

Syracuse University

SURFACE

Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects

Spring 5-5-2015

"Mack": A Comedy Television Pilot

Nicholas M. Ferreiro
Syracuse University

Follow this and additional works at: https://surface.syr.edu/honors_capstone



Part of the [Television Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Ferreiro, Nicholas M., "'Mack': A Comedy Television Pilot" (2015). *Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects*. 898.

https://surface.syr.edu/honors_capstone/898

This Honors Capstone Project is brought to you for free and open access by the Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects at SURFACE. It has been accepted for inclusion in Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects by an authorized administrator of SURFACE. For more information, please contact surface@syr.edu.

Mack

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at
Syracuse University

Nicholas M. Ferreiro
Candidate for Bachelor of
Science
and Renée Crown University Honors
May 2015

Honors Capstone Project in Television, Radio & Film

Capstone Project Advisor: _____

Capstone Project Reader: _____

Honors Director: _____

Stephen Kuusisto, Director

Date:

© Nicholas Ferreiro 2015

Abstract

My Capstone project is titled *Mack*. The project entails writing, producing, casting, budgeting, scheduling, directing and editing an original dark, observational television pilot. *Mack* explores the world, inner thoughts and expectations of college junior Mack Green, as he navigates school, romance, and everyday life. The project is broken up into three stand-alone narratives: “Smoking,” “Chivalry,” and “Advice.”

Online Links to Video Files

“Smoking” <http://vimeo.com/nickferreiro/MackE1Smoking>

“Chivalry” <http://vimeo.com/nickferreiro/MackE2Chivalry>

Full pilot for *Mack* <http://vimeo.com/nickferreiro/MackPilot>

Password: Mack

Executive Summary

Description

My Capstone project is to write, develop, produce, direct and edit an original television pilot. *Mack*, an observational dark comedy television series, revolves around the world and subconscious of Mack Green. Mack, the third year student from suburbia, finds himself too often engrossed in his own imagination and expectations to take note of what goes on right in front of him. He is always just a little out of sync. The show follows Mack's day-to-day life and interactions with individuals, groups, society and the world around him, both on and off campus. Imagine *Louie* set in college, meets *Curb Your Enthusiasm* with flares of *Six Feet Under*.

Mack has long been my passion project – a piece that allows me to inject myself and my comedic styling into an eclectic mix of first-hand personal experiences, incomprehensible observations and questionable conclusions. The format of the pilot is innovative, in that it is comprised of three, self-contained storylines. Because of this, *Mack* may be released as a single, twenty-two minute television program, or may be broken down into three separate stories for publishing as individual episodes of a web series. In this pilot episode, we see three narratives that revolve around the theme of expectations. Future episodes would explore this theme further, as expectations become reality and Mack grows to become more and more in tune with the world around him.

The Script

Although I had been developing this idea for over a year, I only began writing “Mack” in January 2014 under its original title, “Questionable Individual.” The first drafts were all much drier portrayals of actual events that happened to my friend Mack and myself throughout our time at Syracuse. However, as I proceeded to finish the script, I reflected much more on my own experiences, thoughts and imagination, which all led to the arrival at the introspective script I shot in the end. The final draft and shooting script was published on Sunday, November 2nd 2014, one week before filming began.

The final draft is broken up into three separate, stand alone stories. The first story, “Smoking,” explores Mack's imagination as he lights a cigarette for an old man, who then proceeds to lose his breath

and is rushed to the hospital with Mack at his side. The second story, "Advice," focuses on Mack confiding in two different professors and mentors who give polar opposite counseling on what Mack should do with his future. The story climaxes as the two "mentors" joust and ride students as horses through the school cafeteria. The final story, "Chivalry," revolves around Mack's attempts to remain chivalrous on a date, in spite of having found his partner on a dating application notorious for one-night hookups.

The advantage to this initial concept of three stand alone stories was to allow this idea to serve as a great project sample for me. The project is able to be split up into three smaller, easily viewed pieces of narrative content as a web series, or, the stories may be strung together as a semi-cohesive twenty-two minute pilot.

