ENTER

USC ANNENBERG
The Entertainment Initiative
WHAT IS ENTERTAINMENT?
The Oxford English Dictionary locates the appearance of its modern meaning — “the action of occupying attention agreeably; that which affords interest or amusement; esp. a public performance of a varied character” — in 1612, citing Shakespeare.

But entertainment is at least as old as the singers of the Iliad and Gilgamesh, and arguably older than the cave paintings of Lascaux and the children’s games of the Ice Age. Our species is Homo ludens, the creatures who play. Evolutionary biologists say we have a “meme” for it, a kind of cultural gene for enjoying time.

Entertaining means not boring. It is the ability to hang on to our attention; in its etymology means “to hold.” The politician, the publisher, the teacher, the curator, the artist, the advertiser: what they want is our attention, and to maintain it — often at any cost.
DOES WHY ENTERTAINMENT MATTER?
By Plato’s century, the trouble with entertainment is apparent. When people listen to the bards, he warns in the *Republic*, it’s as though they’re enchanted. They forget themselves; they’re manipulable, irrational; they’re everything a good citizen isn’t. The danger of the arts, he says, is their power to instill values hostile to the community. So he banishes the poet from the ideal state to protect us from what can happen when we’re spellbound.

Aristotle, of course, takes the other side. The screams of horror from the thousands in the Theatre of Dionysus are necessary for *catharsis*. But Aristotle was as worried about the harm of “spectacle” as Plato was about oral epics. “Bread and circuses” was the notorious Roman formula. What happens when amusing people is more important than informing, educating, or enlightening them? What happens when there’s no values but show business values?
Is Greek tragedy entertaining? Yes. So is _Hamlet_. Sophocles always wanted the audience to vote his play the best in the festival. Shakespeare wrote for the box office, and competed with bear-baiting for groundlings’ shillings.

The idea of entertainment belongs as much to high culture as to popular culture. What Dickens did to hold his audience is different from what MTV does, but both have the same intent. The arts and non-profit institutions are part of the same ecology as Hollywood. The museum and the amusement park are both looking for audiences. A night at the opera requires leisure time and disposable income no less than a night at the ball game. Branding and graphic design are as important to a ballet company as a software company.

To examine symphony, dance, and theatre in the same context as politics, gambling, and wrestling is to reveal new facets of both and to invite fresh insights about creativity, consumption, and culture.
What is the entertainment initiative?
A university-wide collaboration to analyze the entertainment dimension of all contemporary culture. An attempt at fresh thinking about entertainment’s appeal, its content, and its consequences. A point of view, a lens, a perspective for better understanding culture and society and just about everything human in the world’s industrial economies. Much the same could have been said 250 years ago about the then nascent science of economics.

Our approach saturates the study of entertainment with questions of value. In that sense, we argue for an integration of cultural studies with professional education. We teach whether and why along with what and how. The entertainment industry could profit from more leaders who grasp its impact on society. The society could benefit from more conscience, and more critical self-consciousness, in the creative process.

The entertainment initiative offers a dramatic opportunity to be ahead of the curve. A decade from now, it will be commonplace to use entertainment as an intellectual framework; that result is guaranteed by technology, globalization, and the triumph of the marketing paradigm. What academic institution will be recognized as the leader in this field? That is the opportunity we have seized.
AN ENTERTAINMENT INITIATIVE?

WHY
We do not assume that the university’s task is simply to grease the wheels of students seeking employment in a rapidly growing economic sector. But we do not ignore the demand for those careers or belittle the legitimacy of those professional aspirations. We do not presume that we are (in Neil Postman’s formulation) entertaining ourselves to death. But neither do we uncritically celebrate the culture of box office, commodity fetishism, and instant gratification.

