Producing for Film & Television (What is the exact title of the pre existing class; add it here.)

IFMTV-UT 1296
Harvey L. Myman

Contact info

Time and location of class: Room XYZ at Emerson, address

This class is an examination of the creative, organizational, and managerial roles of the producer in narrative motion pictures and television. Topics include how a production company is formed, functions, creates and obtains properties, financing and distribution. The course gives specific attention to the issues that will be faced by students as future producers and/or production and studio executives.

This class is primarily a creative producing class—and it will focus on the Los Angeles entertainment industry. And it will examine both feature film development and production and the television industry.

This class will provide students a roadmap of how the Los Angeles film and television industry works. It will also help students decide what kinds of projects to develop and acquire, how to assemble the necessary elements, such as director, writer, cast, etc., and to construct a realistic overall producing plan. Today’s producer must be an entrepreneur, navigating and setting his/her own course in a dynamically changing world, as well as someone who can find and create content.

COURSE OVERVIEW

The course is designed to describe and explain the roles, function and skills required to produce a feature film or television project, from initial conception through production and into marketing and distribution. The emphasis will be on the realities of producing in our current market, economy and cultural landscape; what makes a project viable and successful in an ever-changing world.

The course will explore the qualities and skills a producer musty know to be successful, including a command of market trends as they relate to dynamically changing production and distribution modalities.

The course will cover the process of production, from the initial concept of the story through script development, funding avenues, production, post-production, and marketing/distribution. We will cover an overview of script budgeting, timetable development, team building, talent selection, contract and union negotiation, regulations, technology, and other relevant core competencies.
COURSE OBJECTIVES

To build a body of knowledge and information through lectures, case studies, discussions with visiting professionals, and readings of articles and selected chapters of relevant texts – about the opportunities and challenges facing the contemporary producer in film and television. The rapidly changing nature of the industry has effectively brought about a convergence of the two, in which a decision of how to best explore a project — as a film, limited series or open-ended series — is more often a function of how best to tell a story.

To learn the basic concepts, terms, and principles which apply to the role of producer in the entertainment and media industries.

To analyze the specific job functions of the producer, required to effectively and efficiently complete all phases of production, through marketing and distribution.

To understand the various disciplines in which the producer must effectively function as a key member – and in most cases, the leader – of the creative and business team assembled to complete a project.

The syllabus is subject to change, at the instructor’s discretion.

CLASS PREPARATION

Topics for each class are identified in the syllabus. It is critical that you do any assigned reading for the week in advance of the class, since that session will build on the reading material. When a guest speaker is announced, students will be expected to research their work and be prepared to ask questions.

ATTENDANCE

This may be sunny Los Angeles, but missing class is not something you should, or can do. The lectures build upon and with each other, and together they form the whole that is essential to understanding film and television production. So don’t miss class. The rules for absence and lateness are no different than in New York. So don’t do it, and if you do, have a very good reason. (Remember, as with all Tisch courses, three lates equal an absence; three unexcused absences will result in a one letter drop in your grade.)

If you are going to be absent or late, you must e mail me before class. Failure to notify me in advance of late attendance will result in lateness being counted as an unexcused absence.

For an absence to count as an excused absence, a student must submit documentation that attests to the impossibility of attending class due to illness or genuine family emergency.

GUEST SPEAKERS
A specific and strategic advantage of taking this course in Los Angeles is the access we have to people in the entertainment industry, and we will have guest speakers from all parts of the professional world.

Industry guests bring the real world into our classroom, to share their experience and insight into the business. There is also an understanding that the guests are speaking in a “cone of silence” and their frank and open discussion is not intended for use or publication elsewhere.

RECOMMENDED BOOKS, ETC.

This will be a semester of consumption outside the classroom as well. There are books to be read and websites to follow on a daily basis. The script reading load at your internships will also be heavy. And the flow of movies and television shows to be watched never stops.

The Mailroom—David Rensin
Dealmaking in the Film and Television Industry – Mark Litwak
Hello, He Lied – Lynda Obst
Producer To Producer – Maureen Ryan
Shooting To Kill – Christine Vachon
A Pound of Flesh – Art Linson
Musts, Maybes, And Nevers – David V. Picker
Memo From David O. Selznick – David O. Selznick, ed. by Rudy Behlmer
So You Want To Be A Producer – Lawrence Turman
When I Stop Talking, You'll Know I'm Dead – Jerry Weintraub & Rich Cohen
What a Producer Does—Buck Houghton

These are the classics; there are many more. It is a good way to absorb considerable information.