Funding

I was able to fund the project through the Crown-Wise Funding program. I assembled a thorough budget through Movie Magic Budgeting, the standard industry software used in entertainment to produce budgets. I originally asked for just under \$5,000, and was ultimately provided \$4,000 from Crown-Wise Funding.

Crew and Equipment

I first looked to hire my Cinematographer, Assistant Director and Production Designer. I hired Luke Rafferty to film the project based on his portfolio and experience with higher-end film cameras. Because I was filming this project the same semester as my Television Production series, I knew that scheduling simultaneous day shoots would be nearly impossible. This meant that I would not be able to rent gear for a single period, which would run up my budget. Luke and I both chose to use the Canon C100 because of its quality, regular availability at Newhouse and our access to high quality lenses that fit the cameras mount.

I then hired my Assistant Director, Cassie Grimaldi, a recent Syracuse grad and close friend who lived in the neighboring area, and my Production Designer, Jacob Pirgovsky, a junior TRF major and close friend. I had worked with both on several projects before and knew they would be great for the jobs.

I hired Juan and Nicolas closer to shoot days to fill necessary roles. I initially hired Mack Bleach to compose the original score because of past music he has written for me, and I later hired Zach Eisen to mix some sound and record ADR, or automated dialogue replacement, once I realized there were issues with some initial sound recording.

Casting

I first started the casting process by accessing Cuse Casting, a database that connects Television, Radio & Film majors to Acting majors in the VPA school. I watched through the videos of all the students and contacted those who I thought fit the available roles. For the older roles, I reached out to a local talent agency that connected me to members of the Onondaga community. I called both sets of actors and actresses in for auditions and hired those my crew and I thought were fitting. I completed the casting process in casting Bob Emerson, one of my former teachers and acting major himself, as the older gentleman in “Smoking.”

Producing

First, Cassie and I sat down with actors’ and crews’ schedules in order to try and minimize the potential number of shoot days. Then, we looked through the script and divided it up by scenes. We prioritized based on interior and exterior, night and day, actors’ schedules, equipment availability and important campus-wide events. Despite both Luke’s and my busy schedules, we were able to find four days over the course of two weekends in which we would be able to complete all necessary filming.

After, Cassie and I sat down to discuss all potential locations for filming. Once we compiled a list, Cassie, Luke, Jacob and I all scouted the locations and contacted the necessary people needed to grant us access to the locations. We proceeded to do the same for all of the props we would need to rent, buy and borrow. Jacob and I went on many shopping runs to assemble all of the necessary art pieces needed for the shoots. I was able to rent equipment from the cage and from Orange Television Network, and Luke provided some of his own personal gear. Cassie then prepared call sheets, which are schedules that provide shoot information (locations, cast calls, phone numbers, nearest hospital, etc.) for each of the shooting days.

Editing

I chose to edit the project using the Adobe Creative Cloud programs, a series of softwares that covers everything from editing, special effects, audio, color correction and graphic design. I chose the Adobe CC software because of my proficiency with each program and because of how easily compatible each of the programs were with each other.

I first organized the files via scenes, then synced all of the audio files to their complimentary video files. I was then able to easily sift through takes that I liked and sequence the scenes. Once this was completed, I mixed necessary sound effects and dialogue. I then color corrected all of the shots. I am now in the process of completing this process, also known as online editing, and I plan to send it to Mack for composing and Zach for ADR within the next two weeks.

Significance

This project was significant for many reasons. Firstly, I wanted to showcase my skills and proficiency with production. While many students may just choose to develop and write a pilot, I produced and filmed my own original concept. I chose this subject because of how important it was for me to express my inner thoughts about college. Many shows on television simplify and portray college as a Greek experience or one in which the characters interact strictly inside of a dorm. College was far from either of those experiences for me. Instead, it was filled with friendships, broken relationships, weird interactions, certainty and doubts, ups and downs and everything in between. By implementing my experiences and experience with writing comedy, I was able to produce something that I think stands above many formulaic television shows and projects.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iii
Online Links to Videos.....	iii
Executive Summary.....	iv
Acknowledgements	viii
Advice to Future Honors Students	x
Chapter 1: Reflective Essay	1
Introduction.....	1
Problem.....	2
Structure.....	2
Artistic Approach.....	4
Television Comparisons Today.....	6
Influences.....	9
Obstacles and Learning Curves.....	10
Conclusion.....	14
Chapter 2: Script	16
Smoking.....	17
Advice.....	20
Chivalry.....	29
Chapter 3: Budget	43

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I'd like to thank my family, Doug, Louise and David, for their continuous support throughout this rigorous process and my years at Syracuse. I love you all more than anything.

