



JOURNAL **Mon**tecito

SUMMER 2022

POLO, BECAUSE YOLO

GREATER SANTA BARBARA
ELEVATES ITS POLO GAME

PLUS

MONTECITO BALLERS:
MARCY CARSEY & DICK WOLF
SCORE YET AGAIN!

PEEP THIS!

PEAK LIVING IN SY VALLEY

AND!

SEARCH DOG HEROES

Is the Carsey-Wolf Center the Best Media Studies Center in the United States?

It is, according to the legendary media juggernauts who are backing it

Interview by Les Firestein



The relatively new field known as “media studies” has never been more important than in our news-bifurcated country. The good news is one of the best media studies programs in the nation is actually right here on the Central Coast: the UC Santa Barbara Film and Media Studies department. Which is a function of our proximity to the info-tainment capital of the world 80 miles south. But it’s also largely a function of multiple major media players who all reside right here in the 805.

One such player is Rick Rosen, head of television at the William Morris Endeavor Agency and arguably one of the most powerful people in show business. Rosen is a UCSB poli-sci grad, and when he’s not brokering deals for the biggest players in Hollywood, he’s actively involved on the board of the Carsey-Wolf Center – UCSB’s center for media studies. Says Rosen, “UCSB is as good or better a program at preparing people for a life in media – *any* media – than UCLA or USC.”

Recently I had the opportunity to sit down with the foundational members of Carsey-Wolf at this particularly poignant moment in our nation’s media sojourn – when media power is being consolidated into the hands of so few while, simultaneously, media consumers are increasingly narrowcasting what they are willing to see in their infinity mirrors, from CNN and Fox down to 4chan. I felt blessed to hear what so many media visionaries have to say at this particular time.



Marcy Carsey

In the 1980s, the Carsey-Werner name was the gold standard for TV comedy. For decades, Carsey and her producing partner Tom Werner ran a veritable primetime comedy hit factory. Producing multiple number-one shows such as *The Cosby Show*, *A Different World*, *Roseanne*, *Grace Under Fire*, *3rd Rock From the Sun*, and *That ’70s Show*, to name just *some* of their successes. I had written on a few of Carsey’s shows back in the day, so it was fun to catch up. I was also a fan of her Just Folk art gallery in Summerland.

LF: Can you tell me why you went so all-in with the Carsey-Wolf Center at UCSB?

MC: Well because I really believe in public education. I think we must support it because the states are not supporting it sufficiently. I’m also involved with public education at the University of New Hampshire, which is where I went, where I’ve endowed a school of public



Mila Kunis and Ashton Kutcher starred in *That ’70s Show* long before they moved to Montecito
(Photo courtesy Fox Network)

policy. Dick Wolf and I think it's critical to our society. Education and opportunity can't just be for the elites.

LF: Media studies are particularly important right now. It seems like we have two separate media nations, or I should say each party seems to have its own media, which, to me, seems to make the country less governable. I don't know if you agree with that. There's that old saying "You're entitled to your own opinion but not your own facts." However people *do* seem entitled to their own media, and those extremes on both sides are driving the national conversation. Or should I call it the national pro wrestling shouting match.

MC: Oh my God, yes. It could destroy us. I don't know what you do when you have a population with two separate sets of news based on two different sets of facts. It's the opposite of common ground. But I'm surprised and aggrieved by the fact that – I don't know – that people could be led like this by algorithms basically. The algorithm is what's driving the echo chamber and facilitating people to only hear more of what they want to hear.

LF: But I'm guessing you already had a keen sense of the power of the moving image because you did it so well and for so long.

MC: Of course I already knew television was powerful, but we knew it from the positive side. Like when Carsey-Werner was in its prime time, we used our platform the *opposite* of an algorithm. Instead of showing people more of what they already liked, we exposed people to families and lifestyles with which they weren't necessarily already familiar.

We had a lot of positive representations of gay people on our shows, positive images of Black families – and important shows featuring working women, which revealed how circumstance of birth just plants certain people where they are, but that doesn't by any means mean they're lesser. I grew up among the people we portrayed on *Roseanne*, and they were smarter than most people I've met who have PhDs, but it was just an accident of birth. However, in our portrayals of the working class, I was well familiar with the positive effects TV could have on the broader culture. But today, seeing TV's power used as a cudgel the way it so often is now, this is an unfortunate surprise to me.

LF: And how does the Carsey-Wolf Center plan to correct this?

