/or props fabricator. The goals for students in this course are:

- To learn to break down a script and develop a comprehensive list of all props needed, gather critical information regarding each item, plan for each acquisition, and track expenses for each item.
- To produce research documents that are accurate and actionable for effective visual communication with other production team members
- To gain a basic understanding of several prop fabrication including
 - Researching and producing a period paper good using digital software.
 - Planning for, measuring and sewing a simple set of curtains
 - Planning for and executing a basic upholstery of a chair seat.
 - Analyzing, planning, and executing a simple plaster bandage mold & creating a laminated casting within that mold using papier mache.
 - Using simple patterning techniques to reproduce the above casting in a larger size using cardboard, masking tape and more papier mache.

Prerequisite(s): THTR 130 or THTR

Recommended Preparation: basic fabrication and/or sewing skills are helpful, but not mandatory.

Course Notes

THTR 439 is primarily a project-based class. You will be spending more than half the class fabricating physical objects and must have a workspace where you can spread out and make a mess. You may be required to buy or otherwise

acquire some equipment and art supplies. Some items may be available for loan from SDA. We will discuss all of this in-class.

Communication

Communication and collaboration are essential for theater artists working on any project. Therefore, I want you to feel comfortable asking questions and giving feedback on this course just as I, and your classmates, will be providing you with feedback on your work. Feedback should be respectful and inclusive.

You can contact me via email at hburnham@usc.edu. I endeavor to respond to emails within 24 hours during weekdays, and on Monday following a weekend or holiday break. If you have a truly time-sensitive question, you can call or text me on my cell phone at 213.361.1760. However, this should not be your primary means of communication, and you may be blocked if you overuse it.

Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required

You will need to have access to Microsoft Excel. All students can download MS Office Suite. Please contact ITS if you need assistance. Additionally, you will need Adobe Creative Suite, primarily Adobe InDesign. The school is currently working on making student licenses available. Please stay tuned. You may have access to the design lab computers upstairs in the Bing Theater. If you do not have a computer that can run Adobe Creative Suite, please see the technology rental program information below.

Other helpful equipment includes printer, scanner, sewing machine, iron, staple gun. Many of these may be available on campus.

USC Technology Support Links

[Zoom information for students](#)

[Blackboard help for students](#)

[Software available to USC Campus](#)

Required Materials

- **Readings**
 - You Can't Take It With You by Moss Hart & George S Kaufman. I recommend buying a copy, so you can write in it. They can be purchased at various purveyors of books, such as Amazon, Barnes & Noble, or Dramatists Play Service.
 - The Properties Directors Handbook, by Sandra Strawn, ISBN #978-0-415-66327-4, also available free online at <http://prophandbook.com/HOME.html> Website may be more easily accessed using Firefox as your web browser
- **Art Supplies/Materials**
 - Copy paper
 - A large quantity of cardboard-available for free from your local Costco
 - Exacto knife & blades, or mat knife and blades
 - Cutting mat
 - Glue sticks or spray adhesive
 - Sewing machine *
 - Iron*
 - Fabric for curtain project, thread, pins*
 - Sharp scissors*
 - Curtain rod & rings or hangers of some kind*
 - Chair seat to be recovered*
 - Stapler, staple remover, staples, hammer*

- Several small paint brushes
- Plaster bandages*
- Tarp or plastic sheet*
- Elmer's Glue-all or Elmer's Art paste*
- Plastic bucket*
- Release agent-Petroleum Jelly (Vaseline), Cooking spray (Pam)
- Newsprint paper*
- Acrylic Paint set & brushes
- Other materials as needed

*Items that may be able to be bulk bought and split up amongst students, or items that SDA will likely be able to loan or provide.

Optional Materials

- The Prop Building Guidebook for Theatre, Film and TV, by Eric Hart, ISBN # 978-0-240-82138-2
- Theater Props Handbook, by Thurston James, ISBN # 978-0887349348
- The Theater Props What, Where, When, by Thurston James, ISBN # 978-0887349355
- The Prop Builder's Molding & Casting Handbook, by Thurston Janes, ISBN # 9781558701281
- Reader's Digest Complete Guide to Sewing, ISBN # 0895770261 This is the same book used in costume construction, if you plan to take that in the future.