I would like to acknowledge and thank my crew, Luke Rafferty, Cassie Grimaldi, Jacob Pirgovsky, Zachary Eisen, Mack Bleach, Juan Alvarez, Nicolas Sessler and Adam Greenberg for dedicating their time to make this project happen. I would not have been able to do it without your support, your speediness and your willingness to wear many different hats.

I would like to acknowledge Tim Simon for his superb acting and dedication to the role. You were willing to do everything from chasing an old man in a stretcher to wearing Shakespearian tights in a snow storm. Thank you for your enthusiasm and for shaping the Mack we see today.

I would like to acknowledge Jesse Roth for her superb performance as Megan, and I need to give a huge thanks to Bob "Deniro" Emerson for his performance in the role of Harry. It takes a certain kind of person to die on screen, and you did a killer job. Hah.

I would like to acknowledge the rest of the cast, Natalie Oliver, Zachary Auerbach, Charlie Reiff, Ben Meshumar and Cassie Grimaldi. Thank you for making this all possible.

I would like to acknowledge Eric Holzworth for his continued support throughout this long and winding road. It has been an arduous process that has spanned two continents and three time zones, and it would not have been possible without your experience and knowledge. Thank you and best of luck as you begin your retirement!

I would like to acknowledge Michael Schoonmaker for helping shape my style and my creative identity. Even though we only recently got to know each other, you have been crucial every step along this road. Thank you.

I would like to acknowledge Andrew Robinson for always coming to the rescue. You have been a mentor and a close friend since we first worked together and I really value your opinion and the conversations we've had over the years. Thank you for always being there for me and for always being in the office when I sprint in asking for your slider.

I would like to acknowledge Keith Giglio, my original advisor on this project. Thank you for helping mold this concept into something new and exciting. It was only through your feedback and initial support that I knew this project could be something great. Thank you.

I need to acknowledge Jason Kohlbrenner. You are the unsung hero of Newhouse. I don't know what they are paying you, but it is not enough. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

I would like to thank the Reneé Crowne Honors Program and the Crown Wise Funding program for turning what was once just an idea into a possibility.

Advice to Future Honors Students

I would start off this section by first writing what is essential to a successful student production. The two most crucial parts of a good production are time and a good producer. I tried to film this entire script while being the Director of Photography for a television production Capstone course that took up every waking moment of my life. That really hindered me and I would suggest doing this during a relatively free semester. Make sure you put in the time to develop your idea as well: you don't want to look at the script halfway through production and wish you changed something. I developed my script for over a year.

The second most important piece of a successful production is a good producer who believes in the project as much as you do. This can be tough in school because no one is getting paid and everyone is busy producing their own materials and going to class. However, if you can find someone who reads your script and says "I want to help produce this and make this to its full potential," then you need to scoop that person up and make them your producer immediately. You honestly shouldn't start producing the project without a person like that - it is impossible to produce something alone. Believe me, I know. It is so important to have someone to remind you that your script is good when things go bad. If you can't lock down a set for a certain day or an actor bails on you at the last minute, a good producer will be your life preserver.

My biggest piece of advice to offer future Honors students in the video production field is to not sell yourself short. I spent a good portion of my time at Syracuse talking about how useless college is about actually teaching skills that are relevant in the industry. As someone whose primary interest lies in production, particularly in camerawork, Newhouse wasn't exactly the perfect place to be.

Back to my initial point, I am spending my final semester at the SU Los Angeles campus where I am interning at Happy Madison Productions. Today, the day I am writing this, Happy Madison released a teaser trailer for *Joe Dirt 2: Beautiful Loser*, a movie they are co-producing. The teaser is filled with ridiculous gags and stunts, but I noticed two things in particular. The first thing was how terrible one of the shots looked. It involves David Spade standing in front of a poorly lit green screen with an American flag behind it. I'm not sure if it looks bad because it is part of a gag in the movie, but it looks unprofessional. The second thing I noticed was a bit of audio in the middle of the teaser was severely muffled. And these aren't just any extra's lines, these are lines being delivered by Christopher Walken.

