

# STUDIO LAB

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A division of Ringling College of Art and Design  
in association with Semkhor Productions

When Studio Lab was founded in 2010 in collaboration with David Shapiro of Semkhor Networks, the mission was simple yet ambitious: to become the best, our students need to work with the best. Our steady climb in *The Hollywood Reporter* film school rankings, now at #16 (up one slot from last year, thank you very much) and dynamic, forward-thinking programming, are representative of Studio Lab's standard of excellence.

Using a model of learning-by-doing, Ringling Film students connect with some of the top talent and brightest stars in media today. In March, Kevin Smith came to campus, engaged with students and was so impressed, he scheduled a repeat visit to work on a web series produced right here. Marquee stars such as Sissy Spacek and Helen Hunt have made impressive Studio Lab appearances. Dylan McDermott and Justin Long have also seen the value of the Studio Lab model.

Momentum is everything, and with the state-of-the-art Soundstage and Post Production Complex nearing completion, Studio Lab is on the move.

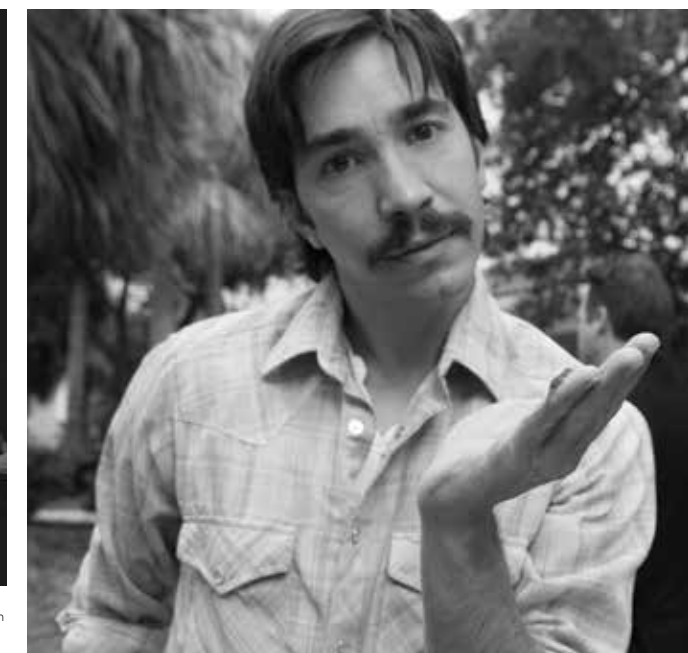


#### COMING TO STUDIO LAB

Two American actors fill the bill for Studio Lab this spring.

**John Lithgow**, award-winning actor, musician, singer and author comes to Studio Lab in late March. His portrayal of Winston Churchill in the BBC's *The Crown* has met with critical acclaim.

**Ethan Hawke** is an award-winning writer and actor, most recently seen in *The Magnificent Seven* and in *Born to Be Blue*. Look for Hawke in early March.







PHOTOS BY RICH SCHINELLER

DYLAN MCDERMOTT

Above: Night shoot at the iconic John Ringling Causeway Bridge

## Sugar Production on Track

BY RICH SCHINELLER

When accomplished actor, writer and director Dylan McDermott sought to bring his passion project on human trafficking—*Sugar*—to life, he came to Ringling College to partner with the Ringling College Film Program, Studio Lab and Semkhor Productions.

What he found was a growing, sophisticated film program and some impressive student filmmakers.

Golden Globe-winner McDermott created *Sugar* to tell the story of a young woman and the challenges she faces as a runaway. As a father to two young daughters and son of adoptive mother Eve Ensler, who has been working to stop violence against women her whole life, McDermott envisioned creating an ongoing series to address the experiences and potential dangers for a young woman adrift as she makes her way in the world.

McDermott stated in an interview that “as a director-creator, this is really my vision—how I see the world, this character, her plight. That’s something I haven’t had much of a chance to do. This is the beginning of that, and I’m excited. I really want to tell the story through my eyes.”

According to Executive Producer David Shapiro, *Sugar* represents the first original series to come out of the production alliance between Ringling College and Semkhor Productions, and it was a seminal time for all involved. The patience and extraordinary generosity of spirit McDermott shared with this young crew accelerated their learning and experience curve—and resulted in some very powerful programming. According to McDermott, Shapiro stated, “Working with the Studio Lab was like working with a major Hollywood studio, except nobody was jaded.”



