

CNTV-530 - Cinematic Ethics

Spring 2022 - 1 unit
Monday, 9:30 am - 11:20 am PST
Richard Lemarchand: Section 17812D

Instructor & Student Assistants:

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Office Hours: by appointment, Tuesdays, 2pm to 5pm PST

Course Description

This is an introductory course in the ethical questions professionals encounter in the field of cinematic arts (including animation, writing, interactive media, and games). Ethical questions are those in which we ask, "What's the right thing to do?" The cinematic arts, unlike professions of law or medicine, for example, have no specific code of conduct. So this course does not aim to instruct you how to adhere to standards. Instead it seeks to develop your capacity to recognize ethical questions and deepen your ability to engage and address those questions consciously, fully and effectively.

Learning Objectives

The hardest part of ethical conundrums, in life and in the cinematic arts, is that we are often neck-deep in them before we realize it.

My goal in this class is to give you the tools to:

- **Recognize** you are in an ethically fraught situation in your working life.
- **Understand the problem.** To think your way through the thicket of conflicts and obligations that make a thorny ethical dilemma.
- **Gather information you need**, if there is time.
- **Develop a broad range of possible actions** that may answer the problem.
- **Make a choice and take action.** This comes with the understanding that *taking no action is an action*, and is often the least responsible action we can take.
- **Learn how to continue learning** to make better ethical choices.

The course includes exploring your own ethical and moral influences. Our goal isn't to learn one right answer for every problem (that would be impossible). The goal is to get good at figuring out what is the most ethically appropriate action is for you, in this moment, and for the larger media-making and consuming society. Our society and industry are built on these choices. Only together can we make it a more just and compassionate place.

Approach

The core of the course is a discussion of actual, not hypothetical, cases drawn from the experience of professionals in the cinematic arts. Most weeks the instructor will welcome an industry guest with expertise in the topic under consideration. That guest will present a true story from their professional lives.

We'll explore the different dimensions of these dilemmas and you'll be asked to decide how best to act. The idea is that by rehearsing different sorts of questions deliberately, and in detail, you'll be better equipped to handle decisions that, in your professional life, you'll often have to make in the blink of an eye.

Along with our guests, our class will include working in breakout rooms with your peers to respond to our weekly case studies. You will be asked to write two short essays as your homework assignments. As well as occasional readings and viewings of documentary films prior to class that contribute to your broader knowledge of both ethics and common industry practices. In this way, you'll sharpen your sense of the unique ethical decisions you may face in your media-making career, and practice how to determine your response to these challenges.

Weekly Schedule of Topics & Assignments

Syllabus is Subject to Revision

Week 1

Jan. 10 **Beginnings: What will you choose to work on?
How will you decide?
In what way does that relate to cinematic ethics?**

Guest: Professor Ted Braun, Joseph Campbell Endowed Chair in
Cinematic Ethics

Assignment: Read: *"How Blind is Hollywood to Ethics?"* (1990 LA Times Article)

Week 2

Jan. 17 NO CLASS – DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. DAY

Week 3

Jan. 24 **Decisions media makers face. What is an ethical question?
What are our values based on?
Do our choices depend upon the role that we play?**

In Class: Values Exercise. Introduction to role morality.

Assignment: Read *Ethics: a general introduction* (approx. 3000 words)
http://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/introduction/intro_1.shtml

Week 4

Jan. 31 **An Overview of Ethical Thought**

An introduction to the ethical frameworks and the case study approach used by the class; in-class examination of first case study, *The Suffering Sound Designer*.

Assignment: Entire Class: Read Case Study #1: Management Melange
Group A: Write a response to the case study (max 500 words)
(Due: upload to class Blackboard by 8pm, Sunday 6 Feb)

Viewing: *The Farewell*, written & directed by Lulu Wang

Listen/Read: Interview with Lulu Wang on Fresh Air (Terry Gross/NPR)

<https://www.npr.org/2019/07/24/744805282/filmmaker-lulu-wang-based-the-farewell-on-her-family-s-real-life-lie>

Week 5

Feb. 7 **Relationships and distance from material.
Questions about ownership and telling someone else's story.**

Guest: TBD

Assignment: Entire Class: Read Case Study #2: Credit Crisis
Group B: Write a response to the case study (max 500 words)
(Due: upload to class Blackboard by 8pm, Sunday 13 Feb)

Week 6

Feb. 14 Partnerships. Questions about collaboration and the nature of professional relationships.