Anyone can have a shiny microphone or an expensive camera, but it is more about what people do with that equipment than the equipment itself. Even though I have worked with lower-quality equipment, I have been able to produce some fun material. Kids in USC are given millions of dollars of equipment from day one, and they produce some good stuff too. If you stay true to your guns and try to produce things to the best of your abilities, the shiny equipment will come along. Honestly, we produce a lot of things at Newhouse that are above professional quality, hence the *Joe Dirt* reference. So long as you have a good script and the drive...and a producer.

Chapter 1

Reflective Essay

Introduction

When I began my journey through my Honors Capstone, I had no idea where the process would take me. I sat in my host family's apartment in Madrid tinkering away at half-baked ideas for short films. It was only after several failed pitches and Skype meetings that I realized that the usual short film route for film students was not for me. I then turned to my love and inspiration for attending Newhouse in the first place: television. I had always wanted to produce a pilot, but coming from a background in short-form sketch writing from my years at Humor Whore, I had never written anything over eight minutes. I turned this presumed weakness into a strength in formulating the unique short-form narrative structure behind my pilot. After compiling several stories loosely based on personal experiences and those of friends and family, *Mack* was born.

“I’m not in this world to live up to your expectations and you’re not in this world to live up to mine.”

-Bruce Lee

Problem

The problem I wanted to address in *Mack* was how people often project their expectations of one another into reality. We often project our own thoughts and experiences onto others instead of observing them and accepting them as how they exist objectively. Mack faces this issue in the pilot when he projects his own expectations of both Megan and Harry’s anticipated desires and takes matters into his own hands instead of confronting the other characters. I set out to prove that these false expectations we place on one another often prove to have a somewhat negative effect on the projected person or group, but end up having most detrimental effects on ourselves.

Structure

Mack is organized into stand-alone chapters for two reasons. The first reason is the potential to release *Mack* as a web series. Because most of the stories I would like to tell in *Mack* are relatively short, it was self-serving to develop the scripts as easily compressed pieces of content to be released as a comedic web series. The second reason has more to do with my general philosophy about comedy. Shakespeare says that “Brevity is the soul of wit.” As I wrote in my introduction, I have a strong background in sketch-writing, and I strive to make my scripts as concise as possible while still delivering jokes and a message. The overall project is told from

Mack's point of view because of my desire to externalize my inner thoughts from a comedic perspective.

Each part of the stories can essentially be broken up into four parts: Mack's initial reaction, Mack's fantasies of his initial reaction, Mack's actual reaction, and the outcome of Mack's actual reaction. Mack's initial reactions (lighting the man's cigarette and anticipating sex with Megan) would prove beneficial to all parties involved and objectively make the most sense. Mack's fantasies of these initial reactions (Harry dying on the operating table and Mack believing he will ruin Megan's expectations of all men) are enough to persuade him to act against his instincts. Mack's actual reactions based on expectations (not lighting Harry's cigarette and leaving Megan's doorstep even after she offers to sleep with him) end up hurting all parties involved and leave all initial questions posed at the beginning of the stories unanswered. The most important part of this structure is the outcome of Mack's actual reaction (Mack leaving the bus stop as a woman lights Harry's cigarette and Mack returning to Megan's window, only to find her sleeping with a different guy). In both of the stories, Mack ends up in a worse position in the end, losing his seat at the bus stop and surrender his chances at sleeping with Megan. However, the ending scene of "Chivalry," in which Megan offers Mack sex again, is written this way to exhibit the oddity of human nature and the fact that sometimes things do work out if your intentions are in the right place. If Megan's character truly wanted nothing more than to have sex, she would still want to have sex with Mack, especially if she found out that was his initial intention, as well. Also, it's funnier that way.

