

Media and Communication

FTVMS 317 Screen Tools 2017 Screen Production Short Course

Aim of course

This course is designed to enable students to produce a self contained episode of a serial drama, recorded in the television studio with inserts shot on field location. As well as developing technical skills in multi-camera television production and single camera location shooting, students will be introduced to the processes of script breakdowns, casting and directing actors. This is an intensive, workshop-style production class which draws on creative and technical skills from drama scripting through to acting, directing and producing.

One of the primary considerations of the course is for participants to develop an understanding of the collaborative and co-operative nature of the making of drama for film or television within strict time limits. Informed decision making is vital.

The class will produce multi-camera recorded scenes and a short drama (possibly for new technology markets) structured around a central theme and a small core of characters. The completed drama will be produced by 'teams' of students who will be responsible for certain sections of the final drama among themselves and in consultation with other teams. The group-produced episodic drama shot multi-cam in the studio also includes a one-camera location scene.

Prerequisites: 15 points at Stage II in Film, Television, Media or Communications Studies

Convenor: John Callen

Assessment: 100% coursework

Course limit: 16 students

Selection criteria

This is a restricted entry course. You will be assessed on the quality of your academic record, previous production or creative work and your application. Particular attention is paid to the quality of the application and the originality and presentation of your proposal for a short drama programme.

This course is designed for students with two years' undergraduate experience. A background in film or media production, drama, or creative

writing is preferred, but not essential. Students with only one year of undergraduate experience and a strong creative portfolio are also eligible for entry. Please list any extracurricular activity you have done e.g. theatre, acting, script writing, producing, arts administration and sports or other cultural activities where you have developed a range of skills which you think are relevant for a production course such as this.

Students who have had writing experience but no production experience are encouraged to apply as well as those with some production, technical or acting experience. If you have no experience but have studied or are currently enrolled in a theoretical film/media/communications degree then you should also consider applying for this programme.

Credit weighting: 15 points

Course dates: 26 June-21 July 2017

In-class course timetable:

Weeks 1-3: Tuesdays and Thursdays 8.30am-1pm

Week 4: Tuesday and Wednesday 8.30am-1pm
Screening Friday 10am-1pm.

Course Convenor

The course will be taught by John Callen who has over 40 years experience as an actor and director/producer in the film and television industries and as a tutor teaching acting skills and television production at tertiary level. His most significant film credit to date is one of the core-cast roles in Peter Jackson's *Hobbit* trilogy where he played the dwarf Oin. John has acted in or directed more than 100 stage plays as well a variety of television drama. Some of his screen acting credits can be viewed on IMDB – search John Callen at www.imdb.com

Course eligibility

This is an introductory course and while previous production or writing experience is preferable it is not necessarily the main criteria governing acceptance onto the course (see application form for details).

The selection of students and the make-up of the production teams will be based on the production and/or creative experience of the candidates to ensure a balance of skills within each team.

Method

This is a four-week intensive course which meets for two four-and-a-half-hour sessions per week in the television studio and/or editing suites. Out-of-class time will be spent working in teams to produce the script, preparation for studio sessions, location shoots and post production preparation and editing. During the last week of the course, the out-of-class and editing time will increase in order to keep to the production deadlines.

Up to 16 students are accepted into the course, working in three production groups of five with an Executive Producer (EP) coordinating the three groups. Each group writes, directs and edits approximately five-six minutes of drama made up of one studio and one location scene. The storyline will be decided by the collective groups then each production group write their contributing scenes. The producers from each group and the Executive Producer will ensure that each scene is of equal quality and fits within the total narrative.

A collaborative and co-operative process is required throughout the entire course.

Television and film industry professionals contributing to the course

- Commissioning editor of television programming from Television New Zealand (TVNZ – national free-to-air broadcaster). The Commissioning Editor will conduct a story pitching session with each group contributing their chosen narrative. In discussion with the editor, the central storyline for the drama will be chosen and writing duties allocated.
- Script editor from the independent television industry. The editor will work with the writers from each team to finesse their contributing scene.
- Course convenor John Callen's expertise in working with actors and training television directors will be an integral part of the course. In addition he will share his experience as a director and actor in fast turn-around television drama and engage the students in a 'behind the scenes' glimpse of working on a major film production.

