

General Course Information:

FILM R6034.001 PRE-PROD OF A MOTION PICTURE
R 06:00P-09:00P
DODGE BUILD 507

Instructor Information:

Richard Brick
E-mail: richard@richardbrick.com

Website

Potential registrants who wish to know more about Prof Brick's career should go to www.richardbrick.com

Announcement

ALL *duly registered* students will assemble at 6:00 pm on Thursday, January 21, as scheduled. If you are not a producing student, or are from a different program or school, please make your case for registration before January 21 to richard@richardbrick.com. Students who do not fit into 11 spots for the spring semester are encouraged to register for the fall semester when the course will be repeated.

Method of Instruction**PREFACE:**

This course is for all MFA degree candidates who have chosen the producing track, or for anyone interested in exploring how feature films are prepared. It will also give writers and directors an appreciation of the line producer's functions. In the past, space permitting, I have welcomed law and business students to the class, although registration priority remains with MFA film degree candidates, with students who have declared a producing concentration having first priority. This term's enrollment is strictly limited to 11.

I have been teaching this course for twenty-five years, since 1984, immediately after completing my work on Robert Benton's *PLACES IN THE HEART* (two Academy Awards). I have always used the "case history" approach to illustrate and give form to much of the material covered during the short arc of approximately fourteen class meetings. In the past I have used *PLACES IN THE HEART*, Mike Nichols' *SILKWOOD*, and a \$2 million Panavision feature I produced for New Line Cinema in 1990, *HANGIN' WITH THE HOMEBOYS*. This year we will study *ARIZONA DREAM*, directed by Emir Kusturica, distinguished European director and former Visiting Professor in our Film Division, 1988-89, who I hired during my tenure as Chairman of the Film Program. The screenplay originated in a directing course taught by Mr. Kusturica and was written by David Atkins, Columbia Film Program graduate and former adjunct faculty member, who directed his first feature, *NOVOCAINE*, released in 2001 by Artisan.

ARIZONA DREAM was released in Europe, played particularly strongly in France, and won two prizes at the 1993 Berlin Film Festival. Warner Brothers acquired US domestic rights prior to production for something in excess of \$2 million. After taking delivery of the picture, Warners sat on the picture for a year and a half during which they conducted abortive negotiations with a more specialized distributor, Miramax, to handle the domestic release. Warners and Harvey Weinstein of Miramax never came to terms. Warners opened *ARIZONA DREAM* in Seattle on September 9th, 1994 for a "test weekend", for which they did no publicity to speak of and reported no grosses. Shortly thereafter, the picture went to video release. In July 1995, Karen Cooper exhibited *ARIZONA DREAM* for two weeks at Film Forum in New York. Kit Carson Films subsequently released the film on a limited basis around the U.S.

In my opinion, *ARIZONA DREAM*, starring Faye Dunaway, Jerry Lewis, Johnny Depp, Lili Taylor, Vincent Gallo and Paulina Porizkova, is an unusual, if faulted, picture. Mr. Kusturica has enjoyed an extraordinary track record at the Cannes Film Festival: he won the Palme d'Or twice, in 1995 for *UNDERGROUND*, in 1985 for *WHEN FATHER WAS AWAY ON BUSINESS*, and in 1989 he was cited for Best Direction for *IN THE TIME OF THE GYPSIES*. In 1991, at age 36, with French financing, Mr. Kusturica came to the American southwest to make *ARROWTOOTH HALIBUT* (released as *ARIZONA AREAM*), his first film in English and his first film shot in the US under a very different system than what he had known in his native Yugoslavia.

It is my conviction that the pre-production phase of making a motion picture is critical. In the case of ARIZONA DREAM, pre-production was flawed, an inadequate budget and an unrealistic shooting schedule were developed and a line producer was chosen who was not supportive of the director. In the course we will examine each of these factors, as well as the choice of a mixed union and non-union LA-based crew, the source of the rented camera, lighting and grip equipment, and other critical decisions which, in my judgment, collectively led to the worst kind of production problems. Our analysis of this picture will demonstrate the importance of informed and meticulous pre-production preparation. We will discuss two fundamental questions, among others: Did the artistic goals of the director suffer? How did the shooting hiatus and the budget overage affect the commercial outlook of the picture?