Our intent is to produce neither jeremiads about cultural despoliation, nor apologies for pop culture, but rather some good questions — and, one hopes, some good answers. How does marketing determine content? How does vertical integration affect news? How does the blurring of the line between truth and fiction in entertainment affect civil discourse? Should there be safeguards on the awesome power to simulate reality? Is American culture America’s real foreign policy? Future entertainment executives need to wrestle with questions like these no less than they need specific skills.

Our intention is to make practitioners who are aware of the power of what they do, of how their work makes the psyche of others, and how they might take that into consideration in what they do with their talent.
And so in regard to the emotions of sex and anger, and all the appetites and pains and pleasures of the soul which we say accompany all our actions, the effect of poetic imitation is the same. For it waters and fosters these feelings when what we ought to do is dry them up, and it establishes them as our rulers when they ought to be nulled, to the end that we may be better and happier men instead of worse and more miserable.

I cannot deny it, said he.

Then, Glaucus, said I, when you meet encomiasts of Homer who tell us that this poet has been the educator of Hellas, and that for the conduct and refinement of human life he is worthy of our study and devotion, and that we should order our entire lives by the guidance of this poet, we must love and salute them as doing the best they can, and concede to them that Homer is the most poetic of poets and the fount of tragedians, but we must know the truth, that we can admit no poetry into our city save only hymns to the gods and the praises of good men. For if you grant admission to the honeyed

Muse in lyric or epic, pleasure and pain will be lords of your city instead of law and that which shall from time to time have approved itself to the general reason as the best.

—Plato, Republic
When they arrived at the arena, the place was seething with the lust for cruelty. They found seats as best they could and Alypius shut his eyes tightly, determined to have nothing to do with these atrocities. If only he could have closed his ears as well! For an incident in the fight drew a great roar from the crowd, and this thrilled him so deeply that he could not contain his curiosity... So he opened his eyes, and his soul was stabbed with a wound more deadly than any which the gladiator, whom he was so anxious to see, had received in his body. He fell, and fell more pitifully than the man whose fall had drawn the roar of excitement from the crowd. The din had pierced his ears and forced him to open his eyes, laying his soul open to receive the wound which struck it down.

When he saw the blood, it was as though he had drunk a deep drought of savage passion. Instead of turning away, he fixed his eyes upon the scene and drank in all its frenzy unaware of what he was doing. He reveled in the wickedness of the fighting and was drunk with the fascination of bloodshed... He watched and cheered and grew hot with excitement, and when he left the arena, he carried away with him a diseased mind which would leave him no peace until he came back again, no longer simply with the friends who had first dragged him there, but at their head, leading new sheep to the slaughter.

—Augustine, Confessions
Never Have We Seen

USC ANNENBERG

The Norman Lear Center

Entertainment
Exploring Implications of the Convergence of Entertainment, Commerce, and Society
WHY
THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA?

Its location in Los Angeles puts it at ground zero for much of the world’s entertainment. Its location in arguably the most vibrant multi-cultural megalopolis on earth situates it at the epicenter of globalization. Its location on the Pacific Rim links it to innovators from Silicon Valley to Tokyo. Other great world-cities, from New York and Paris to Rio and Jerusalem, vie for command over dance, publishing, art, sports, culture. But if one place on the planet could be imagined as the intersection of all that pushing energy, it would have to be Los Angeles.

USC understands its natural advantages. Its strategic plan puts location at the top of its list of assets. That plan also puts leadership of the communication revolution at the top of its priorities for excellence. USC’s professional schools in entertainment-related fields are top-ranked nationally and enjoy superb international reputations. But USC’s aim is higher than first-class professional education. Its purpose is also to infuse practical knowledge with civic values. In the words of the Trustees’ statement on USC’s mission, “The integration of liberal and professional learning at USC is designed to provide knowledge to our students, while at the same time helping them to acquire wisdom and insight, love of truth and beauty, moral discernment, understanding of self, and respect and appreciation for others.”

WHY
THE USC ANNENBERG SCHOOL?

The Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Southern California is among the world’s leading academic institutions devoted to research and education in communication and journalism. The faculty are extremely well published, and their many research and writing awards range from academic honors to Pulitzer Prizes. The school is a model of inter- and multidisciplinary collaboration; faculty fields include communication, journalism, technology, economics, sociology, engineering, information science, religion, cultural studies, political science, psychology, and law.

Its scholars study and teach the interface of media and politics, the globalization of communications, the interpretation of popular culture, the rise of new technology, the communication revolution and the arts, the management of communication in the entertainment industry, the nature of audiences. It offers both undergraduate and graduate degrees with emphases in entertainment. And it has made the field of entertainment, media, and culture a priority for international preeminence in the next century.
A panel of scholars, teachers, and administrators from across USC provides intellectual direction. It involves faculty from twenty-one disciplines, drawn from eleven different schools, including six deans. Affiliated with this initiative are many more USC faculty drawn throughout the university, all energized by the opportunity to use entertainment as a clarifying lens through which to look at their work, at leading issues in their field, and at our world.

Entertainment panel members include

Jonathan Aronson  
Director, School of International Relations

Warren Bennis  
University Professor  
Distinguished Professor of Business Administration

Leo Braudy  
University Professor  
Leo S. Bing Professor of English

Erwin Chemerinsky  
Sydney M. Jaimo Professor of Public Interest Law, Legal Ethics, and Political Science

Geoffrey Cowan  
Dean, Annenberg School for Communication

Loren Ghiglione  
Director, School of Journalism

Barry Glassner  
Professor of Sociology

Thomas A. Hollihan  
Associate Dean, Annenberg School for Communication

Selma Holo  
Director, Fisher Gallery; Director, Museum Studies Program

Darnell M. Hunt  
Associate Professor of Sociology

Martin Kaplan  
Associate Dean, Annenberg School for Communication  
Director, The Norman Lear Center

Larry J. Livingston  
Dean, Thornton School of Music

Doe Mayer  
Mary Pickford Professor of Film and Video Production

Ian A. Mitroff  
Hillard Quinn Distinguished Professor of Business Policy

C.L. (Max) Nikias  
Director, Integrated Media Systems Center  
Associate Dean, School of Engineering

Dana Polan  
Professor of Critical Studies, Cinema-Television

Michael Renov  
Professor of Critical Studies, Cinema-Television

Patricia Riley  
Director, School of Communication

Steven J. Ross  
Professor of History

George J. Sanchez  
Director, Program in American Studies and Ethnicity

Robert R. Scales  
Dean, School of Theatre

Morton C. Schapiro  
Dean, College of Letters, Arts and Sciences  
University Vice President of Planning

Kevin Starr  
University Professor, School of Policy, Planning and Development  
State Librarian of California

Robert H. Timme  
Dean, School of Architecture

Nancy Troy  
Chair, Art History Department

Ruth Weissberg  
Dean, School of Fine Arts
The Norman Lear Center

WHAT IS THE NORMAN LEAR CENTER?

A multidisciplinary research and public policy center exploring implications of the convergence of entertainment, commerce, and society. The entertainment initiative is a project of the Lear Center.

On campus, the Lear Center builds bridges between eleven schools whose faculty study aspects of entertainment, media, and culture. Beyond campus, it bridges the gap between the entertainment industry and academia, and between them and the public.

The Lear Center is a unique convener of entertainment industry professionals, scholars from all disciplines, public figures and political leaders, and critics and social commentators.

Through scholarship and research; through its programs of visiting fellows, conferences, public events, and publications; and in its attempts to illuminate and repair the world, the Lear Center works to be at the forefront of discussion and praxis in the field.

