



**CTPR 423 INTRO TO SPECIAL EFFECTS IN
CINEMA**

Units: 2

Spring 2025 — Mondays — 7:00pm – 10:00pm

This class may not be audited.

Location: SCC Stage 3

Instructor: Gene Warren III, Christopher Lee Warren

Office: SCA stage 3

Office Hours: (By Appointment)

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Course Description

Welcome to CTPR 423. Our aspiration is to generate an appreciation for the art of special/visual effects and foster an understanding of how special/visual effects are conceived, generated and produced. This course will primarily cover the practical elements of visual and special effects using various film clips, lectures and in class hands on filming. Discussion of digital effects will only focus on how the various in-camera techniques integrate with the newer digital tools.

Learning Objectives and Outcomes

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

apply and combine scales using forced perspective techniques to produce and submit a photographic still or moving picture,

demonstrate the basic mechanics of stop motion animation and produce a 10 to 20 second stop motion animation clip,

analyze a provided screenplay to identify and submit possible special and visual effects solutions, (commonly referred to as a 'Script Breakout').

Every student will participate within a group to develop and produce a short ***FX FILM*** using special and visual effects techniques previously used/taught throughout the session.

Prerequisite(s): Safety Seminar

Course Notes:

Athletic shoes and long pants **MUST** be worn to all Cinematography classes and when picking up and returning equipment. No open toed or dress shoes will be permitted. If you come to class dressed inappropriately, you will be asked to leave and marked absent.

Please note our final class is Monday, May 12th. All students are required to attend, take the final exam and present their final projects.

Required course equipment

Either a digital or analogue still camera (the quality does not matter; you can use the camera in your smart phone), but we highly encourage a manual still camera for reasons that pertain to the forced perspective project and the stop motion clip.

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

A study sheet of commonly used words and phrases will be handed out week 1. It is meant for students to be more familiar with the jargon used in the special and visual effects discipline.

Grading Breakdown

	of Grade
Participation	10%
Midterm exam	20%
Forced perspective assignment	10%
Script excerpt f/x breakout assignment	10%
Stop Motion Animation clip	10%
Group f/x production film	10%
Effects film reviews	10%
Final exam	20%
TOTAL	100%

Grading Scale

Course final grades will be determined using the following scale.

A	95-100
A-	90-94
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D+	67-69
D	63-66
D-	60-62
F	59 and below

Assignment Rubrics

For participation, forced perspective and script breakout assignments there are extra points to be had for inspired work beyond the basic application of the conceptual work.

The midterm and final will be graded by dividing the number of questions into 100. Each incorrect answer will be that number taken away from 100 resulting in the grading scale outlined above.

In class hands on projects will consist of Chris and Gene along with an SA filming on Stage 3 various elements relating to the technique discussed each week.

Grading Timeline

The Midterm will be reviewed the following week.

The forced perspective assignment will be graded within two weeks after the due date.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Faculty has discretion to adopt the absence policy that works best for the needs of each course. Many classes across SCA allow 2 absences without consequence. After a 3rd absence their grade can be lowered. Many of our project-based courses, however, require a stricter policy as outlined below:

Students are expected to be on time and prepared for each class. One absence may result in a student's grade being lowered by one notch (IE: A becomes A-). Two absences may result in a student's grade being lowered by two notches (IE: A-becomes B). A third absence may result in a student's grade being lowered another full point (IE: B becomes C). Grades can be lowered by one full point for every additional absence.

Tardiness: A student is deemed late 7 minutes (number can be adjusted as desired) after the class is scheduled to start. One late arrival may not affect your grade. Two late arrivals equate to one full unexcused absence. (IE: A becomes A-). Three late arrivals may result in your grade being dropped by two portions (IE: A-becomes B). Four late arrivals may result in your grade being dropped three portions (one full point: B becomes C). Lateness of more than 30 minutes will count as an absence.

Timely attendance is mandatory and failure to attend all class sections from beginning to end may affect grades.

- Exemptions will be allowed on a case-by-case basis and must be supported by a written accommodation request from the USC Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS).

- Students who become ill and need to self-isolate will be supported in their efforts to stay current with classwork and assignments. Faculty are no longer required to provide an option for students to zoom into class. However, Faculty may choose to use zoom at their discretion to help students stay current in their course work.

Students must contact the professor or SA 24 hours prior to class start time if they need to miss class for any reason.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Policy:

In this course, you are allowed to use artificial intelligence (AI)-powered programs to help you with assignments that indicate the permitted use of AI. You should also be aware that AI text generation tools may present incorrect information, biased responses, and incomplete analyses; thus, they are not yet prepared to produce text that meets the standards of this course. To adhere to our university values, you must cite any AI-generated material (e.g., text, images, etc.) included or referenced in your work and provide the prompts used to generate the content. Using an AI tool to generate content without proper attribution will be treated as plagiarism and reported to the Office of Academic Integrity. Please review the instructions in each assignment for more details on how and when to use AI Generators for your submissions.