McDermott working side by side with Film student Morgan Shane

McDermott wrote the series in conjunction with the Ringling College Producers Group over the past year before directing the pilot episode in Sarasota with a full crew of recent Ringling College graduates and students during the summer. The Ringling College Studio Lab crew continued to shoot the next six episodes with Ringling graduates Jason Letkiewicz directing, and Nick Morgulis as cinematographer. Letkiewicz remarked on his experience that “the best way to learn how to be a professional is to work with professionals.”

“One of the most important things for me was to have an ongoing series after I left,” McDermott said. “I do the pilot and I hand it off to them—the kids write it, they direct it and they edit it—they continue the show. It’s going to be in their hands. I can hand off my vision and they run with it.”



Filming on the gulf coast

**“The students get to take that experience, the confidence this success engenders and the screen credit, and use it to advance their careers. This is why Ringling College offers exceptional opportunities to those entering the field.”**

Tony Stopperan, Ringling College Studio Lab producer

According to Ringling College Studio Lab producer Tony Stopperan, “For the students and recent graduates working on *Sugar*, this was an opportunity to deliver under the most demanding of real-world production scenarios—summer Florida weather, high concept production design, multiple overnight shoots with several locations, and celebrity talent. These are significant challenges for a seasoned crew, and it’s even harder when it’s your first attempt at executing with no comparable experience to draw from. The students delivered, and they get to take that experience, the confidence this success engenders and the screen credit, and use it to advance their careers. This is why Ringling College offers exceptional opportunities to those entering the field.”

McDermott’s return to Sarasota will coincide with the planned release of *Sugar* in mid-February of 2017. Shapiro has aligned *Sugar* with several anti-trafficking groups, including Sarasota-based More Too Life. More Too Life founder Dr. Brook Bello lent her expertise as a subject-matter expert to the production and has been instrumental in elevating dialogue around the subject of human trafficking. In conjunction with the series launch of *Sugar*, Shapiro is working with More Too Life and other complementary organizations to expand series distribution and raise awareness of human trafficking, including Atlanta-based Wellspring Living and Kevin Smith’s Wayne Foundation.

To get involved, visit [www.MoreTooSugar.com](http://www.MoreTooSugar.com)





PHOTO BY AERIAL INNOVATIONS OF FLORIDA



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PHOTO BY RICH SCHINELLER

## Soundstage & Post Production Facility Impact

BY RICH SCHINELLER

Ringling College Studio Lab and Semkhor Productions have now completed two series productions with established stars at the helm.

According to Semkhor's David Shapiro, "We are well on our way to creating a sustainable digital content industry centered on Ringling College and Sarasota. We have two solid series productions under our belt, we've formed an alliance with regional PBS affiliate WEDU and we are exploring production opportunities with commercial entities like HSN. Our facilities and commercial/academic production model represents the vanguard in how education and commerce should interact—where every experience is balanced with real value and every engagement provides mutual benefit."

**With a growing slate of projects in development, completion of the 36,000 square foot soundstage and post production facility on the Ringling College campus has become of singular importance. The soundstages are expected to be shoot-ready this year, with the post-production facility online by April.**

WEDU has already engaged with Ringling College around the alliance, documenting the production of Dylan McDermott's *Sugar* for their ARTS PLUS program. As WEDU President and CEO Susan Howarth said, "The new studios in Sarasota will provide an additional base of operations for WEDU that will enable us to expand our programming from this region."

"Digital content development encompasses a wide range of creative and business involvements including e-commerce, advertising, marketing, graphic design, photography and fine art. Our goal, in conjunction with the completion of the soundstage and post production facility, is to encourage and facilitate the expansion of our regional production infrastructure—including talent, personnel and equipment—so that there is increased flexibility and capability to take on larger productions," Shapiro concluded.

Opposite: An aerial view shows the scope of the project  
Above: Filming on set of *Sugar*





## JUSTIN & CHRISTIAN LONG

Above: Ringling students have a place at the table with Justin and Christian Long

PHOTO BY RICH SCHINELLER

## The Long Brothers Bring on *The Real Stephen Blatt*

BY RICH SCHINELLER

Brothers Justin and Christian Long filmed their new comedic series *The Real Stephen Blatt* in Sarasota this October in partnership with the Ringling College Studio Lab and Semkhor Productions. The series, written by both brothers and directed by Justin, was developed out of workshops conducted by Justin and Christian with Ringling College students.