The audience for *Mack* would be a 16-29 year old audience across both sexes. I believe that many of the shows that have existed about college kids have portrayed us in all-too-similar perspectives: party animals, frat bros, nerds, et cetera (*Blue Mountain State*, *Greek*). The truth is

that many of us are sleep-deprived, anxious over-thinkers. I wanted to appeal to this large demographic in an unconventional way, as demonstrated by my comparison to *Undeclared* (addressed in **Influences**). This desire to appeal to a broader audience is also relative to the general theme of “expectations” that I exercise in *Mack*. The media portrays college students in the images mentioned earlier, and I would like nothing more than to shatter these expectations. I believe that *Mack* gives a much more complex insight into the true mindset of an intelligent college student. We are over-thinkers, constantly questioning everything, and we are in search for some rhyme or reason to the world around us.

Artistic Approach

I found my artistic approach through years of molding a unique and abstract sense of humor and direction. Through my work at experimental sketch comedy group, Humor Whore, I realized that I was never a fan of the typical comedy from the past and even today. Even though I had grown up and loved shows like *I Love Lucy* and *Gilligan's Island*, I knew that I wanted to produce things in a completely different area of the genre. Just as I had addressed in my main problem, I knew that I wanted to take expectations of what a comedy looks like and subvert them to a different level, on which I could play with drama, comedy, suspense and overall absurdity.

I then catered my artistic approach and desire to find comedy in abstract places to the script for *Mack*. I wanted to externalize us an over-thinker's innermost thoughts, however dark, absurd, obscene, silly or upsetting they might be. I wanted to then take these externalized thoughts and apply them to modern day, real life, everyday scenarios, which many of us have experienced. My desire to subvert expectations also comes into play at the end of “Chivalry,” when Megan offers to sleep with Mack again. Most people would expect her to leave Mack after

his monologue proclaiming his potential love for her. However, if Megan's character actually followed her original development, she would still want nothing more than to have sex with Mack in the end, regardless of his ridiculous speech.

While writing the script, I made a conscious effort to focus on two things: Mack's expectations and making sure that all of the comedy derived from this character's personality and expectations. The first piece was to determine exactly what the expectations were. In "Smoking," Mack's expectations were that the old man would die. Therefore, Mack needed to take responsibility into his own hands and prevent the man from smoking his would-be final cigarette. In "Chivalry," Mack's expectations derive from his sister's belief that all women want the same things that she desires on a date. It was also important to show how easily our expectations can shift based on the ideas of people who are close to us. While in production, it was important to focus on Tim Simon's facial reactions, especially after the foil characters (old man in "Smoking" and Megan in "Chivalry") revealed that Mack's expectations were not in sync with their desires (a lit cigarette and sex). In one tiny eye movement or body jerk from Tim, I attempted to exhibit how deflated people become when their expectations don't line up with reality and just how easy it is to get the two confused.

"Advice," was different because it put Mack on the opposite side of the table (literally). Instead of answering the questions he initially asked, both of the people Mack confides in and looks up to for advice project their political beliefs and expectations of Mack's future onto him instead of offering him relevant advice.

I would label my artistic style and the program *Mack* as abstract observationalism. It is abstract in the regard that it averts traditional television show structures. Most TV shows fill the twenty-two minute episode with a single timeline of A, B, C and D stories. An episode of *Mack*

may consist of up to three individual stories with only a single storyline each. Its roots also lie in darker themes and jokes that may be considered abstract. It is observational in the regard that the comedy derives from the protagonist's insecurities and observations of the world around him, as opposed to the relative comedy found in scenarios in which he is placed. As someone who plays to the beat of his own drum, a label such as abstract observationalism means that I stay true to my creative instincts. As someone who finds humor in everything, primarily because of my own unique perspectives and opinions on the world, a piece like *Mack* is both entertaining and intellectually stimulating.