Course Content Distribution and Synchronous Session Recordings Policies

USC has policies that prohibit recording and distribution of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment.

Recording a university class without the express permission of the instructor and announcement to the class, or unless conducted pursuant to an Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) accommodation. Recording can inhibit free discussion in the future, and thus infringe on the academic freedom of other students as well as the instructor. ([Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook](#), page 13).

Distribution or use of notes, recordings, exams, or other intellectual property, based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study. This includes but is not limited to providing materials for distribution by services publishing course materials. 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. ([Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook](#), page 13).

Final short film project

Four production groups will be formed from the class. Each group will produce a final *short film* containing in-camera practical and special effects shots.

-NOTEWORTHY DATES TO REMEMBER-

- ☐ **01/19/2025 – MLK DAY – NO CLASS**
- ☐ **02/17/2025 – PRESIDENTS DAY – NO CLASS**
- ☐ **03/17/2025 – SPRING RECESS – NO CLASS**
- ☐ **05/03/2025 – 05/06/2025 -- STUDY DAYS – NO CLASS**
- ☐ **02/24/2025 – TURN IN FORCED PERSPECTIVE PHOTOGRAPH**
- ☐ **03/03/2025 – MID-TERM EXAM**
- ☐ **05/12/2025 – REVIEW GROUP PROJECTS – FINAL EXAM**

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

MEETING #1 01/013/2025 - COURSE OVERVIEW

INTRODUCTION TO SPECIAL/VISUAL EFFECTS HISTORY AND TECHNIQUES. SPECIAL AND (VISUAL) EFFECTS CATEGORIES: PHYSICAL, PRACTICAL AND SPECIAL PROPS, IN CAMERA EFFECTS, SPECIAL MAKE-UP EFFECTS, PYRO-TECHNICS, MINIATURES, CHARACTER ANIMATION, POST COMPOSITING.

(MARTIN LUTHER KING JR DAY- 01/19/2024 - NO CLASS)

MEETING #2 01/27/2025 - PHYSICAL/PRACTICAL FX / MAKE-UP FX

BREAKING AND COLLAPSING SCENERY. BREAKAWAY PROPS, BREAKING WINDOWS, STUNTS, FIGHTS. ARROWS, KNIVES, SWORDS AND DAGGERS. BLOOD, SCRATCHES, AND BLOOD EFFECTS. CASTING BODY PARTS.

INSTRUCTION OF BASIC SAFE USE OF STANDARD MOVIE EQUIPMENT.

(ON-STAGE, HANDS-ON PROJECT)

MEETING #3 02/03/2025 - IN CAMERA EFFECTS – pt. 1

FORCED PERSPECTIVE

UNDER/OVER CRANK PHOTOGRAPHY.

MIRROR EFFECTS: FIFTY-FIFTY MIRRORS, GLASS SHOTS AND SPLIT SCREEN OVERLAYS, DOUBLE EXPOSURES. GHOST EFFECTS USING 50/50 MIRROR

(ON-STAGE, HANDS-ON PROJECT)

MEETING #4 02/10/2025 - IN CAMERA EFFECTS – pt. 2

SCENIC PROJECTION FRONT AND REAR SCREEN.

PROCESS PHOTOGRAPHY (POOR MAN'S PROCESS)

(ON-STAGE, HANDS-ON PROJECT)

(PRESIDENT'S DAY- 02/17/2025 - NO CLASS)

MEETING #5 02/24/2025 - MINIATURES

MINIATURE EFFECTS: FOREGROUND HANGING MINIATURES, FULL FRAME MINIATURES AND CHOICE OF SCALE.

MINIATURE CONSTRUCTION (CHOICE OF MATERIALS).

MINIATURE LIGHTING PHOTOGRAPHIC TECHNIQUES.

MINIATURES AND MOTION CONTROL (MODELS AND CAMERA).

THE NODAL POINT AS USED IN VISUAL EFFECTS.

(ON-STAGE, HANDS-ON PROJECT)

TURN IN FORCED PERSPECTIVE ASSIGNMENT

MEETING #6 03/03/2025 – SCRIPT BREAKOUT - MIDTERM

READ AND IDENTIFY IN SCRIPTS, THE VARIOUS EFFECTS TECHNIQUES REQUIRED.

MID-TERM EXAM

FX SHORT FILM GROUPS WILL BE ASSIGNED.

MEETING #7 03/10/2025 - CHARACTER ANIMATION

STOP MOTION PUPPETS (ARMATURED, CLAYMATION AND REPLACEMENT).
HAND PUPPETS, ROD PUPPETS/ANIMATRONICS (SAG ACTORS).
WHY MOTION CAPTURE?