Method of Evaluation

OFFICE HOURS

Generally, during the semester the instructor schedules a one-hour appointment with each student to go over their production board assignment. In addition, to help students with problems they may be having with their work, other appointments may be made with the instructor either before or after class. These appointments will be held at my office in Soho at a time mutually convenient to the student and the instructor. *Routine questions about assignments or class topics should be asked during class.* The instructor is also available by e-mail: richard@richardbrick.com

Method of Instruction

Class is small enough to sit around one large, almost square table. Brick likes a cool classroom (high 60s F). After laying out ARIZONA DREAM'S production history, he discusses why the pre-production of feature films is so fundamentally important to the artistic and financial outcome. Then classes move on to different topics within the pre-production process: breaking down the screenplay and scheduling principal photography on the production board, buying insurance, getting bids on equipment rental packages, working to support the director, hiring department heads, et cetera.

Assignments are given almost weekly, including reading sections in the three-ring ARIZONA DREAM production binder each student receives at the first class and which must be brought to class each week because it is referred to constantly. Brick hands out appropriate articles from the trades and straight press, as they may appear.

Questions are encouraged, particularly whenever students aren't clear about what is being discussed or its significance.

If Brick must miss a scheduled class due to outside business or professional commitments, the class is always rescheduled at a date and time mutually arrived at with students.

ATTENDANCE AND EVALUATION:

The course covers a lot of material and the instructor moves fairly fast. Therefore, class attendance is important. If you have scheduling conflicts which will force you to miss more than one class, it is strongly suggested you take the course another semester. Multiple unexcused absences result in a LOW PASS grade, or FAILURE. So if you have scheduled travel, attendance at a film festival, will be part of a crew shooting a film...whatever, please take the course in a semester when you can give it your attention.

Grades are based on the take-home exam, screenplay breakdown, call sheets and production board assignment, as well as classroom contribution. Non-MFA degree candidates are given traditional letter grades or whatever their "home" school requires.

ANNOUNCEMENTS CONCERNING THE DIRECTORS GUILD OF AMERICA:

July 25, 2009: CONGRATULATIONS to Taylor Hackford on his election as president of the Directors Guild of America at the National Convention today in Los Angeles. Mr. Hackford succeeds Michael Apted who served with distinction for three two-year terms. Among his accomplishments were leading the negotiations for two landmark contracts: in 2004 securing the financial future of the DGA health care plan and in 2008 securing jurisdiction and compensation for all new media production. During Apted's tenure, the DGA fought runaway production and also led the industry push that resulted in the passage of the first federal tax incentive legislation for audio-visual work.

January 17, 2008: BRAVO to the negotiating team of the Directors Guild of America for reaching an agreement with the studios on a new three-year contract commencing July 1, 2008. Congratulations for almost two years of serious research into the nature of the changing technical landscape in which their 13,500 members will work, for the wisdom to value establishing jurisdiction over new media rather than arbitrary income formulas from these, as yet, unproven platforms and delivery systems *and* for the highly professional manner in which they reached this complex agreement is less than a week of negotiations under an effective news blackout.

Over the past several contract cycles, the DGA has adopted the approach of negotiating first among the three above-the-line sister guilds (DGA, WGA, SAG) usually concluding their negotiations by January 1, six months before the expiration of their contract, with a premium settlement for going first. This year, out of respect for and in support of the WGA, the DGA held off, hoping the WGA would reach an acceptable contract. When the strike ensued, putting tens of thousands of television and film workers out of work, and with no negotiations scheduled, forbearance had ceased to be a virtue and the DGA commenced the informal talks which led to the successful negotiations.

--- Richard Brick (MFA 1971), Adjunct Professor. DGA member since 1980. Member, DGA Eastern Assistant Director/Unit Production Manager Council since 2002, First Vice-Chair 2004-2009; member of the Executive Committee, New York Exploratory Committee and Chair of the Sustainable Production Committees; elected delegate to the biennial Conventions, 2003, 2005, 2007, 2009; member DGA PAC Leadership Council 2005 to present.

Emir Kusturica's Kustendorf Film Festival

Emir Kusturica founded the extraordinary Kustendorf Film and Music Festival in 2008 in a rural mountain village he created, Drevgrad, Mokra Gora, Serbia. Like Kusturica's films, it is a place of magic and fully expresses his artistic, cinematic and political values. The festival is devoted to non-commercial cinema, the very best of a broad spectrum of national cinema and genres - what a typical American does not see - including both contemporary films and retrospectives. Screenings, workshops with the filmmakers, more screenings, great food, drink and socializing until the midnight music performances...and then back to the bar. Not an easy experience for those who cannot tolerate second-hand smoke, but completely exhilarating. I was delighted and honored to have been an official guest at Kustendorf 2010.

<http://www.kustendorf-filmfestival.org/2010/index.php?p=1>