Television Comparisons Today

Aesthetics

Today, there is a relative shift in television comedies that favors the direction of shows like *Mack*. Before the early 2000's, multi-camera comedies (e.g. *All in the Family*, *Alf*, *Friends*) were standard, whereas single-camera comedies (e.g. *M*A*S*H*, *Modern Family*, *30 Rock*) were more of an oddity. However, after the recent success of shows like *Malcolm in the Middle* and *The Office*, many writers began adapting their styles to fit this new form of television production. In multi-camera comedies, writers were often limited to familiar locations, sets and feelings. However, with single-camera comedies, the free-flowing movement of the camera may be used to build character's perspectives and motives and give the viewer a deeper perspective into the characters' lives. I was able to use this single-camera format to do just that. Because so much of *Mack* revolves around Mack's perspective, inner thoughts and expectations, it was essential to use a single-camera format to be able to literally provide the viewer with Mack's perspective.

The free-flowing camera movements and extended sequences without cutting, which are called “one shots,” also play into my desire to exhibit Mack’s perspective.

Storytelling

The fragmented, progressive storytelling structures used in cult favorite *Arrested Development* have made producers come to realize that audiences are a lot smarter than they seem, and that they often enjoy content that steers away from linear timelines. Many writers and television shows have veered away from these linear timelines used throughout television history and are now able to build and work around non-linear time structures. In addition to time-shifting, I believe that this newly discovered viewer intelligence has allowed producers to make content that also plays with many fantastical elements that dance between reality and fantasy. Shows like *Louie*, *Man Seeking Woman*, and *Six Feet Under*, often play with the notion of showing things on screen (e.g. cadavers talking to certain characters in *Six Feet Under*) that don’t actually exist in the diagesis of the show. I believe that both these time-shifting and real-life versus fantasy elements are two of the most crucial concepts applied in *Mack*.

An important recurring component of the scripts is the use of video chatting. I incorporated Skype into the script for a few reasons. Firstly, when studying away from home in college, you often communicate with people from home via phone calls or texts. Showing these conversations with people from your past is essential in shows about college because of how easily you let your guard down around those you know the best. These conversations are extremely fluid and give stronger insight into Mack’s background. Phone calls and texts are boring to show in television, so I used Skype because it is a more interesting visual platform.

Secondly, I used Skype because of its semi-confessional nature. Many shows use similar narrative devices that I will refer to as “confessionals.” The aside interviews in *Modern Family*,

The Office, and *Parks and Recreation* all serve essential functions to give insight into the characters' emotions untapped during regular dialogue. The internal voiceovers used in shows like *Blackish* and *The Goldbergs* do the same thing. These "confessionals" fill gaps in the story and are often added or rewritten during post-production depending on how the pacing of the storylines appears to be playing out. If *Mack* were picked up as a series, the Skype dialogues would all be filmed towards the end of the shooting schedule and would be rewritten depending on how the later portions of each episode were appearing in editing. I also used Skype because it was a great visualization of Mack's fantasies and daydreams. In the early drafts of *Mack*, readers were confused because of the abstract nature of the appearance and disappearance of Lauren and Will. It was a new way to restructure the "confessional" narrative device and cater it to the abstract nature of *Mack*.

Character and Theme

In addition to the change in both the look and feel of comedies, the content and joke-structures have significantly changed, as well. In the past, multi-camera comedies were essentially formulaic in character development, joke set-ups and overall storytelling structure. They were based around one of a several few different acclaimed methods that many writers study today. However, with the success of many premium cable shows such as *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia*, *Louie* and *Workaholics*, it has been proven that audiences also enjoy darker themes with severely flawed characters and modified narrative structures. While a show like *Louie* may be labeled as a comedy, it often has more elements of drama in it than comedy. It is then able to derive comedy from these over-the-top dramatic and suspenseful sequences by applying some sense of reality. I applied this concept to *Mack*. You may not be laughing throughout the entirety of the show, but it isn't designed to make you do so. While many shows

are filled top-to-bottom with jokes, *Mack* takes its time developing a deep theme and message, intercutting comedic aspects along the way.

Influences

The obvious comparison I strived for, and hope to draw moving forward, is between *Mack* and FX's *Louie*. Louis CK has been my favorite comedian for years. He is vulgar, absurd, obscene and not afraid to say what's on his mind. However, instead of just spewing it out, he will try to frame it inside of a story or some absurd scenario. This is true in both his stand up and his series on FX. I believe that Louis CK observes other people's actions, internalizes them and searches for the humor in what that person may have been thinking while performing that action. He will either do that, or just take funny scenarios that have happened to him and make them more absurd. In addition to the writing style of *Louie*, I also strived to emulate the directing and editing style from his show: single-camera with intentionally long takes during important sequences and a fast-moving, flowing, quickly cut shots during more intense scenes. I even tried to emulate his color scheme in lighting and color grading. The obvious stylistic difference between *Mack* and *Louie* is the more frequent use of fantasy versus reality in *Mack*.