MC: If students can think critically, they can communicate effectively. I think at the Carsey-Wolf Center, they're doing a top-notch job of training students to do both.

LF: I know you're personally also going back into television with your reboot of *That '70s Show* called *That '90s Show*. Will that help?

MC: Laughter is always good. Right now, the holy grail for people in my field is to put a show on television – a comedy in my case – that could show our divided America in a perspective that models ways to talk to each other about it.

LF: Like your fellow New Englander Norman Lear used to do, right? With so many great shows like *All in the Family*, *The Jeffersons*, *Good Times*, etc.

MC: I have my family in Massachusetts, I go back to see them every summer and they're a fairly reliable bellwether of how politics are going in the country. My brother and I were raised by moderate Eisenhower Republicans, which would now be considered a far-left Democrat. So my family is a mix of moderate Massachusetts Republicans and moderate lefties like me. When my crew has opinions different from mine, of course things can

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– Rick Rosen,
William Morris Endeavor Agency



Film still from *Grace Under Fire*, starring Brett Butler and Dave Thomas
(Photo by Frank Carroll)

get tense, but we still listen, we all love each other, the political bias doesn't matter. My brother and I used to yell at each other something fierce, but after a good exhausting argument, we'd go get a sandwich.

LF: Is that because you grew up in Sandwich, Massachusetts?

MC: No, I grew up in Weymouth. Sandwich is about an hour away.

Dick Wolf

At approximately the same time Carsey and Tom Werner were killing it in primetime comedy, over in drama, Dick Wolf was just beginning what would become his *Law & Order* police procedural empire. Wolf's shows not only became the gold standard for network one-hour, but ultimately the tentpole of the entire NBC network. (Today, Wolf has nine hours of programming on network television – six on NBC and three on CBS.)

On the day I sat down with Wolf, two auspicious events in the world of media occurred at the same time. Netflix stock lost a third of its value as the streaming network announced they've started to lose subscribers, and Elon Musk announced his pursuit of Twitter. Both of which naturally led to discussions about entertainment as a business, the Carsey-Wolf Center, and media "sustainability."

LF: From your perch, where do you think "the media" is going and what is the role the Carsey-Wolf Center for media studies will play in all this?

DW: The entire business has changed over the last five years, and it's going to go through the same upheaval again over the next five. If I had to define it, the Carsey-Wolf Center is hopefully a petri dish that will be evolutionary, but also revolutionary. We should



Poster from the original "mothership" *Law & Order* series that launched a procedural empire (Photo by Frank Carroll)



Mariska Hargitay (Captain Olivia Benson on *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*) with Wolf (creator of 456 episodes and counting)

be – and I think are – the defined leader in figuring out what "new media" is going to be and where it's going. What's wonderful about the center is it's not just a film school. It's really media sociology.

LF: Does the study of media at Carsey-Wolf have anything to do with finding a path through what I'd call "post-truth society"? Is that an important part of what the center will look at?

DW: It's an unfortunate period in our political and sociological history. I watch CNN for two hours, and then go over and watch Fox for half an hour. It's startling that it's the same country. I don't know how you bridge that gap – but I believe the only way it's going to be successfully accomplished is through forms of media. After all, media is what people are going to be exposed to – it's what they consume. And it should be and is one of the main functions of the center to discover more of the actual truth and disseminate it. If we can play a part in that healing – great.

LF: It's a big deal that you're putting your time, energy, and funding into this. I'm sure with the same effort you could have hatched another *Law & Order* or two.

DW: Well, you know how important I think this is. And it just

dropped into our lap – unscrambling where media is going. But we're actually the ones best suited to tackle it. Because I don't care who comes out looking good or bad, I just want things to improve. Which is the best way to go about these things.

LF: But *Law & Order* will soldier on. Will you keep making them ad infinitum?

DW: I certainly hope so. It took me 35 years to get to the point where people say yes. Why would I hang it up now? I want to ride all nine horses until they die under me.

LF: Why do you think your shows have remained so successful amid all this turbulence in media? How is it that our divided country is somehow unified in their viewership of *Law & Order*?

DW: Firstly, apparently the shows are good and they're resonating. But on top of that, we've always adhered to an actual business model. They're profitable. Unlike things like, say, Netflix, where the product has always been deficit financed and it's unclear where and when the revenue would arrive.

LF: I always found it fascinating that Netflix kept their viewership information to themselves. And their stockholders seemed to be okay with that.