The Lear Center was named for television writer, producer, and director Norman Lear, a pioneer of a more candid, socially realistic genre of television programming and a champion of democratic values. The founding of the Center celebrates the artistic innovation of such Lear shows as All in the Family, Mary Hartman, Mary Hartman, and The Jeffersons; his willingness to take extraordinary creative and commercial risks in the name of quality; his passion for wrestling with issues of conscience while building a remarkable entertainment career; and his leadership in founding People for the American Way to defend core First Amendment freedoms, and the Business Enterprise Trust to celebrate businesses that advance the public good while achieving financial success.

The Director of the Lear Center is Martin Kaplan, Associate Dean, USC Annenberg School. A summa cum laude graduate of Harvard, a Marshall Scholar to Cambridge University, and a Stanford Ph.D., he has been an Aspen Institute program officer; a federal education staffer; a Vice President’s chief speechwriter; a Washington journalist in print, television, and radio; a deputy Presidential campaign manager; a Disney Studios vice president of motion picture production; and a film and television writer and producer.

Themes of interest to the Lear Center include:

- boundaries: the shifting borders between what is entertainment and what is not;
- creativity: imagination, illusion, and the art of attention-getting;
- the political economy of entertainment: its history, ownership, production, marketing, distribution, and globalization;
- audiences: how entertainment gets consumed—what it does to us, and what we do with it;
- technology: what it makes possible, and what it makes different;
- ethics: the rights and responsibilities of creators, producers, consumers, investors, and citizens; and
- praxis: implications for pedagogy, public policy, advocacy, entrepreneurship, and social change.

entertainment.usc.edu
Research
The Lear Center sponsors scholarship, seminars, conferences, and colloquia, often in partnership with other institutions. Illustrative projects include *Entertainment Goes Global*, a three-year roundtable co-sponsored with the Pacific Council on International Policy; *Celebrity, Politics, and the Public Sphere*, a two-year multidisciplinary seminar series; *The Ownership of Creative Property in a Digital Age*, a program co-sponsored with the School of Fine Arts, the Law School, and the Artists Rights Foundation; *Understanding Edutainment*, a look at the promise and risks of using entertainment to educate, in partnership with the School of Engineering’s Integrated Media Systems Center and faculty from the Schools of Education and Theatre; and a conference jointly planned by the Annenberg School and the School of Cinema-Television on *Children, Media, and Politics*.

Events
The Lear Center sponsors events that bring together leaders from industry, academia, and public life. These events—lectures, panel discussions, workshops, brown bag lunches, seminars, roundtables, works-in-progress—are often open to students and the general public and live video streamed on the World Wide Web.

Publications
A vigorous outreach effort is designed to project the work of the Lear Center into the world. Its activities may be followed on its Website, [entertainment.usc.edu](http://entertainment.usc.edu). Materials generated by its research projects—including case studies, primary materials, and analytic pieces—will be published and made available for academic use and broader audiences.

Fellows
The Lear Center sponsors visitors to the university, sometimes in collaboration with other USC schools. Visiting practitioners from the entertainment industry contribute their experience and insight. Visiting scholars, journalists, social critics, public intellectuals, and writers-in-residence stimulate discussion and debate. Postdoctoral research fellowships will also be awarded by the Lear Center.

Praxis
The Lear Center’s work may translate into congressional testimony, journalism, and other attempts to improve public dialogue and public debate. It may sponsor experiments, interventions, entrepreneurial ventures, and public-private partnerships. It may build strategic alliances with other universities, non-profit institutions, and advocacy groups.

The Lear Center also encourages innovations in curriculum and pedagogy. It acts as a catalyst for the creation of new interdisciplinary courses, new minors, tracks, and options; new faculty hires, perhaps shared between different schools; and perhaps new degree programs as well.

Many entertainment-related courses are currently offered by the individual schools and departments affiliated with the entertainment initiative.

At the Annenberg School, there is a new undergraduate track in Entertainment, Communication, and Society; a Communication & the Entertainment Industry minor (offered jointly with Cinema-TV, Music, and Theatre); and an Entertainment Management option in the Communication Management Master’s degree program.