

CMGT-550: Hollywood Convergence and Transformation: Storytelling Across Platforms

(Formerly titled: "Hollywood 3.0 Entertainment Industry in the Convergence Age" — new course name to reflect the evolving industry landscape.)

4 Units

Spring 2024 – Wednesday – 6:00-8:50pm

Section: 21765

Location: [ASC 228](#)

Instructor: Josh Feldman

Office Hours: Fridays 10-11am (or by appointment)

Contact Info: joshuatf@usc.edu

Course Description

"Hollywood Convergence" will be an exploration into the myriad new ways that a) stories are created and b) how audiences are consuming and interacting with content. New technologies beget new platforms; and new platforms often stimulate new business models, formats, and consumer behaviors (remember the pre-binge era?). We will chart the progression of narrative communication with an eye towards identifying best practices for the creation, management, development, and distribution of new content. Understanding the lifecycle of content creation will form a core of our coursework. Through discussions, readings, and, most importantly, group projects, we will extract storytelling principals to put into practice.

Other topics will include fandom, franchises, and the creative principals behind the ever-expanding reach of intellectual property (IP) from the linear screen to games (metaverse?) and into built environments (i.e., theme parks). Our analysis of current trends will foster critical discussions to hypothesize about the future of storytelling creation and delivery.

Additionally, we will dissect the roles and responsibilities of industry professionals across overlapping segments of the evolving "Hollywood" business: the future of cinema, linear streaming video on-demand, gaming, podcasting, in-app/social experiences, user generated content, the creator economy, etc. Guest speakers will help illuminate the changes in the media/entertainment landscape. Nuts-and-bolts production, rights/clearance and chain-of-title topics will also be examined.

Learning Objectives

- Trace the evolution of storytelling creation and hybrid, multi-platform consumption, discerning best practices/mechanics for cultivating new work.
- Identify distinctions between existing and emerging platforms / content business models.
- Critique entertainment properties and evaluate business and creative opportunities beyond the original content format.
- Become familiar with the key terms, roles & responsibilities, and basic corporate structures of the primary segments of the entertainment industry at the center of convergence and transformation.
- Explore metrics for "successful" content, focusing on voice, authenticity, engagement, and scale.
- Analyze the psychology and principals behind virality on digital platforms.
- Create a narrative "bible" (or story-based business proposal) that can form the basis for a viable project.

Course Expectations/Policies

We will have many discussions, review sessions, and critiques. I encourage full participation, but I understand that people have different levels of comfort as it pertains to giving and receiving creative feedback. Please communicate with me if there are any specific areas of concern as early as possible to avoid any misgivings being interpreted as a lack of participation.

Some of our class discussions will be opportunities for debate and analysis. These situations lend themselves to vibrant, real-time exchanges of ideas. Conversely, when students/groups are sharing creative work to be critiqued (or guest speakers join our class), there is a certain etiquette that will be expected:

Critiquing Etiquette

I urge everyone to give feedback to your peers on their creative projects, but this must be constructive. It is critical that our class environment be one where students feel safe to experiment.

How to give feedback for creative work:

- Tell the presenter/group which parts of the presentation were most intriguing and effective.
- Let the presenter/group know if anything confused you.
- Point out specific spots that dragged or felt redundant.
- Remember that what you are saying is your opinion, not fact.

How to receive feedback:

- Don't defend your work DURING a critique. Some students spend more time talking during their critique than listening. This wastes everyone's time.
- Listen to the feedback, write it down, and take time to mull it over. Don't immediately reject a note. You'll be amazed at how many times a "stupid" note will become immensely valuable after time to reflect.
- When utilizing peer-provided notes, it's up to you to decide which notes will help you and which notes won't.

Guest Speaker Etiquette

Guest speakers, whether in-person or via videoconference, are taking time out of their busy schedules to share valuable insights with us. It is important that we treat these visiting professionals with respect for their time. Anything less would not only be rude (!) but could dissuade future guest speakers from visiting and sully the reputation of yourself, our class, and this school.

Do not ask for a guest speaker's contact info, never pitch an unsolicited idea, or ask them to read your work. Unless there is explicit permission to do so, no video or audio recording of guest speaker talks. Again, unless told otherwise, do not post details of our guest speaker's discussion on social media. The sanctity of our classroom setting should be upheld such that guest speakers feel comfortable sharing their personal and/or professional experiences exclusively with us – not wider audiences they didn't agree to address.

