

Course Syllabus**Instructor:** Miles Watkins**Instructor:** Tony Cucchiari**SA:** Mark Witte**Course Number:** 18477D**Room:** SCA, Room 259 (unless listed otherwise on the calendar)**Class Hours:** 1pm – 4:50pm Tues/Thurs**Important Phone Numbers:**

* NO CALLS AFTER 9:00pm *

| | | | |
|----------------------------|----------------|----------------------|----------------|
| Peter Kolstad | (213) 821-0025 | Susana Santana | (213) 740-2470 |
| Nic Wagner | (213) 821-0045 | Avid Labs | (213) 740-3981 |
| Equipment (camera/sound) | (213) 821-0951 | Equipment (Lights) | (213) 740-289 |
| Joe Wallenstein | (213) 740-7126 | Prod. Faculty Office | (213) 740-3317 |
| Student Prod. Office - SPO | (213) 740-2895 | | |

Course Description:

Introduction to filmmaking as related to cinematic expression, aesthetics, criticism, and ethics. Individual film projects.

Recommended Texts:

- *Producing and Directing the Short Film and Video*, Fourth Edition
Peter W. Rea and David K. Irving. Focal Press
- *The Bare Bones Camera Course for Film and Video*
Tom Schroepel. Self-published.

Class Handouts**Recommended Viewing:**

- DVD: *Visions of Light, The Art of Cinematography*
- DVD: *The Cutting Edge*
- Angelo Pacifici's Cinematography website:
<http://web.mac.com/angelodp1/iWeb/USC/Welcome.html>

EATING AND DRINKING IN THE CLASSROOM ARE PROHIBITED AT ALL TIMES. BOTTLED WATER IS THE ONLY EXCEPTION.

GETTING STARTED

Welcome to 290/241! Some students start out a bit anxious about the semester. They may have never held a moving image camera or written a movie script, and now they must make four movies in the space of 12 weeks.

Rest assured, you will, in fact, have a movie ready—will make four pictures—will, in all probability, pass the course—and, most of all, learn something and (we hope) go away feeling it's been one of your best educational experiences.

EDUCATIONAL PRINCIPLES**COURSE PHILOSOPHY**

290/241 is about communicating through moving visual and sound patterns. It's also about exploring the cinema medium, and finding your own strengths and weaknesses as a moviemaker.

The class does not aim to produce polished movies or moviemakers. The technical proficiency of a 290/241 movie is less important than the quality and originality of what it is saying. We are looking for the freedom to experiment without fear of failure.

So, students' productions are viewed as works-in-progress, as “scratch-pad” projects. By the end of the course, students should display basic competence in conceiving and developing movie ideas and in using the techniques of cinema and digital media to express themselves and communicate to audiences. You will know traditional cinema language, not as a set of rigid rules, but as tools which can be used or changed for your own artistic purposes.

When you make narratives, we would like you to focus on the expressive potential of physical behavior; reveal emotions and ideas through what the characters *do* rather than say. Dialogue is used sparingly encouraged in 290/241; we make sound pictures, but not talking pictures.

We encourage exploration of experimental and non-traditional forms in both narrative and documentary. In documentaries, we suggest personal statements, rather than journalistic “objective” reporting.

290/241 immerses students in learning-by-doing. We collaborate in a workshop, involving us all in constructive criticism. Our mutual challenge will be to create an environment that encourages honesty, experimentation, and growth. The technical proficiency of a 290/241 movie is less important than the quality and originality of what it is saying. We are looking to foster the freedom to experiment.

290/241 FILMMAKING GOALS: upon completing the course, students will be able to:

- Understand and begin to apply the aesthetics of visual and aural communication through cinema;
- Use the creative interaction of image and sound for expressive purposes;
- Design and create cinematic structures;
- Demonstrate sufficient capability in writing, producing, directing, cinematography, editing, and sound to be ready for the next level of production;
- Develop starting ideas into complete movies;
- Experiment with personal expression through cinema;
- Show skills in characterization and story telling;
- Recognize the potential of a range of genres: experimental, documentary, animation, etc;
- Deliver and receive effective critiques of work in progress;
- Establish ethical standards for movie-making and critiquing.
- Show ability to collaborate, to both lead and take direction on a crew

A FEW TIPS

Explore several styles and types of movie-making, rather than making four comedies or four experimental pictures. Extend that experimentation into your visual style through camera composition and movement and lighting. After 290/241, you will always need to secure someone's approval of your ideas, so use this opportunity to experiment while you can!