RECOMMENDED WEBSITES
Deadline.com
The Hollywood Reporter and Hollywoodreporter.com
The Wrap
Variety.com

GRADING
The class will be graded on the following basis:
Class Participation 35%
Midterm paper 15%
Final Project 50%
CLASS PARTICIPATION
Class activities will include pitching projects and evaluating them from both sides of the table. These exercises, designed to give you an opportunity to hone ideas and projects from the point of view of the seller and the buyer, will also serve to set the table for your final project. Students will be divided into small groups, taking the role of studio or producer. This is being done in teams because of the highly collaborative nature of the business.

Studio people will be assigned an actual company to analyze in an effort to understand its market and objectives; producers will be given a project to breakdown and develop it in terms of potential markets, appropriate talent and directors, budgets, etc.

The pitch, and the response from the “executives” is designed to see if the project an be developed into something that is specifically right for the company. Fast passes are not acceptable. The goal is to get to a greenlight.

Guest speakers are an important component of the semester. Be prepared; familiarize yourself with the speakers and their topics. Come to class with two questions based on the topic or guest. The more you know going in, the more you will get out of the session.

MIDTERM PROJECT
In 500 words or less, write an essay on three topics of producing that most interest you at this point, and what would you like to explore more deeply.

FINAL PROJECT
Each student will partner with a classmate. As a team, you will create a written prospectus and verbal pitch for a feature film or television project that has not yet been made or produced. Students will pitch the project at the end of the semester and attempt to "sell" it to the instructor and the class. The pitch will be accompanied by a written prospectus, detailing all relevant aspects of the project.

The project may be a feature or a television series. No shorts, as the objective is to present a project that is professionally viable. The script may be real or imaginary. It can be original or based on an existing piece of material (book, play, etc.). It can be a remake of, or a sequel to, an existing project that is at least ten years old, but not an installment in a long-running franchise (e.g. Star Wars). Please stay away from projects that are similar to upcoming films that have already been developed and packaged.

Your choices for casting and directing should be appropriate and realistic, in that it is a project the talent might realistically consider. If you are looking at this as a property, who would be appropriate writers to handle the material.

In considering who you are pitching to, is this a company or financier who would make such a film or show?
Detailed guidelines for the final project will be given out in class. If you have any questions about whether your project is appropriate, please consult me.

SCHEDULE
(The class schedule is subject to change based on guest speaker availability. Speakers and specific topics will be confirmed and announced at least one week in advance.) Classes will be held on Tuesday and Thursday evenings, from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m—Classes will be held at the Emerson campus unless otherwise announced, when we have an opportunity to meet with a speaker at a studio, or in a writers’ room, to add to our understanding of the process.

- June 6: Overview of producing; understanding the nature of the rapidly changing landscape in features and television.
- June 8: Finding material: books, articles, events and, yes, original ideas; determining if there is actually a market for a project
- June 13: Development: securing material; making sense of ideas. Determining if there is a market for a project, and what that may be
- June 15: The view from the writer: where it starts. The very different jobs of feature and television writers; life in the writer’s room
- June 20: Finding money. Someone pays for all this. While studios still exist, even they are loathe to fully fund a project, and the nature of co-financing and co-production has redefined both features and television
- June 22: Line producing: building a below-the-line staff; scheduling and budgeting; understanding the myriad departments and jobs; production design and art direction, the essential key
- June 27: Post production: saving a project; making it great; editing for film and television; music and SFX
- June 29: Distribution, from theatrical to television, broadcast, cable, SVOD, OTT and more; finding a home for every project
- July 4: No class. Have a safe and sane holiday; remember the founding fathers and mothers
- July 6: Business affairs and legal—the often unsung, certainly less glamorous corner that makes a project happen; how deals get made
- July 11: Film festivals and sales marketplaces: the major and minor events in film and television; where do deals really get made and which festivals really matter
• July 13: Marketing a project from billboards and television ads to viral and online campaigns. Do the old rules of thumb about how much to spend based on production costs still work? How to break out of the clutter in both film and television? How do so many projects come and go without being noticed? How has social medial and the internet changed the nature of marketing

• July 18: The Six Families: understanding the role of the six companies that still control the entertainment business: Disney, Fox, Sony, Viacom (Paramount/CBS), Warners and NBCUniversal; where do the other production and distribution companies fit in?

• July 20: Agencies, from the dominant firms to specialized boutiques, how they fit into the larger process

• July 25: Managers, the unregulated cousins of agents, they can also serve as producers.

• July 27: Micro-budgets: can a $100K film win audience awards and find distribution? The lessons of NOBODY WALKS IN LA

• August 1: Starting out: what jobs lead to what; how to stay on track, and how might your own career evolve

• August 3: Final project: pitch sessions

• August 8: Final project: pitch sessions

• August 10: Reflections: where to go from here; should you be in Los Angeles?