I also used Judd Apatow's *Undeclared* as a model for a more typical college student. In the program, many of the characters have certain attributes that may fall into over-used college stereotypes, but at the heart of the program, most of the characters are just lost, young kids looking to find their way around a system that is often difficult to navigate during an extremely emotionally volatile and all-important period of growth in one's life.

My work may also be compared to FX's *Man Seeking Woman*, based on the book of the same title. The book and show follow the protagonist in his day-to-day life, working and

searching for love in New York City. The show is filled entirely with fantastical sequences, such as the protagonist going on a date with a troll, entering a high-tech war room while trying to determine the perfect response to a text, and realizing he has left his penis at a club just as he is about to have sex. Even though this show was released after I wrapped production on *Mack*, I draw a lot of comparisons to the content and structure of the programs and I am excited to see shows so similar making headway on such an acclaimed television station.

Obstacles and Learning Curves

Producing *Mack* was an extremely difficult and arduous feat. When I first began the Capstone process, I was told two things. The first was that there was no way I could go to Los Angeles my final semester. The second was that I could not possibly complete the Newhouse Television Production Capstone course in the same semester as I produced *Mack*. I ended up doing both of those things. Some people call me motivated, others, stubborn. Both of these obstacles gave me an extremely tight timeframe to film the entirety of *Mack*. While most students will devote two semesters to their Honors Capstone, I allowed myself one very busy semester to film it, and one semester “abroad” to edit it. In the end, everything worked out, but not without a hitch.

The most apparent issue is that I was unable to film the entire script. Although I budgeted, cast and scheduled shoots for “Advice,” I was ultimately unable to film the second chapter of my script. The problem with having such amazing actors and crew involved in your production is that they often have other commitments. Tim Simon, who plays Mack, is a senior acting major in VPA. As a senior, he was involved in a variety of different shows at the Syracuse Stage. Therefore, he had to rehearse for his performances often and had to be available at all

times for impromptu rehearsals, some of which were scheduled just hours before he was expected to be on set. Luke Rafferty, the director of photography, does a lot of high-profile freelance photography and videography in New York City, which tied up his schedule for many weekends at a time. In addition to Tim and Luke's issues, I produced *Mack* simultaneously as I worked as the Director of Photography, Colorist and Visual Effects Coordinator on the Television Production class show *Truth Or Dare*.

All of these factors led to an extremely unstable shooting schedule. We combatted these issues by planning the schedule several weeks in advance based around all three of our schedules. We also planned three extra shooting days that may be used interchangeably for cancelled shoots. Just hours before the first planned shoot for "Advice" was supposed to happen, Tim received word that he had an emergency rehearsal for his show, which was premiering the following weekend. We had to cancel and reschedule on one of the extra days. The same thing happened on the rescheduled shoot later that month. In addition to dealing with the scheduling issues between Tim, Luke and I, the actors cast as Professor Feels and Lipstein were adults with very busy weekend schedules that conflicted with our own.

I realized after all of this just how difficult it is to produce projects when you have actors under flexible contracts. In Hollywood, actors are committed to certain days and times and are contractually obligated to be on set, regardless of conflicting schedules. Working with student actors and crew is always extremely difficult because the best people are usually busy and overworked in the first place. Schedules will change with classes, and even if you are paying someone, there are certain things that will always take priority over a project that isn't their own. In retrospect, I would have cast multiple actors for the roles of Professor Feels and Professor Lipstein in order to create different windows of availability. I have no regrets about casting Tim,

in spite of his difficult schedule. His enthusiasm and performance behind the role was more than enough to justify my instinct to cast him.