Schedule each step of your projects. If there is one thing students tell us about handling the course, it's that they wish they had planned their projects more carefully, and managed their time better.

Cast actors when you want performances, not roommates, friends, and family—use the casting sources at SPO. Since you must operate camera, you are not permitted to act in your own movies.

AND FINALLY

In many classes, students succeed by reflecting back and commenting on material provided by the teachers; in 290/241 the situation is reversed. The students provide the material on which we all reflect, and students succeed by tapping their inner resources of memory, feeling, and imagination.

This is a class about your ideas and feelings and your ability to express yourself visually and aurally. You will learn the basics of our craft, to criticize and be criticized, and a good deal about yourself. 290/241 may be your most demanding and perhaps your most rewarding academic experience. Have fun and make the most of it!

CLASS ORGANIZATION**PRODUCTION SECTION REQUIREMENTS:**

1. Complete four personally originated projects (P-1, P-2, P-3, P-4) which you write, produce, direct, **operate camera for**, light, create sound for, and edit. It's your chance to have total control . . .likely your last!

We encourage students to invite other students to help out **but not replace the filmmaker in any of these key roles**. Projects are shot, edited, and screened according to the class calendar schedule. You will be assigned to one of three groups (A, B, or C) for screening dates and you will share camera equipment with 2 other classmates.

Collaborate on 1 group project- as a crew member for an in-class scene shoot. You will take at least one of the following roles: **1) Writer; 2) Producer/AD; 3) Director; 4) Cinematographer; 5) Production Designer/Gaffer; 6) Sound Recordist/Designer; or, 7) Script Supervisor/Editor.**

2. Attend all class meetings, on time, and participate in class discussions, including oral and written critiques of projects screened.
3. After screening each picture, write a narrative script or documentary/experimental treatment for the next movie and discuss it with the instructors the week after. (Check the *Course Calendar*, which will be handed out separately, for script conference schedules.) We aim to help you clarify your ideas, estimate the size and scope of the project, prepare for any safety procedures, and brainstorm creative and practical possibilities. *We are not interested in censoring you*; rather we have found that a timely commitment to a project concept greatly increases the pre-production preparation and decreases stress on the movie-maker.
4. Complete a *Personal Critique*; and a *Crit on Crits* for each of your movies. (See Pages 9–11) **All documents are to be TYPED, and submitted IN TRIPLICATE. No project will be screened unless accompanied by the required documentation.**
5. Attend conferences as requested by the instructors. After Project Three has been viewed, a progress conference will be held with both instructors.

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| <p><i>Plan projects within your resources!</i> Calculate the time you need for <i>all</i> your coursework (not just 290/241), and schedule shoots and editing within your limits. If there is one thing students tell us about handling the course, it's that they wish they had planned their projects more carefully, and managed their time better. The workload is heaviest in the first few weeks, because you'll be learning to use the camera, lights, and editing system.</p> |
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PROJECT REQUIREMENTS:

1. **LENGTH/FORMAT:** All films will be made in DV-cam digital video. Projects are **3 to 7 minutes long**- which is what you have time to shoot and edit in the available time. **Do not bring in projects that are longer**; they throw screening schedules/discussions out of balance.
2. Sound is optional in Project 1, and required in Projects 2 through 4. On-camera synchronous dialogue is not permitted in Projects 1 or 2; in either Project 3 or 4 (not both) you may, but only with faculty permission, use limited sync dialogue. Tracks may include music, backgrounds (such as traffic, crowds, etc.), and voice-over or narration. (Avoid "lip-flap," that is characters talking without being audible.) Films Three through Four must employ "mixed" tracks, a blending of two or more elements.
3. **ACTORS:** Cast actors from outside our section for your projects. Since **you must operate the camera** on your personal movies, you are not permitted to act in them.
4. **LABELS/COUNTDOWN/CREDITS:** When brought to class, tapes should be labeled with your name, class number and title. Begin projects with an SMPTE **COUNTDOWN** (available on computer desktop). Each project should contain a Main Title and credits for cast and crew.
5. **Complete a *Personal Filmmaker's Critique*** for each of your projects. *Include a brief synopsis, main idea, summary of major learning, and any problems.* All documents are to be TYPED, and submitted IN **TRIPLICATE** at the beginning of the screening day. * **No project will be screened unless accompanied by the filmmaker's critique.**
6. **DEADLINES:** Each project is to be handed to the SA at the *beginning* of the class, **even if the movie-maker feels that it is unfinished.** Do the final outputting of your film at least 4 hours before screening time to give yourself time for technical problems.
7. **SAFETY:** Each project must observe the **USC CNTV Safety Guidelines** as well as professional, **ethical and safety standards** that will protect everyone on the set. See Safety section below for information on when a proposed film element may pose a risk and require a pre-production conference with instructors.
 - 1) **An actor cannot drive a vehicle while being directed or speaking dialogue.**
 - 2) **Minors cannot act in your film without a Studio Teacher present.**
 - 3) **No guns of any kind may appear in a 290/241 project**
 - 4) **The rules for safety MUST be followed...or else the film will not be counted as one of your projects and your grade in the class will be affected.**

EXAMS/PRESENTATIONS

No formal exams will be given.

DOCUMENTS:

WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS:

Movie-makers must learn to express themselves in words and on paper; otherwise, they will never get a chance to make the pictures they dream about. We require two written assignments with each project. ***Please remember to turn in three typed copies of each document.*** Completion of all these assignments bears directly on your grade.

Following this page is a set of blank copies of the forms for this class.

1. ***PERSONAL CRITIQUE***

Due *with* the project. We provide a form on which you give a brief statement of the intent of your movie. You will also evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of your picture, and indicate things you want to learn to do better.

2. ***CRIT ON CRITS***

Due *one week after* the movie. You study these and fill in a one-page form summarizing the main points and what you learned from them.

Movie-maker: _____ Date: _____
Title: _____ Project No: _____

PERSONAL CRITIQUE

NOTE: **THREE (3) PRINTED** copies to be turned in with project.

INTENT: (How you want to affect us)

SYNOPSIS: (What we see)

STRENGTHS: (list by priority, one line per item)

WEAKNESSES: (list by priority, one line per item)

WHAT I WANT TO LEARN TO DO BETTER IS:

Movie-maker: _____ Date: _____
Title: _____ Project No: _____

CRIT ON CRITS

(**THREE PRINTED** copies to be turned in ONE WEEK after screening)

THE MAJOR SUGGESTIONS IN THE CRITS WERE:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)

I AGREE/DISAGREE WITH THE SUGGESTIONS AS FOLLOWS:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)

BASED ON THE SCREENING AND CRITIQUES, IF I COULD CONTINUE TO SHOOT OR EDIT, I WOULD MAKE THE FOLLOWING CHANGES:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)

GRADING:**GUIDELINES**

Final grades will be issued only upon completion of all required movies and documents; grades will be calculated on the following percentages:

| | |
|------------------------------------|-----|
| 4 projects | 45% |
| Performance in Final Group Project | 30% |
| Documents | 15% |
| Attendance and class participation | 10% |

Unexcused late projects will be downgraded one step (for example, a B+ will be lowered to a B.) Projects are due at the beginning of class; any project turned in more than 10 minutes after the scheduled start of class is late. Lateness will be excused only on presentation of written evidence, such as a doctor's note. (Camera break-downs, or other problems which back-up plans could have fixed, are not acceptable excuses.) In addition, there will be no oral critiques of late projects, whether or not the lateness is excused.

