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LEGACY

PRODUCING A FEATURE FILM

An Engaged Learning Project

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Abstract

The art of film—making movies—is often portrayed as something glamorous or as some sort of fun hobby. It *can* be glamorous, and it often *is* a fun hobby-turned-career. However, when you break it down, creating a feature film is patience, dedication, people skills, creative problem solving, sleep deprivation, and hard work. This report outlines the experience I had producing my first feature-length film.

What is a producer?

A producer oversees a film from conception to completion. It sounds simple. It is not. During pre-production, a producer finds the creative material that is eventually turned into a film. This can be a book, screenplay, script, or pretty much anything of substance and inspiration. Then, the project is magically turned into a script—by magically, I mean after months and months, and sometimes years, of re-writes and clearances. The producer then attaches a director to the script, hires the crew heads that make up the central creative team, and works with the casting director to hire actors. Then, he or she creates a budget for the entire film, start to finish, with an accountant or financial director, determines and legally contracts the locations, and develops a shooting schedule with the other crew heads.

If all of this doesn't sound like enough, the actual production comes next. During production while protecting the creative vision of the director, a producer acts as a manager, psychiatrist, and almost like a parent distributing allowance to his or her children. When problems arise with actors or the creative team on set,

the producer is the one to dissolve the disputes. In the film industry's chain of command, the producer has an arm reaching out to every department head.

When principal photography is wrapped, a producer takes a temporary sigh of relief, and then braces for the impact that is post-production. Once the editor has synced the sound and footage, the director and producer discuss and review the selection of scenes. The footage is re-worked and finely edited countless times until it is ready for picture lock. Once the picture is locked, the final cut is handed off to the post-production sound department. The producer schedules and organizes automated dialogue replacement sessions with the actors, puts the film composer in touch with the director and sound mixing team, and makes sure all deadlines are met in order to premiere and/or submit the film to festivals on schedule. All advertising campaigns, compensation agreements, and distribution arrangements go through the producer as well.

Why this project?

The Southern Methodist University Film Department promoted the Summer Film Program ever since I arrived on campus as a freshman. I knew I wanted to be a part of it, but didn't know to what extent. You will rarely find an undergraduate program that encourages or even offers students an opportunity to create a feature length film from start to finish. When I first read the script that was chosen, I will be honest, I was not intrigued. However, the essence of the feature project itself is what inspired and motivated me to take the script on anyways. We were treated like professionals and learned to act like them. Nothing else could have better prepared me for the "real world" film industry post-

college. One of the many things that makes this project unique is that our biggest challenge in pre-production turned out to be our greatest feat. We students had to raise \$30,000 on our own. With an Indiegogo campaign, three Engaged Learning grants, a donation from the film department, and a few very generous Executive Producers, we did it.

Producing Legacy

There is something you must know: *Legacy* wasn't always *Legacy*. In October of 2013, the SMU Film Department selected a script titled *Delerium* for the feature film program. I teamed up with a few fellow film students, and we decided that, although we weren't thrilled with the choice, we would re-write the script and take on the project. I spent my Winter Break of 2013 with director Rachel Wilson editing the script with our writers, creating look books for production designers, and putting together a master schedule of what would become the next two years of my life.

After hiring all of our crew heads—SMU film students and some alumni too—we reunited on campus in January of 2014 and began meeting weekly to organize pre-production. We organized and signed on a crew of over forty people. We cast seven lead actors, over ten featured extra roles, and over thirty extras. We leased a home that we would shoot in for two weeks. We contracted two police officers to shut down a four-street intersection. We bought insurance for over \$200,000 worth of equipment. We choreographed a fight scene involving sugar-glass bottles. We obtained an authentic police car for use in the picture. And, I learned how to drive an eighteen-foot cube truck—a skill not many

producers flaunt. Making all of this happen was definitely a group effort, but I was involved in and stayed on top of each step to make sure that our film was executed on schedule and under budget.

Our shoot consisted of 14 days at 10 different locations—each day ranging from 14 to 17 hours of shooting. We hired a professional make-up artist, fight choreographer, production design team, costume designer, special effects coordinator, and script supervisor—all in addition to the crewmembers who volunteered their hard work and time to this project.

We had a wrap party with our cast and crew in June of 2014, which marked the beginning of post-production. We reached picture lock in December of 2014. We completed Foley in February of 2015. We completed ADR in March of 2015. And now, we are mixing sound and color as we prepare for our mock premiere that will take place at the end of April. We have a mock premiere to make sure that everything is running smoothly before our film premieres to our friends, family, crew, and cast on May 9, 2015—the day we have all been waiting for. Following the premiere, we will be submitting our film in festivals all across the nation.

The End

Our film is so close to being finished—I can almost taste it. This process has, no doubt, been the biggest learning experience of my life. Experience outside of the classroom can be just as, if not more, valuable than experience inside of the classroom. About a year ago, we were preparing to embark on this journey and crossing our fingers that we knew enough to make it happen. Now, I

can say that we accomplished just that and are more prepared than ever to enter the film industry post-graduation. I am so very proud—it is a milestone that my fellow filmmakers, my friends, and me were able to tackle together.

Without my cast, crew, team members, family, friends, and mentors, it would not have been possible. I am infinitely grateful to those who participated, those who donated their time and money towards making this dream come true, and to the Southern Methodist University Engaged Learning Program for awarding my team three different departmental Engaged Learning grants to make our film a reality. Working on this film helped me find my strengths as a person and a producer, trained me to not give up on my weaknesses, and gifted me with professional connections, fond and chaotic memories, and friendships that will last a lifetime.

Check out our [behind the scenes video](#) to re-live the fourteen days on set with me and my team.