Guest: TBD

Assignment: Entire Class: Read Case Study #3: Intoxicated Ingenue
Group C: Write a response to the case study (max 500 words)
(Due: upload to class Blackboard by 8pm, Sunday 20 Feb)

Week 7

Feb. 21 NO CLASS – PRESIDENTS DAY

Week 8

Feb. 28 Distinctly Cinematic Relationships: Director & Actor. Questions about working with actors, eliciting a performance.

Guest: TBD

Assignment: TBD

Week 9

March 7 Distinctly Cinematic Relationships: Comedy. Exploring the boundaries of what's funny.

Guest: TBD

Assignment: All: Read Case Study #4: Stoned Subject
Group D: Write a response to the case study (max 500 words)
(Due: upload to class Blackboard by 8pm, Sunday 13 March)

Assignments: Entire Class: Read: [How Close is Too Close?](#)
& [Money Changes Everything](#) by Prof. Lisa Leeman

SPRING RECESS – MARCH 13 - 20 – NO CLASSES**Week 10**

March 21 True Stories. Ethical questions that arise in documentary films and animation, and games.

Guest: TBD

Assignment: Entire Class: Watch: [Who Needs Sleep?](#)

Assignment: Entire Class: Read Case Study #5: Overtime Odyssey
Group A: Write a response to the case study (max 500 words)
(Due: upload to class Blackboard by 8pm, Sunday 27 March)

Week 11

March 28 Work. Ethical questions that arise when you supervise others.

Guest: TBD

Reading: [“HollywoodReporter.com: Midnight Rider & death of Camera Assistant Sarah Jones”](#)

Week 12

April 4 Work. Ethical questions that arise when you work for others.

Guest: TBD

Assignment: Entire Class: Read Case Study #6: Diversity Dilemma
Group B: Write a response to the case study (max 500 words)
(Due: upload to class Blackboard by 8pm, Sunday 10 April)

Assignment: Entire Class: Watch *Disclosure* (Netflix, 2020)

Week 13

April 11 Representation: Who to depict and how in scripted film, television, games, & interactive. Questions of race, ethnicity, class, gender, orientation, ability – and what you owe to who you represent in your work.

Questions about promoting inclusion in front of and behind the camera.

Guest: TBD

Assignment: Entire Class: Read Case Study #7: Production Obstruction
Group C: Write a response to the case study (max 500 words)
(Due: upload to class Blackboard by 8pm, Sunday 17 April)

Readings: [Dan Harmon's Apology: Slate](#)
[Dan Harmon's Apology: Vox](#)

Week 14

April 18 Work. Questions about gender, harassment, and power.

Guest: TBD

Reading: Systemic Problems Worksheet.

Assignment: Entire Class: Read Case Study #8: Violent Video Game
Group D: Write a response to the case study (max 500 words)
(Due: upload to class Blackboard by 8pm, Sunday 24 April)

Assignment: Listen to *Scriptnotes* Podcast Ep. 422 or read the transcript
 (John August, Craig Mazin)

[Podcast here](#)
[Transcript here](#)

Week 15

**April 25 Choice. Questions about the material you choose to work on.
 Semester Wrap Up. Q&A about the Final Exam.
 Course Evaluations.**

Exercise: Revisit values exercise from start of the semester

Breakout Groups: Addressing Systemic Ethical Questions in
 Media-Making

Learning Experience Evaluations

UNIVERSITY STUDY DAYS – NO CLASSES APRIL 30 - MAY 3

Fri. May 6 8am-10am (Los Angeles time) FINAL EXAM
In-class two-hour exam (essay questions).
This time is assigned by the university, it cannot be

changed!
Do not make travel plans that conflict.
Synchronous attendance is required.