(ON-STAGE, HANDS-ON PROJECT)

(SPRING RECESS- 03/15/2025 - 03/23/2025 - NO CLASS)

MEETING #8 03/24/2025 - ELEMENTS

WORKING WITH WATER AND PYROTECHNICS, CREATING ATMOSPHERIC
ELEMENTS FOR POST COMPOSITING. GREEN AND BLUE SCREEN

(ON-STAGE, HANDS-ON PROJECT)

MEETING #9 03/31/2025- POST COMPOSITING

HISTORY OF POST COMPOSITING (IN-CAMERA, OPTICAL AND DIGITAL).
INTRO TO COMPOSITE TECHNIQUES AND PROGRAMS.
RED/GREEN/BLUE SCREEN CAPTURE TECHNIQUES.
MATTE MAKING, ROTOSCOPING AND INTEGRATING SUBJECTS INTO THE
ENVIRONMENT.

MEETING #10 04/07/2025 – TEAM # 1

MEETING #11 04/14/2025 – TEAM # 2

MEETING #12 04/21/2025 – TEAM # 3

MEETING #13 04/28/2025 - TEAM # 4

(STUDY WEEK- 05/03/2025 - 05/06/2025 - NO CLASS)

MEETING #14 05/06/2024 – FINAL CLASS

RECAP OF COURSE MATERIALS

REVIEW FOR THE FINAL EXAM

REVIEW FINAL FILM PROJECTS

FINAL EXAM

Each team will collectively write a script and have it ready one week before respective dates to be shot on stage. (Note: we will need to approve each script one week prior to each teams shoot date so that we can be sure that it can be shot in one night.) You will have one week to edit and submit.

All teams will cycle through a rotation, i.e., While TEAM 1 is on stage shooting said short film, TEAM 2 will be assisting. (TEAM 2 will need to turn in their script for approval) TEAM 3 will have this night to read the excerpt from a script provided by us for an **FX breakout** and may choose to not be on stage, (but we encourage everyone to join in each week).

TEAM 4 will have this night to do the **animation project**, a minimum 5 second clip, 120 frames. You may choose to not be on stage, (but we encourage everyone to join in each week).

The cycles will be as follows.

April 7th

Team 1 will have the stage for shooting.

Team 2 will assist and turn in script.

Team 3 will be doing the ***FX breakout***.

Team 4 will be doing the ***animation project***.

April 14th

Team 2 will have the stage for shooting.

Team 3 will assist and turn in script.

Team 4 will be doing the ***FX breakout***.

Team 1 will be doing the ***animation project***.

April 21st

Team 3 will have the stage for shooting.

Team 4 will assist and turn in script.

Team 1 will be doing the ***FX breakout***.

Team 2 will be doing the ***animation project***.

April 28th

Team 4 will have the stage for shooting.

Team 1 will assist.

Team 2 will be doing the ***FX breakout***.

Team 3 will be doing the ***animation project***.

ALL PROJECTS ARE DO ONE WEEK AFTER ASSIGNED DATES

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Integrity:

The University of Southern California is a learning community committed to developing successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the dissemination of ideas. Academic misconduct, which includes any act of dishonesty in the production or submission of academic work, compromises the integrity of the person who commits the act and can impugn the perceived integrity of the entire university community. It stands in opposition to the university's mission to research, educate, and contribute productively to our community and the world.

All students are expected to submit assignments that represent their own original work, and that have been prepared specifically for the course or section for which they have been submitted. You may not submit work written by others or "recycle" work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s).

Other violations of academic integrity include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), collusion, knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage.

The impact of academic dishonesty is far-reaching and is considered a serious offense against the university. All incidences of academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity and could result in outcomes such as failure on the assignment, failure in the course, suspension, or even expulsion from the university.

For more information about academic integrity see [the student handbook](#) or the [Office of Academic Integrity's website](#), and university policies on [Research and Scholarship Misconduct](#).

Please ask your instructor if you are unsure what constitutes unauthorized assistance on an exam or assignment, or what information requires citation and/or attribution.

Students and Disability Accommodations:

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. [The Office of Student Accessibility Services](#) (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at osas.usc.edu. You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at osasfrontdesk@usc.edu.

Support Systems:

[Counseling and Mental Health](#) - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call

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

[988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#) - 988 for both calls and text messages – 24/7 on call

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline is comprised of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The new, shorter phone number makes it easier for people to remember and access mental health crisis services (though the previous 1 (800) 273-8255 number will continue to function indefinitely) and represents a continued commitment to those in crisis.

[Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services \(RSVP\)](#) - (213) 740-9355(WELL) – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender- and power-based harm (including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking).

[Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX \(EEO-TIX\)](#) - (213) 740-5086

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

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

[The Office of Student Accessibility Services \(OSAS\)](#) - (213) 740-0776

OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

[USC Campus Support and Intervention](#) - (213) 740-0411

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

[Diversity, Equity and Inclusion](#) - (213) 740-2101

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 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) 442-1200 – 24/7 on call

Non-emergency assistance or information.

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

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.

[Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice](#) - (323) 442-2850 or otfp@med.usc.edu

Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.

PLEASE NOTE:

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

SCA Production Protocols

as of 08/17/2022

Please refer to the USC website here:

<https://my.usc.edu/?s=SCA+Production+Protocols>