Description of Assignments

- ***You Can't Take It With You Breakdown and Preliminary Props List Version 1***
 - To read, break down a script and develop a comprehensive list of all props needed.
- **Personal Object Exercise**
 - To analyze the relationship between objects and personal characteristics
- **Receipt Tracking Exercise**
 - To learn how to document actual expenses for reimbursement, or credit reconciliation
- **Historical Research & InDesign Options Sheets**
 - To collect visual research documenting a historical object for use as a prop in a play.
 - To create a document using Adobe InDesign that compiles the relevant research to facilitate communication with other members of your production team.
- **Period Food Packaging**
 - Learning objectives
 - To collect visual research of 1936 food packaging
 - To fabricate a historically accurate food package and/or label
- **Chair Seat Upholstery**
 - To strip and reupholster a simple chair seat
- **Curtain Fabrication**
 - To accurately measure a window for a custom set of curtains
 - To identify different types of curtain hardware
 - To apply basic sewing skills in the fabrication of a simple pair of curtains
- **Molding and Casting**
 - To fabricate a simple 2-part mold using plaster bandages.
 - To fabricate a laminated casting from the above mold.
- **Final Project – Puppet head**
 - To develop a puppet head pattern by learning basic patterning techniques.
 - To modify a pattern by changing its scale.
 - To construct a puppet head based on the pattern previously developed.

Participation

Participation in class will be given a numeric point value. Participation means engaging in class discussions and willingness to respond to questions and ideas posed to the class as well as efficiently making the most of your in-class lab time in the shop. Lab time is not for socializing in person or via your mobile device.

Grading Breakdown

Assignment	Points	% of Grade
Preliminary Props list version 1	20	5.00
Receipt Tracking assignment	10	2.50
Historical Research & InDesign options sheets	20	5.00
Paper props packaging project	20	5.00
Window curtain project	20	5.00
Chair Seat	20	5.00
Molding & Casting project	30	7.50
Quizzes	40	10.00
Puppet Project (Final)	100	25.00
Final Props List revised & updated (Midterm Final)	100	25.00
Participation	20	5.00
	400	100.00

Grading Scale

Course final grades will be determined using the following scale.

The final course grade is based on the following percentages of your accumulated points divided by the total points possible for all assignments: The final course grade is based on the following scale:

A=100-94, A-=93-90, B+=89-87, B=86-84, B-=83-80, C+=79-77, C=76-74, C-=73-70, D=69-60, F= below 59

Course-specific Policies

Work in class will be a mixture of 'hands on', project-based work and computer or paperwork. Reading assignments will be expected to be completed before the following class session after they are assigned; there will be quizzes on the readings. All work turned in should be typed and files labeled as follows: NAME_DATE_CLASS PROJECT for example Burnham_08292016_439PropsList.pdf

If your work in class is unsatisfactory, you will be warned when midterm grades are due. I am available to discuss your progress in class. I encourage you to make an appointment to meet with me at least once during the semester.

Participation in class will be given a numeric point value. Participation means engaging in class discussions and willingness to respond to questions and ideas posed to the class as well as efficiently making the most of your in-class lab time in the shop. Lab time is not for socializing in person or via your mobile device.

Grading Timeline

I do my best to grade submissions within 2-3 days. Larger projects may take longer to assess. If you need feedback sooner, please contact me.

Late work

No late assignments, projects, exams, papers, or exercises shall be accepted without penalty unless advance extensions have been arranged between the student and the teacher or unless exceptional circumstances occur. Grades will be lowered by at least one letter grade if they are not turned in by the assigned deadline. Attendance may play a part in the student's final grade. If the student has more than 2 unexcused absences, overall grade will be lowered by 10%.

SDA PRODUCTIONS, ISPS, AND EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

SDA productions, ISPs and Extracurricular Activities* will not excuse you from any class work. There will be no exceptions made for absences in class, missed or delayed assignments, homework or lack of class participation resulting from your involvement in any of the above. Your grade will reflect your work in this class, independent from work in any other class or activity.

*Activities that have been officially sanctioned by the larger university (such as marching band, song girls, or varsity sports) are exempt. You must submit official documentation to your professor regarding your participation in an event prior to your absence.

Technology in the classroom

Please bring your laptop or other internet enabled device to each class. You will need to have Excel and Adobe Creative Suite loaded on your device.

Attendance

Attendance in this class is critical. If you cannot attend, please try to let me know ahead of time. Hands-on techniques are difficult to convey without at least some one-on-one interaction. Although, I will be available for office hours to answer questions, I will not be able to fully review what was addressed during class.