Promptness and regular attendance are very important in 290/241. Any student arriving more than 10 minutes after the scheduled start of class will be listed as tardy. Three tardies will equal one absence. More than two unexcused absences will lower your final grade one step. Absences will be excused only on presentation of written evidence, such as a doctor's note. Unexcused early departures will count the same as tardies. Use of cell phones or connecting to the internet during class will count as an absence.

We do not grade on a curve; we would be delighted to give all students A's if they earned them.

The trend you show is an important consideration; we give weight to improvement.

SUPPORT SYSTEMS:**SA—TO HELP YOU OUT**

Many 290/241 students need extra help, including personal tutoring, with camera, editing, lighting, and sound techniques. Our SA's are available to answer your questions, check you out on equipment, and support you. They may set up some small-group tutorials outside of class. They welcome your calls, and will schedule appointments with students who ask. **Don't hesitate to call on them—there are no dumb questions in 290/241!**

EQUIPMENT AND FACILITIES

The School will provide digital cameras, tripods, and editing stations. Students must pay a Lab Fee of \$500 and also an Insurance Fee of \$300.

Students will provide their own:

1. **Headphones (required) for Avid lab.** We recommend Sony MDR 7506, which are available at the USC *Bookstore*.
2. **Sony Mini DV Tape PR DVM60PRL 60 minute**, also available at <http://www.edgewise-media.com/sonmindv60mi.html> or from *The Tape Company*, 2721 West Magnolia Blvd., Burbank, (323) 993-3000. There is a full list of other tape sources available at SPO. You **MUST** use SONY tapes. The Avid equipment is adjusted for the Sony tapes specifically.
3. One of the following approved External Hard Drives:
 - G-TECH: G-RAID (1TB RAID)
 - G-TECH: G-DRIVE (500GB Single Drive)
 - Western Digital: My Book Studio Edition II (2TB RAID)
 - Glyph-Technologies: GT-050Q (1TB Single Drive)

Students will be required to bring their projects to class on their drives from time to time.

The School will provide:

1. **Cameras and tripods.**
2. **Access to lighting kits after the 5th week of classes**
3. **Limited grip/electric equipment for the group project.**

All 290/241 projects MUST be shot on the camera provided to students by the School of Cinematic Arts and edited in the SCA AVID labs. Use of personal or rented professional cinema equipment is prohibited in 290/241. No Exceptions.

Projects not shot on SCA camera and/or edited outside of the SCA AVID labs will be graded as an "F" and confiscated by the class instructor.

EQUIPMENT CENTER

Cameras and tripods are checked out at the beginning of the semester and returned at the end. 3 students sign on to be responsible for this shared equipment. **Microphone kits, lights, and light stands can be checked out from the *Equipment Center Window*, but you should not count on them regularly. *Light kits will be available only after the fifth week of classes.*** With approximately 250 students taking 290/241 and similar courses, there are high demands.

Observe the Equipment Center's schedule for reserving, picking up and returning equipment. In order to use equipment, you must have all your fees paid and use your

personal *Production Number* (assigned).

SAFETY

“Just get the shot!” “We’re losing the light!” “Back up a few steps.” “Nobody will notice.” Under high pressure, pushing to finish, intently concentrating on the scene, every filmmaker is accident-prone. Even professionals have fatalities. In 290/241, we insist that you protect yourself and everyone on your shoot. Consult the SAFETY GUIDELINES you received at the SAFETY SEMINAR. The CONTENTS serve as a check-list to aid in safety preparation, giving detailed suggestions for avoiding accidents. Please pay particular attention to three concerns: procedures for employing **weapons**; staging **physical action** (climbing, falls, fights); and, using **vehicles** (cars, bicycles, motorcycles, etc.).

You face serious consequences for safety violations, including suspension and expulsion from the University.

The keys to safety are concern for other people, and conscientious preparation. **YOU MUST consult with us on any shot that *might* raise a safety issue; even if you think it’s safe, we require you to let us know, and complete the HAZARDOUS PRODUCTION FORM.** We will help you find creative solutions, so you get the story you want and bring everyone home in good shape.