DW: Yeah – big surprise. Until today. The greater fool theory is great until you run out of fools.

LF: They'd say, "This performed really well for us." And we'd all take their word for it.

DW: Yeah, well the only one, in my humble opinion, entitled to do that is HBO, because they've been so successful for so long, and their marketing machine is so awesome. When you think back about what TV shows have been truly memorable, many of those shows are HBO series. They just have an incredible track record spanning literally decades. Netflix, on the other hand, this is their second time in the tank as a corporation.

LF: So the emperor has no clothes?

DW: More like the emperor and his whole court are buck naked. Now, mind you, this isn't me saying, "I told you." I'll be the first to tell you I don't understand algorithms and advanced math. And everyone knows I have no intellectual pretensions about how things should be done. But if you hand me a financial statement or a business plan, I read every one the same way – I turn to the last page and look at the bottom right-hand corner. And I look and say "Oh, that's good" or "Oh, that's not so good." Numbers – well I'm going to say something really stupid here – the numbers *do* lie. The numbers can be made to lie. So the important thing is getting at the unfiltered numbers and, by extension, getting at the truth. Whether it's cops or reporters, interrogation is a profound skill. To get people's information out of them and then knowing how to synthesize it so it leads to some greater irrefutable conclusion – that's something to be admired. So, yeah, I guess with our TV shows but also, importantly, with *Carsey-Wolf*, in both cases I guess an obsession of mine is getting to the truth.

LF: So when they do the miniseries about the precipitous fall of Netflix, who will do that miniseries? Hulu?

DW: Like I said. HBO. And I have no doubt they'll do a great job.



Dick Wolf with *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* Detective Odafin Tutuola, aka Ice-T

"Interrogation is a profound skill. To get people's information out of them and then knowing how to synthesize it so it leads to some greater irrefutable conclusion – that's something to be admired. So, yeah, I guess with our TV shows but also, importantly, with Carsey-Wolf, in both cases I guess an obsession of mine is getting to the truth."

–Dick Wolf,
TV super producer

Patrice Petro

If the UCSB Film and Media Studies department is one of the elite media studies programs in the nation, one of the MVPs getting the school into that rarefied air is Patrice Petro, the Dick Wolf Director of the Carsey-Wolf Center and presidential chair of media studies at UCSB. Petro is a particularly good fit to lead the center – not just because she was a double-major in film studies and history and earned her master's degree here as a Gaucha – but she also went on to serve two terms as president of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies, the largest U.S. professional organization for college-level educators, filmmakers, historians, critics,



Patrice Petro with actress Mya Taylor following a screening of *Tangerine*



Patrice Petro and Dick Wolf

and scholars devoted to the study of the moving image. Which means she basically knows everyone who's anyone in media studies and has a quarterback's grasp of the many forces converging on her field all at once.

LF: William Morris Endeavor honcho Rick Rosen was talking about the program here. He said, "People commonly know about the UCLA and USC film programs. But we're definitely in that league if not at the very top." Do you agree with that statement?

PP: Yes, absolutely.

LF: But you're also doing something different here that they're not doing down in L.A. It seems like your programs are more expansive rather than just straight-up film or TV production. Would you say that's a fair characterization?

"We're very fortunate in our funding, benefactors, and human resources. Plus we have our secret weapon – very few people don't want to come to Santa Barbara."

– Patrice Petro,
Chair of Media Studies at UCSB



Petro with *Nosferatu: Phantom der Nacht* director Werner Herzog



LF: Would you say it's a unique time in our nation's history to be grappling with issues of who has control over media and who gets to control what images get seen and by whom?

PP: It's an exciting time and a complicated and troubling one. On the other hand, it's certainly not the first time our nation has been confronted with issues of censorship, the iconography of fascism, and who gets to decide what images and information get seen and by whom.

LF: Are you saying there's an historical American context for what we see happening today?

PP: Very much so. In 2017, I curated a film series for the Carsey-Wolf Center called Hollywood Berlin. Our country had just dealt with the Charlottesville attack, and among other films, I showed Fritz Lang's *Fury* from 1936, which is all about lynch mobs and mob violence in America. This was Lang's first Hollywood film made shortly after he fled Nazi Germany for Hollywood. Although critics at the time argued that Lang brought his feelings about his country's encroaching fascism along with him, we should not forget that Hitler himself looked to U.S. race policy when crafting his own Nuremberg Laws. Nazi praise for American racial restrictions was continuous throughout the early 1930s. And it should be noted that when the Nazis rejected American practices, it was sometimes not because they found them too enlightened, but too harsh. Although released in the '30s, *Fury* raises issues – about race, technology, mob violence, the corruption of political and legal institutions – that remain remarkably current for us today.