If you do miss a class, please contact you classmates or me, via email, with any questions.

Classroom norms

Sharing our art with others and opening ourselves to critique (or peer feedback) can be a vulnerable process. To model the expectations of a professional work environment in our field, and promote a respectful classroom environment, we agree to the following.

- Listen actively and attentively
- Critique work, not people
- Support critique with evidence, or speak from personal experience
- Allow everyone to critique (i.e., don't dominate or remain silent)
- Keep a positive tone when offering critique and responding to it
- Accept critique in the positive spirit with which it is given as a means of development
- Trust that people are always doing the best they can
- Don't engage in private conversations while others are speaking
- Ask questions when you do not understand
- Don't worry about impressing people

COVID-specific guidelines

- In accordance with county and university guidelines, masks must be worn at all times during class. Please bring your own 2-layer cotton mask, or non-woven surgical mask with you. We may have a limited number of surgical masks if yours becomes soiled or lost.
- You may be asked to show a completed Trojan Check at the beginning of each class.
- If you have any observable COVID-like symptoms, you may be asked to leave class.
- Eating during class is strictly prohibited. Please plan to eat either before or after class.

- Tools and equipment must be sanitized between users. Sanitizer and towels, or wipes, will be provided.
- Additional COVID restrictions may be put in place at any time.

Health and Participation in Class

You are expected to complete your Trojan Check screener daily and, as your instructor, I may ask you to show your daily screening in class. Your health and safety, and the health and safety of your peers, are my top priorities. If you are experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19, or if you discover that you have been in close contact with others who have symptoms or who have tested positive, you must follow the instructions on Trojan Check. My hope is that if you are feeling ill or if you have been exposed to someone with the virus, you will stay home to protect others. I will ensure that you can continue to participate in class remotely so that your education is not disrupted.

To reduce the spread of COVID-19, USC requires that face coverings (masks) be worn indoors including in classrooms. Face coverings must cover your nose and mouth and be worn throughout the class session. A mask with a valve is not considered an adequate face covering and should not be used, as it can expel exhaled air, increasing the risk to others. Eating or drinking during class is prohibited because of the risk posed by removing your mask for these activities. Failure to comply with these requirements will result in your being asked to leave the classroom immediately. Requests for accommodations related to the face covering and eating/drinking policies should be directed to the Office for Student Accessibility Services (<https://osas.usc.edu/>).

Sharing of course materials outside of the learning environment

SCampus Section 11.12(B)

Distribution or use of notes or recordings based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study is a violation of the USC Student Conduct Code. This includes, but is not limited to, providing materials for distribution by services publishing class notes. This restriction on unauthorized use also applies to all information, which had been distributed to students or in any way had been displayed for use in relationship to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the Internet or via any other media. (See Section C.1 Class Notes Policy).

Course evaluation

Student feedback is essential to making this course the best it can be. Students will have an opportunity to submit comments on the mid-semester evaluation and the standard USC course evaluation survey at the end of the semester.

EDI @SDA: Professional Development/Mandatory EDI Training

Wednesday, September 15, 2021

As part of our EDI initiatives and call to action, some workshops will be offered to faculty and staff and to students. Competencies that will be included: Anti-Racism (Faculty/Staff) and Equity Mindedness (Faculty/Staff), and then Theater Intimacy & Building Cultures of Consent (Students, Faculty/Staff). More details will follow. NOTE: All SDA classes will be cancelled to support involvement in this effort.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown (subject to change) Quizzes TBD