Course assessment

This course is a practical production process which is based on professional television industry practice. Students are assessed on their creative, technical and organisational skills individually and collectively as a production team. Attendance and teamwork is a vital part of your overall assessment.

Assignment 1: Digital production blog (individual grade)

Assignment 2: Completed group scene – one per production team, mix of individual and group grade

Assignment 3: Completed drama – mix of individual and group grade

There is no final exam as this course is 100% internal assessment. The final marks will be made up of a mix of individual and group marks.

Class roles

Students will be assigned one of the following roles:

Executive Producer

The EP oversees all phases of the process and ensures everyone and everything is up to standard without micro-managing. The role encompasses planning of post-production editing and delivery, quality control of product and personnel, final decision-maker on casting, style of shooting and script elements. The EP must question everything at all stages where necessary and will report directly to the Convenor. The EP needs to exhibit strong organisational and people skills and have the ability to negotiate between groups to ensure delivery of a uniform product to meet the required deadline.

Producer

Producers must decide with the EP on the choice of broadcast or niche dissemination of the product and the style of the piece. They must also decide on the mode of broadcast delivery and identify and understand the target demographic. Commercial imperatives are important. Producers must work towards producing a 'product' that has 'saleable' value. If the product is for Facebook or YouTube, mobile phone or pod-casting, then the demographic and format for this delivery system needs to be researched and implemented.

Producers and the EP will oversee script meetings, scripts, casting, planning, scheduling. The producer must take an active 'creative' role in the development of allocated scenes and the overall film. The Producer will also work with the Director to achieve a shootable series of shots given time and space limitations.

Director

To work with the writer and actors to take a scene from script to screen; to contribute to script elements; to cast roles in collaboration with other Directors and the Producer; to ensure a high standard of interpretation and performance and to work with the Producer and the EP.

Writer

To create work in a collaborative atmosphere that contributes to the whole story and includes the stated intentions of the script and to deliver sound scripts in good, useable hard copy. Appropriate formats must be used. The writer must also follow developments of the script into rehearsal to iron out any deficiencies that may be brought up by the actors or directors. Once the script is completed, the writers will continue to check developments and make final adjustments to the script up to a certain point. They will also assume the role of vision switcher in the studio. This will require practise sessions throughout the course. They may also be required to assist in other areas.

Line Producer

To oversee the management of funds and personnel; to ensure the steady flow of information from one and all to one and all; to appoint and manage shooting crews in collaboration with the producer and the director. (For instance, the LP will decide who fills what role and then guide each crew person through their task during rehearsals and shooting). The Line Producer must find locations, find make-up and unit persons, organise product issues and possibly call shots in the studio for the vision switcher. The Line Producer also acts as DA/Continuity person on all shoots. The Line Producer acts as 'treasurer' for their team.

1stAD/Designer

To organise and deliver schedules for meetings and write up minutes, to devise schedules/callsheets for rehearsals and shoots; to control and direct all operations during shooting; ensure all settings, props and costumes are appropriate for each episode and each location. The 1stAD must provide progress reports to EP and course convenor.

Editing

The focus of this course is on collaboration in pre-production and production; good editing is essential to create a good end product but is a small component of the course and the group should select an editor who is already capable in this area. The editing system is Adobe Premiere.

Final cut should be delivered to the Convenor two days before the final class screening. Because of the nature of the course there can be no time over-runs.

Class trips

Students will be given the opportunity to travel to Matamata in the central North Island to visit Hobbiton – the film set of the Hobbit village from the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy and *The Hobbit*. Convenor John Callen will accompany this trip and add a narration of various 'backstage stories' from the shooting of *The Hobbit*.

A second trip will be to the Weta Workshop 'Cave' in Wellington. This trip may include a tour of part of the workshop, viewing of a behind-the-scenes documentary and demonstration of the making of (silicone) synthetic prosthetics, their application and painting/make-up. There may also be a demonstration of and participation in a short workshop on the making of chainmaille and blood for the screen.