GRADING

This is a letter-grade course. University guidelines clarify that a grade of B or above is required for a graduate student to receive credit for a class.

Direct engagement with ethical questions, and a conscious open discussion of those questions, is a fundamental methodological goal of the course. For this reason, you're expected to participate in and make a thoughtful contribution to each week's discussion.

Preparation for the discussion – in the form of 500 word responses on two assigned case studies and completing the assigned films and reading – is a requirement. Written responses to case studies must be uploaded to the CNTV 530 class Blackboard site **by 8pm Sundays (Los Angeles time)**, the day prior to each class meeting. Written responses will be evaluated on the basis of a full engagement with the question posed by each case study, an articulate appreciation of the breadth of issues, and a demonstration that you understand and are engaging with the ethical frameworks and concepts we discuss in class.

This class uses a “check mark’ grading system:

- ✓+ You made a consideration of the stakeholders, obligations, and conflicts in the case. You listed the prudential, legal, and ethical considerations that you see. You chose a well thought out, clear course of action. You considered *at least* one other course of action, and said why you've decided against going in those directions.
- ✓(+) You chose a clear course of action, and considered at least one other course of action. You used some, but not all of the other core concepts discussed in class.
- ✓ You chose a clear course of action, but didn't explore alternate courses of action & explain why they didn't choose those options; or didn't utilize the core concepts discussed in class.
- ✓(-) You didn't choose a clear course of action, but offered notably fine distinctions or discussion of concepts.
- ✓- You didn't choose a clear course of action.

Check Mark Grade	Corresponding Letter Grade	Corresponding % grade
✓+	A	96
✓(+)	A-	93
✓	B+	90
✓(-)	B	87
✓-	B-	83

A final two-hour exam makes up the remainder of your grade. The exam will present a fresh case study – a specific and real problem - and ask you to discuss the ethical issues involved and decide on a course of action. The exam will be evaluated not on the basis of arriving at a single correct answer, but on a broad, thoughtful appreciation of the dimensions of the ethical question, a demonstration of understanding of the core concepts we have discussed over the semester, and how well you support a particular course of action.

Class Grading:

- 15% Participation in class discussions (includes familiarity & reference to assigned readings, viewings)
- 45% Fulfillment of the two case study responses (20% for 1st one, 25% for 2nd one)
- 40% Final Exam

Attendance Policy:

Students are expected to be on time and prepared for each class. Because of Covid-19, any student experiencing symptoms of Covid-19 should NOT come to class; instead, they should notify the class SA and professor *before class*, and if they feel well enough, they should zoom into class remotely.

Punctual attendance at all classes is mandatory. Students arriving more than five minutes late to three classes, more than ten minutes late to a single class, or leaving early, will be marked as having an unexcused absence from class, unless prior permission has been obtained from the instructor.

Two unexcused absences will result in a student's grade being lowered by one full letter (i.e. A becomes B). A third unexcused absence will result in a student's grade being lowered by one, additional full letter (i.e. A becomes C). A student's grade will be lowered by one full letter for each additional absence.

If a student misses class due to an emergency, the student must email the professor and SA prior to class or contact the Production Office at 213-740-3317.

Missing an Assignment Deadline:

Written responses to case studies must be uploaded to the CNTV-530 Ethics class Blackboard site before 8pm Sunday nights (see due dates in class schedule above).

The only acceptable excuses for missing an assignment deadline are personal illness or a family emergency. Production schedules are NOT an acceptable reason to turn in work late. Students must inform the instructor *before the assignment due date* and present verifiable evidence in order for a deadline extension to be granted. Graded assignments will typically be returned within two weeks after submission.

Late Work:

Each day or part of a day that an assignment is turned in late will result in the assignment grade being lowered a full grade.

Up to 24 hours late: a ✓+ becomes a ✓(+), a ✓(+) becomes a ✓, etc.

Up to 48 hours late: a ✓+ becomes a ✓, a ✓(+) becomes a ✓(-), etc.

Up to 72 hours late: a ✓+ becomes a ✓(-), a ✓(+) becomes a ✓-, etc.