- Week 1-8/24 & 8/26
 - Class Intro

- Watch “Why Props Matter”
- What is a Prop?
- Who does what?
- Watch “Working in the Theatre: Prop Masters”
- Watch “Below the Line-Property Masters”
- Skills of a Props Worker
- Collaboration with other departments
- Making the props list
 - In class exercise-make props list for “Resolutions”
 - Start making props list for You Can’t Take it With You
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- **Assignments-Class #1**
 - Read “Resolutions” before 2nd class meeting
 - Select an object that you own that you feel represents an important part of your character. Upload a photo, **without a description**, to Blackboard
 - Read "What is a Prop" in Properties Directors Handbook.
http://prophandbook.com/WHAT_IS_A_PROP.html. Be sure to read sub-topics: Stage Dressing, Hand Props, Set Props
 - http://prophandbook.com/Stage_Dressing.html
 - http://prophandbook.com/Hand_Props.html
 - http://prophandbook.com/Set_Props.html
 - Read “Getting Organized” in PDH:
 - http://prophandbook.com/GETTING_ORGANIZED.html
 - http://prophandbook.com/Prop_Lists.html
 - http://prophandbook.com/Tracking_numbers.html
 - http://prophandbook.com/Prop_Bible.html
- **Assignments-Class #2**
 - Read Tom Stoppard "Reading a Play for Performance"
 - Read the following in PDH. http://prophandbook.com/WHO_DOES_WHAT.html
 - Including sub topics:
 - Prop Director: http://prophandbook.com/Prop_Director.html
 - Prop Artisans: http://prophandbook.com/Prop_Artisans.html
 - Skills of a Prop Person: http://prophandbook.com/Prop_Artisans.html
 - Prop Internships.: http://prophandbook.com/Prop_Internships.html
 - Prop Training: <http://prophandbook.com/Training.html>
 - Contracts & Salaries: http://prophandbook.com/Contracts_Salaries.html
 - Read You Can’t Take it With You at least once for content, character, setting, plot, general information
- Week 2-8/31 & 9/02
 - Rehearsal props
 - Rehearsal notes
 - Production Meetings
 - Getting Started: Pre-production and Research
 - Design Meetings

- See design package on Blackboard
 - Props Research
 - Effective web searching
 - <https://murrumbassc.eq.edu.au/Supportandresources/Formsanddocuments/Documents/ParentWorkshops/Workshop6/Effective-Internet-Searching.pdf>
 - Acquisition of Props
 - Build, Buy, Borrow, Pull
 - Budgeting
 - Tracking Expenses
 - Complete receipt tracking worksheet
 - Supplies needed:
 - Blank paper
 - Lots of scotch tape
 - **Assignments- Class #3**
 - Read YCTIWY 2nd time in order to:
 - Continue building props list for YCTIWY
 - Read the following in The Properties Director's Handbook
 - <http://prophandbook.com/PRE-PRODUCTION.html>
 - http://prophandbook.com/Prel_Prop_List.html
 - <http://prophandbook.com/Research.html>
 - http://prophandbook.com/WEB_research.html
 - <http://prophandbook.com/BUDGETING.html>
 - <http://prophandbook.com/Spreadsheet.html>
 - http://prophandbook.com/Kinds_of_Budgets.html
 - http://prophandbook.com/REH_AND_PROD_PROCESS.html
 - http://prophandbook.com/Rehearsal_Props.html
 - http://prophandbook.com/Prod_Meetings.html
 - http://prophandbook.com/Costume_Collaboration.html
 - http://prophandbook.com/Electrics_Collaboration.html
 - http://prophandbook.com/Sound_collaboration.html
 - http://prophandbook.com/Scenery_Collaboration.html
 - **Assignments- Class #4**
 - Read the following in PDH
 - http://prophandbook.com/THE_BUILD_PROCESS.html
 - <http://prophandbook.com/Build.html>
 - <http://prophandbook.com/Buy.html>
 - <http://prophandbook.com/Borrow.html>
 - <http://prophandbook.com/Pull.html>
 - Fill in Acquire column in preliminary props list
- Week 3-9/7 & 9/9
 - Starting the build
 - Pull, Buy, Borrow/Rent, Make-review assignments

- More rehearsal reports. How does the props list continually change? How do notes change how we acquire items
 - InDesign tutorial
 - Assignments-will be started in-class
 - Historical research Project
 - Construct options sheets in InDesign of results of historical research project
 - Read chapters 7-8 in The Properties Director's Handbook
- Week 4- 9/14 & 9/16
 - Paper Goods
 - Watch Making a Paper Trail. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s6gJcWEDrAk>
 - Research-USC Libraries periodicals databases, Proquest and others
 - Printing-how to use different papers, and different printers to your advantage
 - Aging, distressing
 - Wax seals
 - Assignment
 - Period Food Packaging Project
- Week 5- 9/21 & 9/23
 - Upholstery
 - Pattern/Nap
 - Upholstery techniques
 - **Assignment**-to be done in class
 - Strip & reupholster a chair seat. Fabric provided, must have either pattern and/or nap
 - Complete your midterm assignment: Final Props List for You Can't Take it With You.
 - Repairing and Reinforcing Furniture-TBD depending on location and access
 - **Assignment** to be done in class
 - Diagnose and re-glue an in-stock chair, work in teams
- Weeks 6 & 7- 9/28, 9/30, 10/5, 10/7
 - Soft Goods
 - The sewing machine and how to thread it.
 - How to sew a seam: plain, hem (turned & topstitched)
 - Seam allowance
 - Clipping seams
 - Fullness
 - Types of curtains & window treatments
 - Top finishes
 - How to measure for curtains
 - Fullness