LF: That's fascinating. There's that book, *Hitler's American Model*, that came out like two years ago that said Hitler based his Nuremberg Laws on our Jim Crow as the shining example of how to codify marginalization. But sometimes he thought we went too far. When Hitler is saying "ease up" – that probably means you have a problem.

PP: After World War II with the formation of the United Nations and the crafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the one really difficult thing was getting countries to agree on what was the definition of "freedom of information." The concern at the time was: How do we create a nonfascist citizenry? A big part of that remedy was education. Investment in public education. Which I know is a big driver for Marcy Carsey, and I know Dick Wolf is concerned about this, and so am I. So coming back to the Center, a big part of what we do is grapple with how we evolve freedom of information. Access to media? Censorship in the media? And how do we teach about it? That's something we grapple with every day.

LF: And how do you do that? How do you physically manifest that?

PP: The cornerstone of our program is five main research rubrics: Environmental Media, Global Media, Information Media, Media and Democracy, and Media Industries. We present screening events in the evening in the beautiful Pollock Theater, which was generously supported by the family of Dr. Joseph Pollock and his son, producer/director Tom Pollock. These events are open to both the campus and the community. Our post-screening discussions with media-makers and scholars are recorded for presentation on UCTV, where they have been streamed more than 16 million times. We also put on academic conferences, fund faculty research projects, and create innovative programs for undergraduate and graduate study of media.

LF: The moving image has certainly come a long way from the days when film production was outlawed from most parts of the country and there was a seven-year delay in broadcasting the Zapruder film for the public.

PP: Absolutely.

LF: And you guys are on the leading edge of centrifuging it all out and providing clarity.

PP: We're very fortunate in our funding, benefactors, and human resources. Plus we have our secret weapon – very few people don't want to come to Santa Barbara.

PP: I think that many California film schools are much more oriented toward Hollywood, whereas our programming is first of all more international. Second, we talk about our north star being "collaborative interdisciplinary research on media." Interdisciplinary is key for us. We believe it's essential to develop our students as critical thinkers first who then express their ideas through various media. You could say we're focused on the synthesis of the ideas behind the craft first and the craft is secondary.

“When Hitler is saying ‘ease up’ – that probably means you have a problem.”

– Les Firestein

Scott Frank

Writer/director Scott Frank has had quite the storied career, pun intended. The screenplay he developed while an undergrad Gauchito became the Jodie Foster vehicle *Little Man Tate*. Frank has penned many acclaimed films along the way, including *Get Shorty*, *Minority Report*, and *Out of Sight*. More recently, Frank wrote, produced, and directed the highly acclaimed *The Queen's Gambit*. Frank notably received his film training at UCSB, to which he credits much of his success and where today he sits on their external advisory board.

LF: Tell me how you found yourself at UCSB. I know you're originally from Los Gatos.

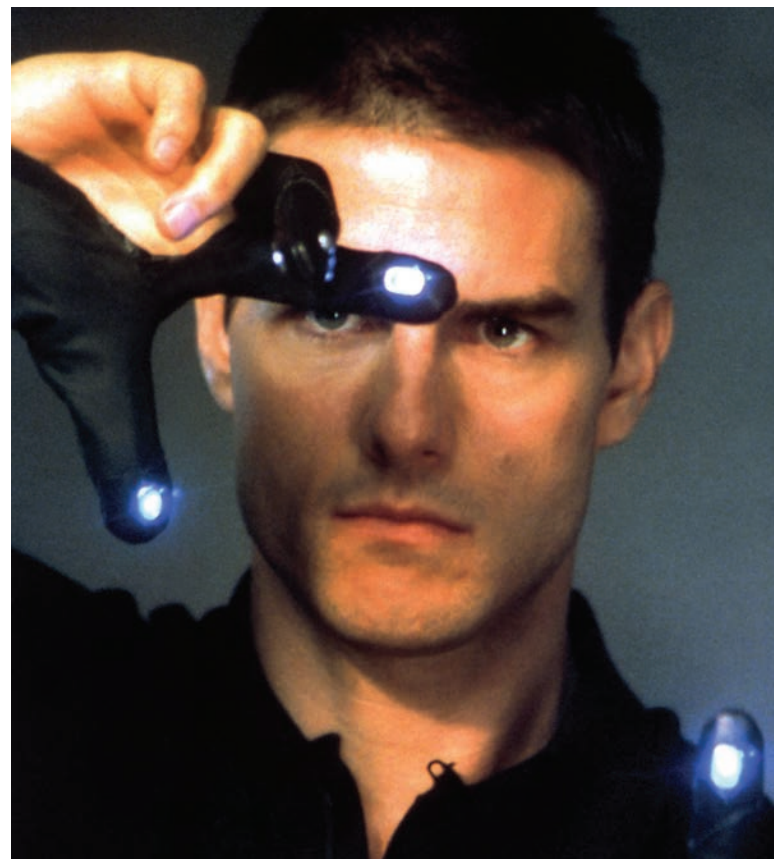
SF: I had to stay in California. We couldn't afford to go out of state. We came and looked, and I just liked the campus and, really, I just felt closer in vibe to UCSB than I did to any of the other universities.