Challenging Material

This class, while rooted in communication management pedagogy, deals largely but not exclusively, with commercial content. The management of content is, inherently, the administration of ideas, personalities, beliefs, and narratives conveyed via media. As such, some of the material we watch, read, and discuss could include stressful or otherwise confronting subject matter. It is my firm intention that our classroom be a safe and tolerant space for differing viewpoints and reactions. If there are any topics or subjects that cause stress or discomfort that you wish to avoid or discuss ahead of time, please do not hesitate to contact me as soon as reasonably possible.

Readings and Supplementary Materials

Required Books:

- **The Sea We Swim In: How Stories Work in a Data-Driven World**
Frank Rose
- **You're Gonna Need a Bigger Story: The 21st Century Survival Guide To Not Just Telling Stories, But Building Super Stories**
Houston Howard

Recommended Reading:

- **Storytelling for New Technologies and Platforms: A Writer's Guide to Theme Parks, Virtual Reality, Board Games, Virtual Assistants, and More**
Ross Berger
- **Immersive Storytelling for Real and Imagined Worlds: A Writer's Guide**
Margaret Kerrison

Additional readings will be assigned and made available via Blackboard and/or separate links.

Description and Assessment of Assignments

Individual instructions / explanations will be provided for each assignment in-class and on Blackboard. The specific nature of our assignments may be adjusted based on changes that could arise during the semester (i.e. tectonic industry shifts, topics of interest that we may dwell on longer than intended etc...).

Reading Blog – 10 Posts @ 2 Points per.

Readings will help reinforce practical storytelling skills and timely trade stories relevant to our studies of the convergencies in the entertainment/media industry. The reading blog will be an outlet to express your takeaways from the reading and an opportunity to gain insights from your classmates' reading reactions. Finding trade stories related to your weekly reading will keep our collective fingers on the pulse of how the industry functioning and evolving. There are no make-ups for these blog posts. There is collective benefit to full participation on a weekly basis for the first 10 weeks of our class.

Media Survey Project – 10 points.

Our own personal media habits can be a helpful case study for ourselves and our classmates to dissect the evolving way in which audiences engage with content. The assignment will consist of personal journal of how, when, where, and how long you consume content over the course of a week. You will then identify patterns and analyze how this information might inform the process of creating, commissioning and/or curating new creative work.

Content Across Platforms, Form and Function Group Project 1 – 10 points.

Identifying how platforms impact storytelling can help inform best practices for the development/management of content creation and its delivery. This group assignment consists of identifying a platform and highlighting how its endemic qualities, strengths, weaknesses, etc... impact native storytelling.

Adaptation + Deployment Project – Group Project 2 – 25 points.

This will be an exercise in taking content that exists in one form and creating a proposal for adapting this content into another format. The class will be split into groups for this project. Group presentations AND class critique will be components of this assignment. Each student will be responsible for submitting a write-up even through the project is

Final Project – Group Project 3 – PART ONE: 25 points. PART TWO: 25 points.

Our final project will consist of either a narrative-based proposal for an original story encompassing various platform capabilities OR a “creative business proposal” that utilizes storytelling principals as part of an app or digital service. Group presentations AND class critique will be components of this assignment.

Final Paper – 10 points.

This will be a reaction document to your final group presentation. Each individual student will be responsible for submitting a final paper even though you will be divided into smaller groups for the actual in-class presentation.

Breakdown of Grade

Assignment	% of Grade
Reading reactions / blog	20
Media survey project	10
Form and function project	10
Adaptation project Final Project Part 1	25
Final project Part 2	25
Final paper	10
TOTAL	100%

Grading Scale

94 to 100%: A	80% to 83%: B-	67% to 69%: D+
90% to 93%: A-	77% to 79%: C+	64% to 66%: D
87% to 89%: B+	74% to 76%: C	60% to 63%: D-
84% to 86%: B	70% to 73%: C-	0% to 59%: F

Grading Standards

Letter Grade	Description
A	Excellent; demonstrates extraordinarily high achievement; comprehensive knowledge and understanding of subject matter; all expectations met and exceeded.
B	Good; moderately broad knowledge and understanding of subject matter; explicitly or implicitly demonstrates good, if not thorough understanding; only minor substantive shortcomings.

C	Satisfactory/Fair; reasonable knowledge and understanding of subject matter; most expectations are met; despite any shortcomings, demonstrates basic level of understanding.
D	Marginal; minimal knowledge and understanding of subject matter; more than one significant shortcoming; deficiencies indicate only the most rudimentary level of understanding.
F	Failing; unacceptably low level of knowledge and understanding of subject matter; deficiencies indicate lack of understanding.

