

NOT EVEN PAST



Digital Teaching: Behind the Scenes – Students Serving Students

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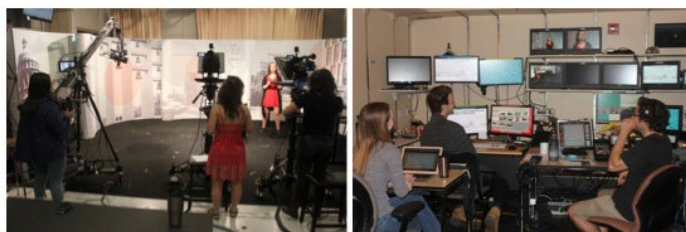
By [Marla Gilliland](#)

Jeremi Suri's HIS 315L course is one of the newest additions to the growing list of online courses that have roots in the Liberal Arts Development Studio. Since its inception, Liberal Arts Instructional Technology Services (LAITS) has employed video, audio and graphic design Student Technology Assistants (STAs) as a key part of its organizational model, which continues to be the cornerstone to cost-effective delivery of online courses as well as other digital learning projects.

STAs are involved in every part of the broadcast production; behind cameras, video signal switchers, graphics computers, stage managing, lighting, audio and tech support, according to Daniel Garza, LAITS' Manager of Media Production Services. "Our students ensure that each class will have a consistent presentation of the expectations of the professor's class experience, while the students working on these courses also gain invaluable practical experience."



Crew call is at 7:15. While most of UT sleeps, Video STAs Lisseth Lopez, Sarah Barr and Audra Webbe begin lighting and equipment checks.



Audio STA Morgan Honaker delivers a great sound check/mini-history lesson while control room crew members listen and learn.

Video STA Bryce Seifert greatly appreciates the enthusiasm Dr. Suri brings to the course. "The class

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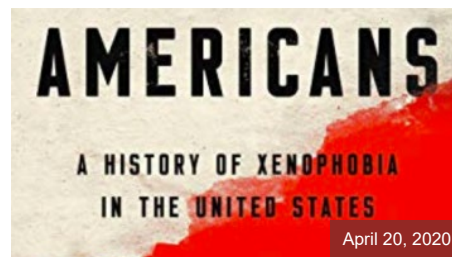


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takes place at 8:00 in the morning, so (we) are there early, setting up the studio. As soon as Dr. Suri enters the room he is always ready to go, has a smile on his face, greets everyone by name and is excited about teaching history. I think this enthusiasm resonates not only with the crew, but as he teaches in front of the camera."



Production Assistant Ashley Schenker gathers the crew to cover Suri's class outline for the day, translated to a "Run of Show", which guides the production and media plan for the 75-minute class ahead.



Professor Suri and TAs arrive and greet video STA/floor manager A.J. Ahmad, student crew and the HIS 315L students who are assigned to attend in person for this early class day.

Video STA A.J. Ahmad wears many hats. Ahmad acts as the floor manager for Dr. Suri's course, where he makes sure that everything is set up and ready prior to going live at 8 a.m. and ensures that the class runs on schedule. "I (also) technical direct an Economics class, I help edit classes and complete walk-in jobs, including off-site shoots LAITS is hired to do, and I help to maintain, build out, or readjust the production studios for LAITS." Says Ahmad about the STA position, "I came in simply wanting to help edit some classes or operate the cameras, but I've come away with an understanding of how to run a small, but growing, production studio. I feel like I'm part of a small TV station," says Ahmad. "I've learned far more than I ever thought I would."



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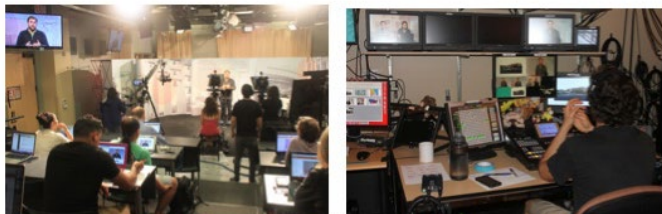
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On-camera TAs Emily Whalen and Shery Chanis prep for the start of class while the crew mics Suri. The camera crew communicates with the control room to set the opening shots.



As instructors and crew hit their respective places, video STA/technical director Peter Northrup gives a 'go-countdown' and the day's class begins. Northrup "calls the shots" from behind the scenes.

Video STA Peter Northrup is the technical director for Suri's class and also serves as camera operator, floor manager, graphics operator and editor on other courses, but his favorite title is that of self-proclaimed "Lord Vacuumer of the studio." Northrup says he has "gained a much better understanding of a "broadcast" environment and of the importance of procedure when many people work on a project."

"Suri makes history more enjoyable for me than it ever was (in class), and I like history." Northrup enjoys the team production environment at LAITS and believes this camaraderie carries over to the on-air style of Dr. Suri. His favorite moments in HIS 315L are when "Suri pokes fun at the TAs. It's great to see the TAs' laughter and reactions."



Former audio STA-turned-audio engineer Samantha Skinner monitors and controls the audio stream, while video STAs Peter Northrup and Mitch Allison handle switching duties and communication with the studio camera crew.

Samantha Skinner, recent UT graduate and former audio STA, is currently acting as audio engineer for Dr. Suri's live online broadcast. She handles "everything-audio", from playlists to in-class audio stings to mixing the professor/TA banter, while making sure the students receive high quality audio for every class.

Skinner credits her time as a STA for providing her with a real world production experience. "I learned to perform multi-channel mixes in a fast-paced environment and to deliver quality work to a high volume of

students. I pushed myself to learn and do my best work every day; a sentiment I believe the professors and fellow co-workers in LAITS all share." Samantha appreciates the enthusiasm of the HIS 315L teaching assistants and Dr. Suri. "His sincere excitement to teach is definitely infectious to the production crew, not to mention very helpful for our 7 a.m. call times."



STAs also play a central role in the post-production process. STA Bryce Seifert is the editor for Suri's HIS 315L video-on-demand, which means that after each live broadcast he puts together the final video for students to review. The timeframe for this turnaround is very demanding so he must work quickly and accurately to ensure that students have what they need to review for the next class or exam. He also acts as a technical director, camera operator and editor for other online courses. Seifert notes that his work on HIS 315L and others will serve him well as he pursues opportunities after graduation this year. "I have gained many hours of real-world production experience that has allowed me to better understand the technical aspects behind the video production of a live event."

Media Manager Mike Heidenreich has recruited, trained and worked with many student assistants during his tenure with LAITS. According to Heidenreich, the students play a critical role in the online courses, because their talents are called upon during all portions of production. "Whenever we need a light adjusted, a new graphic logo created, a video edited, or a multi-channel audio recording mixed and mastered, you will likely find a student handling the job."

But Heidenreich stresses that it is not just the work of the students that helps make LAITS successful, as he feels that the energy they bring to projects inspires the full-time staff. "We are only able to accomplish our large volume of work due to the professionalism of our student assistants. We depend on them and they consistently deliver work that far exceeds their years. Because they view each project as a new opportunity to improve their skills, working alongside them reminds us of why we do what we do and why it is so critical to deliver the best work possible."

Dr. Suri will be teaching an on-demand version of the course in the first Summer session in order to accommodate students both in and outside of Austin. For more information about this and other upcoming

UT Summer and Fall online courses, please visit <http://www.laits.utexas.edu/tower/online/courses/>.



Marla Gilliland is a Senior Project Manager in Liberal Arts ITS, working with LAITS' professional and student staff, UT faculty and graduate students to assist in the delivery of courses online. In addition to having a background in systems support, service and project management, she is an educator and a parent of two college students.



All images courtesy of the author.

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