

**General Course Information:**

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

**Instructor Information**

Richard Brick  
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Office Hours: By appointment

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**Textbooks for purchase:** ([Hide](#))

This course does not require or recommend the purchase of any textbooks.

**Comments**

A three-ring binder of Brick's production notebook from ARIZONA DREAM will be provided to all registered students, to keep, and they are required to bring it to each class as constant reference is made to sections during the semester.

Disclaimer: This is the textbook information that has been entered by your instructor as of today.

**Website**

Potential registrants who wish to know more about Prof Brick should go to [www.richardbrick.com](http://www.richardbrick.com)

**Announcement**

**ALL *duly registered* students will assemble at 6:00 pm on Thursday, September 8, as scheduled. If you are not a M.F.A. film degree candidate or are from a different program or school, please make your case for registration before September 1 to [richard@richardbrick.com](mailto:richard@richardbrick.com). Students who do not fit into the class for the fall semester are encouraged to register for the spring when the course will be repeated.**

**ALL STUDENTS TAKING THIS COURSE SHOULD PLEASE BRING TO THE FIRST CLASS THEIR RESUME WITH A SMALL PHOTOGRAPH OF THEMSELVES ATTACHED.**

**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 producing students having first priority. .

I have been teaching this course for twenty-seven 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](mailto: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, location scouting, 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.

#### **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 and to serve as a juror at Kustendorf 2011.

<http://www.kustendorf-filmfestival.org/2011/index.php?p=1>