- Hardware
 - Draw it out/make a plan
 - How to turn the hem the easy way
 - **Assignment**-will be done primarily in class
 - Measure and make a set of curtains for a window-either your own or one provided in the classroom
- Week 8 & 9 – 10/12, 10/19, 10/21
 - Molding and Casting
 - Techniques and materials
 - 1 part, 2 part and jacket molds/matrix molds/mother molds
 - “Life cast” a doll head
 - Demonstrate laminated castings with paper mache
 - **Assignment**
 - Fabricate a simple 2-part mold of doll head with plaster bandages
 - Fabricate a laminated casting from the mold of the doll head.
- Week 10 & 11 – 10/26, 10/28, 11/02, 11/04
 - Intro to puppets & protest puppets
 - Creating a pattern from a 3-dimensional object
 - Playing with scale. How to scale from a photograph.
 - How to scale patterns up and down
 - In-class exercise with paper craft monster pattern
 - **Assignment**
 - Come to class with at least 3 inspirational images for your final puppet head.
 - Print photo of casting, and sketch on top of it alterations and/or additions to basic puppet head.
 - Create pattern for puppet head, print & cut
 - Construct your large-scale puppet head
- Week 12 – 11/09 & 11/11
 - Distressing your props
 - Texture
 - Surface treatment-tea staining, dirty water washes, glossy wood tone
 - Painting your props, spray paint demo
 - **Assignment**-Continue to work on final project. Primary construction should be complete and surface treatments and paint work should be happening.
- Week 13 – 11/16 & 11/18
 - Other Topics
 - Adhesives & Tapes
 - Consumables
 - Blood
- Weeks 14 & 15
 - Wrap up

Final Examination Date:

Tuesday, December 14, 2-4pm

Final exam will consist of presentation of final project, puppet head and accompanying documentation. Presentation must include verbal description of entire process from research to complete project. Students will be given the opportunity to critique each other's projects.

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

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. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

Statement for Students with Disabilities

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from OSAS. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. OSAS is located in GFS 120 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Website for OSAS and contact information: (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 814-4618 (Video Phone), (213) 740-8216 (FAX) ability@usc.edu.

Emergency Preparedness/Course Continuity in a Crisis

In case of a declared emergency if travel to campus is not feasible, USC executive leadership will announce an electronic way for instructors to teach students in their residence halls or homes using a combination of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technologies. See the university's site on Campus Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

Health and Participation in Class

You are expected to complete your Trojan Check screener daily and, as your instructor, I may ask you to show your daily screening in class. Your health and safety, and the health and safety of your peers, are my top priorities. If you are experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19, or if you discover that you have been in close contact with others who have symptoms or who have tested positive, you must follow the instructions on Trojan Check. My hope is that if you are feeling ill or if you have been exposed to someone with the virus, you will stay home to protect others. I will ensure that you can continue to participate in class remotely so that your education is not disrupted.

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the classroom immediately. Requests for accommodations related to the face covering and eating/drinking policies should be directed to the Office for Student Accessibility Services (<https://osas.usc.edu/>).

SDA Student Support & Reporting Form:

To facilitate a supportive environment of accountability, SDA has created an internal system of reporting for students to address issues/concerns and to offer feedback or suggestions for improvement. This mechanism provides a pathway for reporting and offering feedback without fear of retaliation or judgment. Any submission filed through this form will be reviewed and processed accordingly through SDA Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion.

To file a report, please visit: <https://bit.ly/SDAstudentreporting>

Support Systems:

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call
studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling

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

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call
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) 740-9355(WELL), press "0" after hours – 24/7 on call
studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault

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

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED) - (213) 740-5086 | Title IX – (213) 821-8298
equity.usc.edu, titleix.usc.edu

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298
usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care_report

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office of Equity and Diversity | Title IX for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Student Accessibility Services - (213) 740-0776

<https://osas.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 Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 821-4710

campussupport.usc.edu

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

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, 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

Non-emergency assistance or information.