The hazardous shooting form can be found online at:

https://scacommunity.usc.edu/resources/physical_production/hazardous_form.cfm

The form is a three step process. You must complete it, have your directing AND cinematography instructor approve and sign it. Then take it to Joe Wallenstein for his signature, and, finally, back to your directing instructor for final approval. In order to complete this process you will have to start a week before shooting. Any hazardous shooting done without a completed form will be pulled.

Do not shoot alone at night. Digital cameras are targets for street thieves—several students have had them ripped off at gun-point. Work with others in the class whenever on location; ask someone to serve as a “Safety Officer,” although EVERYONE (crew & cast) is responsible for safety on a set.

DO NOT LEAVE EQUIPMENT IN YOUR CAR, NOT EVEN THE TRUNK. IT IS NOT INSURED FOR LOSS IF STOLEN FROM YOUR CAR.

PROP GUNS

NO GUNS OF ANY KIND MAY BE USED OR SHOWN IN ANY PROJECTS PRODUCED IN THE 290/241 CLASS.

All guns --prop, toy, plastic, or otherwise -- pose an unacceptable risk of accidental injury or death. If your plot requires a gun, consult with your teachers about creative ways to suggest its presence without actually showing it.

USE OF MINORS

Child actors (under 18) have very specific regulations in our CNTV agreement with the Screen Actors Guild. Any use of minors in your films must conform to state regulations limiting the number of hours they may work and assuring their welfare by the presence of a studio teacher/social worker.

COPYRIGHT, INTERNET, AND FESTIVALS

Because the School provides equipment and facilities, the copyrights to all 290 films belong to USC. Details are provided in the *Copyright Agreement* you sign.

An important consequence is that **290/241 works may NOT be posted on the Internet and may NOT be screened in any public venue**—not on a personal Web site, not through an internet company, not in a DV festival—not anyplace.

Whether you are paid does not matter; **all public screenings are prohibited, including free ones.** Only private, invitational screenings for fellow students, cast, friends, family, and faculty are permitted. The benefit of this rule is that it allows you to use any music or clips you wish, without securing rights. Violating this rule may lead to severe academic sanctions, including suspension or expulsion from the University.

You may post your 290 work on the Internet ONLY on a special USC Web site created on the SCA Community Portal. You will have a designated access password for this site, which you may give to those with whom you wish to share your work.

We encourage you to provide DVDs to the actors/subjects in you projects. However, such DVDs **MUST** include the SCA watermark and an accompanying letter to subject/actor.
SEE NEXT PAGE

Documentation on how to add the SCA approved watermark to your sequence can be found in the SCA Post Help folder, located on the desktop of all of the machines in the labs, classrooms and theaters as well as the SCA Community website.

The SCA approved watermark file can be found in the SD&HD Finishing Materials folder on the desktop of all of the machines in the labs, classrooms and theaters.

Date:

Dear _____,

Please find one copy of my -----class project titled -----

The enclosed DVD is a result of an in class project and not intended for placement on the internet, or any kind of public screening outside the classroom, which is prohibited by law.

You may share it with, if applicable, your agents, managers and casting directors.

Because of the exercise nature of this project and in consideration of the rights, legal and ethical, of the original creative forces, please and do not place this DVD/project on the internet. In doing so, you may be liable for prosecution by the owners of the copyrights.

ETHICS

It is extremely important that you protect your opportunity to learn and not hand it over to someone more experienced. As noted above, **we expect you to operate your own camera**, plan your own lighting, etc. ***You may not have people from outside the film school or in advanced classes crew or edit for you***; this is the equivalent of asking someone else to write a paper for you, which is a violation of academic integrity. We DO encourage you to help out on each other's shoots by carrying equipment, dressing sets, watching over safety, and so on; it's more effective and more fun!

The USC Student Conduct Code fully discusses issues of academic integrity and student conduct (see your issue of *Scampus*). Motion picture production involves some additional issues of conduct off-campus. USC student filmmakers need to observe professional standards of behavior with actors, crew, and location owners and protect our reputation with the Screen Actors' Guild, and the City and County of Los Angeles.