Grading Timeline

Grading Timeframe and Missing or Inaccurate Score Inquiries/Disputes

For effective learning, students should receive timely feedback on assignments and exams. Therefore, every attempt will be made to grade assignments/exams and post grades within two weeks. Scores for all assignments and exams are regularly updated on Blackboard. You are responsible for notifying me **within one (1) week** of a score posting if you think a score is missing or inaccurate. Moreover, you only have this period to contest a score on an assignment/exam. If you fail to inquire/notify us of any discrepancy, missing score, or contest a score within one week of the date the score is posted, there is no guarantee that changes will be made.

Assignment Submission Policy

Instructor: Describe how, and when, assignments are to be submitted.

A. All assignments are due on the dates specified. Lacking prior discussion and agreement with the instructor, late assignments will risk a grade reduction.

B. Weekly reading blogs must be submitted via the blog on Blackboard. The remainder of assignments must be submitted via email.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

Important note to students: Be advised that this syllabus is subject to change - and will change - based on the progress of the class, events, and/or guest speaker availability. Students should consult the University [Registration Calendar](#) for dates associated with add/drop deadlines, fees, and grading options.

I'll repeat: SUBJECT TO CHANGE – PLEASE MONITOR BLACKBOARD CAREFULLY FOR UPDATES

#	Topic	Readings Due for Class	Assignments Due
1	Class introduction / overview Lecture: Story structures Assignment: Media Survey		
2	Media Survey Results Lecture: Story Structures	The Marveliad essays. Rose Part I	Blog 1 + Media Survey
3	Lecture: Form and function of content and platforms Announce form and function project. Assign groups	Howard Ch 1 & 2 Rose Part II, Section 1	Blog 2
4	Guest speaker TBD	Howard Ch 3 Rose Part II, Section 2	Blog 3
5	Themes + Halo screening	Howard Ch 4 Rose Part II, Section 3	Blog 4

			Form/Function Presentations
6	Guest Speaker TBD	Howard Ch 5 Rose Part II, Section 4	Blog 5 Your story idea: thematic statement + platforms
7	Industry roles and responsibilities. Story idea outline discussion.	Howard Ch 6 & 7 & 8	Blog 6 Story outline
8	Guest Speaker TBD Story idea outline discussion (cont'd)	Howard Ch 9 Rose Part II, Section 5	Blog 7 + Adaptation Individual write-up
9	Lecture: Business/logistics of transmedia	Howard Ch 10 & 11 Rose Part II, Section 6	Blog 8
Spring Break			
10	Guest Speaker TBD	Rose Part II, Section 7	
11	Announce final project part 2 Lecture: Experiential storytelling / Web3	Howard Ch 12 & 13 Rose Part II, Section 8	Blog 9
12	Class discussion on future convergence trends	Howard 14 & 15 Rose Part II, Section 9	Blog 10
13	Guest Speaker TBD		
14	Final presentations and discussion		
15	Final presentations and discussion		
16	Final paper (No meeting. Online submission.)		Final papers from all

COVID-19 Information for On Campus Activities

USC has COVID-19 and health protocols requirements for in person | on campus attendance. Please consult the USC COVID-19 resource center website for the latest COVID-19 testing and health protocol requirements. Requirements are continuously updated so please check frequently. Students are expected to follow the University's Expectations on Student Behavior. Students should also stay informed with the "We Are USC" portal: <https://we-are.usc.edu/students/>

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

a. Academic Conduct

Plagiarism

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](#)." Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct.

The School of Communication maintains a commitment to the highest standards of ethical conduct and academic excellence. Any student found responsible for plagiarism, fabrication, cheating on examinations, or purchasing papers or other assignments will be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards and may be dismissed from the School of Communication. There are no exceptions to the school's policy.

In addition, it is assumed that the work you submit for this course is work you have produced entirely by yourself, and has not been previously produced by you for submission in another course, without approval of the instructor.

b. 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 and 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. 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. The university also prohibits sexual assault, non-consensual sexual contact, sexual misconduct, intimate partner violence, stalking, malicious dissuasion, retaliation, and violation of interim measures.

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

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 Support and Advocacy - (213) 821-4710

uscsa.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.

Annenberg Student Success Fund

<https://annenberg.usc.edu/current-students/resources/annenberg-scholarships-and-awards>

The Annenberg Student Success Fund is a donor-funded financial aid account available to USC Annenberg undergraduate and graduate students for non-tuition expenses related to extra- and co-curricular programs and opportunities.