LF: And then you had, I take it, obviously a good experience here.

SF: Oh, very good. It changed my life.

LF: How so?

SF: A couple things. It was certain teachers. It was Paul Lazarus, who used to teach screenwriting there many, many years ago (he passed away). And it was Chuck Wolfe, and a third teacher named Dana Driskel, who really changed my life in terms of what I thought about film. Paul Lazarus was the first person to tell me I



The 2002 film *Minority Report* written by Scott Frank and featuring Tom Cruise



The Queen's Gambit actors Moses Ingram, Marielle Heller, and Anya Taylor-Joy with writer/producer/director (and UCSB grad) Scott Frank

should write scripts and I should just go for it.

I was too young to have a fallback. I'd written a sample for him, and Chuck Wolfe taught me about the history of cinema in a way I'd never explored it, and he taught me to think about it in ways I'd never thought about it – what was happening beyond the storytelling and all the different ways stories could be told. And Dana Driskel, in terms of production, because we didn't have a lot of money. So it was good because we really had to focus hard on the basics, and he really taught me about editing. They were all tremendous influences on me.

LF: That sounds great.

SF: I ended up as a film studies major. And the other thing about the film program here was because it was so small, it wasn't competing with the production programs at UCLA or USC. It was more a film *studies* program, but it was very interdisciplinary. And that was a huge thing for me, because I was taking other liberal arts classes, which, as a writer or any artist, is really helpful because you're not just focused on movies. You're not just focused on American art forms. You're focused on all different languages, films from other countries, literature, history, art history, and all that plays into your creative sensibilities and your creative reservoir. And so I felt really lucky that I had that experience. It really changed everything for me. And it's the design of the program even to this day.

LF: Interestingly, in my opinion, it really comes across in your work that you have a breadth of knowledge, that you're not just a geek who can move hardware.



Rene Russo, Gene Hackman, Danny DeVito, and John Travolta in *Get Shorty*, written by Scott Frank (Photo courtesy MGM)

SF: I probably *am* just a geek who can move hardware, but UCSB's film studies program definitely had a profound effect on me. It changed the way I thought about stories and storytelling, and it also changed just how I thought about where stories come from and how to source your stories – not thinking purely in terms of copying other American movies, but just really trying to be influenced and be open to influences from other places. That interdisciplinary part of it, really, has been with me since that time.

LF: Well, that probably helped you get going so early. You filled your tank early so that you were able to do *Little Man Tate*, stuff like that.

SF: Well, I don't know. I wrote *Little Man Tate* while I was at UCSB. Basically a version of it for sure – not *the* version of it – but it was definitely in my head at the time. I was just very motivated. And I think I was just singularly focused on being a writer. And so I did whatever it took to make that happen.

LF: Why do you think that was? I'm just curious.

SF: I just loved it. It felt like the thing I'd always wanted to do. I'd been doing it my whole life and didn't really understand, until Paul Lazarus told me that I could do it for my life, and, really, since I was 24 – going on 38 years now – it's all I've ever done. I've only done one thing in my life, and that is all sourced to my experience here in Santa Barbara.

LF: Tell me about your involvement with Carsey-Wolf and what you think they can do. Or is it just an extension of what you were doing there as an undergraduate?