SUPPORT SYSTEMS

STUDENT ASSISTANT (SA)—TO HELP YOU OUT

Many 290/241 students need extra help, including personal tutoring, with camera, editing, lighting, and sound techniques. Our SA's are available to answer your questions, check you out on equipment, and support you. They welcome your calls, and will schedule appointments with students who ask. **Don't hesitate to call on them—there are no dumb questions in 290/241!**

HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Cinema school is intense. One important aid in coping is managing one's time, energy, and health. This translates into: scaling projects to do-able sizes; having back-up ideas, locations, equipment and actors in case of problems (weather, accidents, camera break-downs, etc.); realistically estimating time; protecting time to eat and sleep!

If you are feeling stressed out, please talk with your instructors or SA. USC also provides a Student Counseling service which has helped pull many students through rough spots; you can reach them at (213) 740-7711. Chances are that as the semester progresses you will be amazed at how much you are capable of and how quickly you are becoming a seasoned filmmaker.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with *Disability Services and Programs* (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to one of the faculty (or the CA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301, and is open 8:30am–5:00pm Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

BIBLIOGRAPHY**RECOMMENDED VIEWING:**

DVD: *Visions of Light, The Art of Cinematography*

DVD: *The Cutting Edge*

Angelo Pacifici's Cinematography website:

<http://web.mac.com/angelodp1/iWeb/USC/Welcome.html>

RECOMMENDED TEXTS:

PRODUCING AND DIRECTING THE SHORT FILM AND VIDEO,
Fourth Edition. Peter W. Rea and David K. Irving. Focal Press
THE BARE BONES CAMERA COURSE FOR FILM AND VIDEO
Tom Schroepel. Self-published.

Ball, William *A Sense of Direction* New York: Drama Book Publishers 1984

Block, Bruce *The Visual Story* Focal Press, Boston 2001

Brown, Blain *Cinematography*, Focal Press, 2002

Dannenbaum, J., and Carroll Hodge, Doe Mayer *Creative Filmmaking from the Inside Out* Simon & Schuster 2003

Goldman, William *Adventures in the Screen Trade* Warner Books, New York 1984

Johnson, Claudia H. *Crafting Short Screenplays that Connect* Focal Press, Boston Second edition, 2005

Katz, Steven D. *Film Directing Shot by Shot* Stoneham, Mass: Focal Press 1991

Lumet, Sidney *Making Movies* New York: Vintage Books, 1996

Malkiewicz, Kris and Robert E. Rogers *Cinematography* New York: Van Nostrand, 1989

Malkiewicz, Kris and Barbara J. Gryboski *Film Lighting: Talks with Hollywood's Cinematographers and Gaffers*, New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1986

Mamet, David *On Directing Film* New York: Penguin Books, 1991

Murch, Walter *In the Blink of an Eye* Los Angeles :Silman-James Press, 1995

Schaefer, Dennis and Larry Salvato *Masters of Light* Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1984

RECOMMENDED TEXTS (cont'd):

Ross, Lillian *Picture*

Monaco, James *How to Read a Film* Oxford University Press

Bunuel, Luis *My Last Sigh*

Almendros, Nestor *A Man with a Camera*

Lord, James *A Giacometti Portrait*

Rilke, Rainer Maria *Letters to a Young Poet* Norton Press

Edwards, G.B. *The Book of Ebenezer Le Page* Knopf

Bergman, Ingmar *Autobiographies*

Ruiz, Don Miguel *The Four Agreements: A Practical Guide to Personal Freedom*

Blanton, Brad *Radical Honesty: How To Transform Your Life By Telling The Truth*

Ondaatje, Michael with Murch, Walter *The Conversations*

Statement of Understanding

I have read and understood the policies and procedures outlined in the 290/241 Syllabus, the CNTV Safety Seminar, and the Student Production Office Handbook.

I agree to conference with my instructors before creating any situation that might put my actors, crew, bystanders, or myself in jeopardy.

I am equally committed to protecting and enhancing the reputation of the USC School of Cinematic Arts through my actions.

Signature: _____

Print Name: _____

Date: _____