More than 72 hours late: an automatic ✓-

If you receive two ✓- grades in this class you are in danger of failing the class, and should speak to the instructor about your situation.

Social Media Use in Class

Social media use, including text messaging, Internet messaging and email, is not permitted in class unless explicitly permitted by the instructor. A 0.5% grade reduction will result from each occurrence of a student being found using social media in class.

Video and Audio Recording in Class

Video and audio recording during class meetings is not permitted, except by prior arrangement with the instructor and the class members.

Asynchronous Learning

Class sessions *may* be Zoom recorded and made available for asynchronous viewing until the end of the grading period in early December. Note: There may be occasions when a guest will request that all or part of a class not be recorded, so the guest will feel comfortable sharing an experience that they don't wish to be recorded.

Covid Protocols: (see detailed SCA Production Protocols & [USC Covid updates & Protocols](#))

Trojan Check: A TrojanCheck day pass will now be required for anyone to come on campus each and every day. Our SA will check TrojanCheck passes outside the classroom, as part of taking attendance. Students without a compliant TrojanCheck day pass will NOT be allowed into our classroom, and instead, will be asked to attend class through Zoom.

Mask Mandate: Everyone is required to wear a mask indoors, whether vaccinated or not.

As of January 5, 2022, individuals on USC campus premises in locations where masking is required are now required to wear medical grade masks, which at minimum are surgical masks and may also include **higher grade respirator masks (N95, KN95, or KF94)**. Campus premises where PPE is required include indoor common spaces, public areas, classrooms, libraries, offices, and laboratories.

Faculty, students, and staff are expected to conduct themselves with care for themselves and the USC/SCA community – wear an effective mask and wear it correctly – with snug fit, covering nose and mouth. If your mask slips below your nose, I will ask you to correct the mask fit. If that happens repeatedly, you will be asked to leave the classroom.

Let's keep each other healthy and keep conditions safe for production in-person.

There is no eating or drinking indoors, to avoid removing masks.

USC Mask Policy & Guidelines, as of Jan. 5, 2022:

<https://we-are.usc.edu/2022/01/05/1-5-updated-masking-guidance-for-campus-environments/>

Los Angeles Public Health Guidelines on masks: (when to wear them; how to wear them; what kinds of masks are effective)

<http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/acd/ncorona2019/masks/>

Symptoms: If anyone has symptoms of COVID-19, they should not come to class. Instead, they should get tested for COVID, notify our SA and professor that they will not come to class, and if they feel well enough, they should zoom into class instead of attending in person.

Covid-19 Resource Center: <https://coronavirus.usc.edu/>
Covid information, updates, and support for the USC community.

USC Student Health: <https://studenthealth.usc.edu/myshr/>
Online source for making appointments, communicating with your health care providers, accessing medical information and viewing test results.

Writing and Time Management

Writing and time management are essential skills to master for writers, filmmakers, animators, interactive media makers and game designers.

These USC Resources are available to everyone seeking to improve their writing and time management skills:

The USC Dornsife Writing Center

[Useful materials to make you a better writer](#)

The USC Kortschak Center for Learning and Creativity

[Tools for Time Management, Organization, Goal-Setting, Self-Care, Note-taking, and Test-taking.](#)

OPTIONAL AND RECOMMENDED TEXTS, FILMS, WEBSITES, & PODCASTS:

Podcasts:

Examining Ethics - <http://examiningethics.org/> - (iTunes & Podcast apps)

Everyday Ethics - <https://www.stitcher.com/show/everyday-ethics>

Getting Ethics to Work -

<https://www.prindleinstitute.org/media-resources/getting-ethics-to-work/>

Websites:

BBC: Ethics Guide

http://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/introduction/intro_1.shtml

A Framework for Making Ethical Decisions:

<https://www.brown.edu/academics/science-and-technology-studies/framework-making-ethical-decisions>

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Center for the Study of Language and Information, Stanford University, <https://plato.stanford.edu/>

Markkula Center for Applied Ethics - <https://www.scu.edu/ethics/>

Center for Media and Social Impact, School of Communication, American University, Washington, DC. <https://cmsimpact.org/?s=ethics>

Films:

The Farewell, directed by Lulu Wang

The Trouble with Apu, with Hari Kondabolu, directed by Michael Melamedoff

Who Needs Sleep, directed by Haskell Wexler

Left on Purpose, directed by Justin Schein

Disclosure, directed by Sam Feder

Readings:

Ethics in The Real World, Pete Singer

The Ethics of Memory, Avishai Margalit

"James Baldwin Writing and Talking," by Mel Watkins. The New York Times Book Review, Sunday, September 23, 1979.