Not being able to film “Advice” was also crucial to restructuring my budget. When I informed the Honors program that I would be unable to complete the script, I was rightfully asked to refrain from spending my entire allotted budget. This meant that I had to reshape the structure of my money, most of which I had anticipated spending in post-production process. I refrained from purchasing editing drives and subscriptions to video-hosting websites, and I asked my friends who worked on the production to renegotiate their contracts to lower their fees.

In addition to the problematic schedules, there was also an issue when planning for reshoots. While filming the final scene of “Chivalry,” in which the camera spins around a red-tinted, overly-romantic Mack and Megan, we were in a rush. We had to start the shoot later than anticipated because we did not have access to our location until 10 AM. Jesse Roth, who plays Megan, had to leave the shoot earlier than anticipated because of a schedule change at her job at the Syracuse Stage. While, we were able to set up the shot and film it in time, the lighting set up was rushed and I was unhappy with the outcome.

Rescheduling this reshoot proved more difficult than I had anticipated because of dealing with two actors’ rehearsal schedules. I anticipated returning to Syracuse during my Spring break to film “Advice” and to reshoot the love scene, but just a few weeks before the fall semester ended, Tim and Jesse were informed that they had been chosen to study in New York and take part in the acclaimed Senior Acting showcase. In addition to this, they would be traveling to Los Angeles during their spring break to participate in Sorkin Week, a week of sessions hosted by various people working in the entertainment industry that VPA students attend. While this may appear to be an easier solution than traveling to Syracuse, it was not. Both Tim and Jesse had

schedules in Los Angeles during Sorkin Week that were packed from sunrise until late into the night, making reshoots impossible. I was, however, able to finish some crucial ADR (automated dialogue replacement) with Tim in his Los Angeles hotel room. Hiring a crew to film the project in New York City would have been too expensive, and sending the actors up to Syracuse to reshoot was impossible with their busy schedules. All of these things combined to forge the perfect storm for problems in *Mack*. If I could do it over again, I would have pushed to have reshot the scene late at night during the week. The most important thing I learned from all of this was that problems like this happen all of the time on sets. Sometimes, you just have to make the best of a bad situation and try to fix it in post-production.

We had some issues on set as well. We faced tumultuous weather (snow, rain, wind) while filming every exterior scene in the script. This significantly slowed us down. We also had a smaller crew than I would have liked. Most of the people I asked to work on my set for free were in my TV Production class. Considering this, I filmed *Mack* during empty *Truth Or Dare* shooting periods, so most of these crew members were busy with other commitments they had planned during the free periods. Then, I did not have enough money in the budget to hire additional, experienced people to work on the set. I had to hire Zach Eisen as an ADR engineer because when I arrived on the bus stop set for “Smoking,” I discovered that a construction crew was using a jackhammer 10 feet away from the bench. We could not reschedule the shoot because of all of the difficult logistics involved in picking up the stretcher. Hiring Zach was an additional strain on my budget, but I was able to negotiate other actors’ and crew members’ fees because we did not film “Advice.” After we wrapped production, I was able to leverage a large part of my budget in general because of the missing shoots. This also gave me enough money to

hire Adam Greenberg, a great colorist I met through the Los Angeles program, who was able to fix many of the on-screen issues we ran into on set.

Even with all of these problems, I am extremely happy with the final piece that I present to you. We filmed through rain and snow storms and I am excited to show *Mack* to professionals in the future as a sample of something I was able to conceive and execute from start to finish. I hope to reshoot the romantic scene this summer with Tim and Jesse in Los Angeles, and in the future, I hope to film "Advice" and continue the series.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I am extremely proud of the video piece I have produced in *Mack*. I feel as though it is a reflection of my image and creative spirit, and I believe that all issues considered, it is structurally sound and will be great to show to professionals and submit to film festivals. I would like viewers to watch *Mack* and do two things. The first would be to laugh, because it's funny...or at least I tried to make it funny. I think it's funny sometimes. The second thing I would tell viewers to do is to watch and reflect on how we perceive people. They should think about any possible way they could have let an opportunity slip by because of their inability to perceive the world around them. We are not always right about what other people think or what the future may hold. In fact, most of the time we're wrong. So hopefully you watch *Mack* and realize that you shouldn't worry as much about what other people are thinking. Mack will do enough of that for all of us.