SF: Well, early on, I was involved with the university and with the film program in an advisory capacity, and we'd begun talking about having some center that combined various media because they could see, even then, that it was all becoming one thing. So to have a place where you could look at and examine everything together seemed like a really good way to go. That's what we focused on. Then we began raising money and we involved Dick Wolf and Marcy Carsey,

Les Firestein:

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Scott Frank:

“I probably am just a geek who can move hardware, but UCSB's film studies program definitely had a profound effect on me.”

and they became hugely instrumental in making it happen, both in terms of their energy, charisma, and their financial support.

There would be no Carsey-Wolf Center obviously without Carsey or Wolf, and it goes well beyond simply writing checks. They were really involved and part of all those initial meetings and had a lot to say in terms of the design and organization. I think everybody understood that this center was going to be an unusual place to study media, and there was nothing like it happening. And, again, I was hammering the whole interdisciplinary aspect of it – that this must be something where we're really focused on the unique design of the program and blending other programs. And so you'll see there are programs with environmental studies, there are programs with communication, and there are programs with all sorts of other departments within the university.

LF: It's interesting. I went to NYU film school for a year and didn't love it. And then I went to Columbia Film for a year, which was also meh. NYU, Columbia, UCLA, USC, they feel more to me like, I shouldn't say this in the article, but they feel more like trade schools to me than UCSB.

SF: Well, I'll say it in the article. My problem with film schools is that they're so expensive and to justify the cost of the curriculum – most of which is useless – they create all these courses that don't matter instead of creating a workshop situation where it's set up for you to try things and fail, not learn about how to outline a comedy, or how to pitch, or writing a half hour. None of that is a part of it. It's all about doing it and then looking at it and examining it and talking about it, and it all is a conversation that doesn't begin with craft, it begins with intention. And that's something I learned working, now for 30 years, with the Sundance Screenwriters Lab. Craft becomes a part of the conversation, but it doesn't *lead* the conversation. The UCSB program isn't organized around things

anybody can learn. It's organized around artistic intention, which is a major difference.

LF: That is a major difference, yeah.

SF: And film schools don't do that. The American Film Institute, I think, is more of a workshop environment. But these other classes, you can learn by watching or reading, and they're not important, and you listen to podcasts and lectures that are all teaching you very craft-oriented things that you can learn elsewhere. And, worse, it's reverse engineering. It's looking at something and talking about how it was made, which is, creatively, not such a good thing. And the preponderance of film schools, I find – both undergraduate and graduate – are focused on that. If you want to be a writer, the best thing you can do is read, and the best thing you can read is not scripts. Read books. And you can read scripts to learn a little of how...if there's a movie you like, read that script, and see what they do, but you don't need to spend a fortune on film school.

LF: Do you think the media is in crisis?

SF: I think media may always be in crisis, but storytelling is thriving, and stories are thriving. And the delivery system and the monetization questions, all those things are in flux and seem to be changing weekly, but I do think that the desire for stories has never been greater.

LF: Interesting.

SF: Two places I look at and see as really interesting examples of thriving storytelling are documentaries because not that long ago,

it was very hard to get anyone to watch a documentary. It felt like medicine. And it was very difficult to get young people to watch them. Now docs are some of the most unbelievably compelling stories, and once you get in the habit of watching them, they're right up there with the other genres of things people want to go watch.

LF: Why do you suppose that is?

SF: The reason is because they're telling really good stories, they're curating characters and events and incidents, and they're turning that into a story. Instead of coming up with some concept and then backing into it or designing something, they're gathering what makes stories, which is information, cultural detail, all the things that you learn in a liberal arts education, to consume and digest, and then they figure out the story. And, oftentimes, the story they think they're telling – when they finish the documentary – is very different, and people love these stories.

And the second example, I would say, are podcasts. Podcasts are really popular. Why? Because they're telling stories, and they don't even have a visual component. It's like old-time radio. But people love them, and I think that's a huge thing. And I think that really is an important factor for what's happening in the world in terms of story. Now how those stories get delivered, how those stories get financed? Dick, I think, is right, in a sense that it's all in flux right now, and one could argue in a crisis. Fortunately, no place is better poised to unscramble that media miasma than the UCSB Carsey-Wolf Center. And the great news is: It's just a \$20 Uber from wherever you're reading this.



The 2020 Netflix series *The Queen's Gambit* starring Anya Taylor-Joy and written, produced, and directed by Scott Frank