Kill the Messenger, written by Peter Landesman, based on the book by Nick Shuro and "Dark Alliance" by Gary Webb, directed by Michael Cuesta

"*The Moral First Aid Manual*," by Daniel C. Dennett

What Should I Do? Philosophers on the Good, the Bad, and the Puzzling, ed.

Alexander George

"*Wooden Eyes: Nine Reflections on Distance*," Carlo Ginzburg

Note for Students with Disabilities

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with the 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 the instructor as early in the semester as possible. OSAS is located in GFS 120, and is open 8:30am - 5:00pm Monday through Friday. The phone number for OSAS is (213) 740-0776.
<https://osas.usc.edu/>

Learning Experience Evaluations

Learning Experience Evaluations will be conducted on Monday, 25 April 2022. This will be your opportunity to provide feedback about your learning experience in the class. This feedback helps the instructor determine whether students are having the intended learning experiences for the class.

It is important to remember that the learning process is collaborative and requires significant effort from the instructor, individual students, and the class as a whole. Students should provide a thoughtful assessment of their experience, as well as of their own effort, with comments focused on specific aspects of instruction or the course. Comments on personal characteristics of the instructor are not appropriate and will not be considered. For this feedback to be as comprehensive as possible, all students should complete the evaluation.

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. 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.

Covid Safety Compliance Understanding and Agreement

Due to concerns regarding the spread of COVID-19 in California and around the world, USC and the School of Cinematic Arts (SCA) have taken a strong stance regarding the need for safe and mindful behaviors among all members of the SCA community. Medical authorities agree that even the young and healthy are capable, if infected, of becoming ill, or of being non-symptomatic, unconscious vectors of the disease's spread.

The health and wellbeing of all community members has to be our paramount concern as we return to learning and collaborating together. We understand that attentiveness to the concerns of all SCA community members – students, staff and faculty, including those with underlying health conditions -- is simply an extension of the key principle of creative collaboration that has guided our school for decades. We're all in this pandemic together and need to behave accordingly.

All of SCA's production work, whether 'in-person' or "Virtual," will be governed by rules laid out in each course syllabus. Compliance with these regulations will be monitored by faculty in conjunction with SCA designated Covid Monitors. The rules follow the guidelines in SCA-Covid Production Protocols, which follows SAG/DGA and other industry protocols, and are being interpreted by a SAG-certified SCA Covid Advisor.

Students indicate their agreement to abide by these regulations by enrolling in the USC School of Cinematic Arts programs in Spring semester 2022.

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.

Stressful Times:

These are stressful times, and graduate school in and of itself is stressful. I encourage you to take care of yourself and be considerate to your fellow students. USC provides opportunities for Mindful Meditation <http://mindful.usc.edu> and USC has a number

of mental health counseling resources which are available at <https://studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling/>

Support Systems:

Student Health Counseling Services - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call
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://campussupport.usc.edu/students/health-and-wellness/health-leave-of-absence/>

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) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call

<https://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) | Title IX - (213) 740-5086

<https://eeotix.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.

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 for

appropriate investigation and response.

The Office of Student Accessibility Programs - (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 & 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.

Trojans Care for 4 Trojans (TC4T)

<https://campussupport.usc.edu/trojans-care-4-trojans/>

An initiative within the Office of Campus Wellbeing and Crisis Intervention that empowers USC students, faculty and staff to take action when they are concerned about a fellow Trojan challenged with personal difficulties. This private and anonymous request form provides an opportunity for Trojans to help a member of our Trojan Family.

Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion - (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

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.

Office of the Ombuds - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)

ombuds.usc.edu

A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

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