*The Real Stephen Blatt* is an exploration of the allure and risks of pursuing internet fame as told through the eyes of Justin's teenage character, Stephen Blatt.

Ringling College's ART Network won a Communicator Award in May of 2016 for its 'Going Up' interview with the Long brothers. The Going Up series, just one year in the making, invites Ringling College Visiting Artists to participate in an informal elevator interview, shot and produced by Ringling ART Network students.

Learn more: [www.ringlingcollege.tv](http://www.ringlingcollege.tv)

As the *Observer's* Arts and Culture Editor Nick Friedman wrote, "Everyone wants his 15 minutes of fame. And in the age of ever-advancing social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and Vine, that elusive goal is within closer reach. And it's probably more like 15 seconds."

While 'Stephen Blatt' pursues internet celebrity, he provides a compelling view of the dissociative effect of social media on today's youth with humor, satire and pathos. Graduates and students working on the series gained valuable production experience and screen credits.



Justin as Stephen Blatt



PHOTOS BY RICH SCHINELLER  
Production design created a social media inspired pelette, as seen in Stephen Blatt's bedroom

The multi-disciplinary nature of this Studio Lab production seamlessly integrated not just the Film Program but all fields of study at Ringling College.

2016 Ringling graduates Shantanu Suri and Sebastian Avery designed the look and feel of *The Real Stephen Blatt* as art director and production designer, respectively. They rose to the challenge and created an overall palette for the production in which many of the scenic components mirrored the primary colors of leading social media sites. Illustrative of their approach is the planetary mobile Sebastian and Shantanu created for Stephen Blatt's bedroom, which is subconsciously evocative of the Twitter and Facebook color schemes.

Business of Art and Design program graduates Keith Nielsen '15 and Hanna Persson '14 managed costume and wardrobe for the series. They created some of Stephen's signature looks while also working with local retailers and supporters to cost-effectively outfit the cast while meeting production budget parameters.

"Even though these are all students or recent graduates, mostly in their twenties, I was impressed with how professional they were," Justin Long commented in an interview. "I would put them on par with any of the biggest Hollywood movies I've done. I was bracing myself for having to deal with a learning curve, and it was just the opposite—they were all so much on the ball. I can't say enough about the crew we had."

*The Real Stephen Blatt* was produced by David Shapiro of Semkhor Productions and Tony Stopperan of Ringling College's Studio Lab. Stopperan's experience with the crew onset every day mirrored Long's comments.

According to Tony, "As a producer, Ringling's Film faculty give me an unwavering confidence in the professionalism of our students and graduates. Students come to set prepared and eager. There is also something unique that is instilled in them by Ringling faculty—gratitude. They're grateful for opportunities that allow them to prove their capabilities. The term "entitlement" has become clichéd when referring to youth, but I haven't seen anything close to resembling it. I've seen gratitude, coupled with skill and a work ethic second to none."

"It's a testament to all of Ringling's faculty as our crews are not just Film but also Illustration, Motion Design, Business of Art and Design and other majors and it humbles me to witness their gifts of talent, creativity and skill and how they don't squander them. I have learned to not be surprised at being surprised by Ringling students. Given the opportunity to rise to the occasion, they rise and not only meet but exceed all our expectations," Stopperan concluded.

For exclusive interviews and a view behind the scenes of *The Real Stephen Blatt*, go to [www.ringling.edu/therealstephenblatt](http://www.ringling.edu/therealstephenblatt)





PHOTO BY RICH SCHINELLER

## JON VOIGHT

Above: Jon Voight toured the campus with Dr. Brook Bello and President Thompson

## Jon Voight Sweetens the Mix

BY RICH SCHINELLER

Acclaimed actor Jon Voight recently visited Sarasota to explore Ringling College, meet with students and expand awareness of *Sugar* and the work being done to fight sex trafficking and exploitation by Jon's long-time friend, More Too Life founder and *Sugar* expert consultant Dr. Brook Bello.

Voight is an Academy Award and four-time Golden Globe Award winning actor. He was Bello's first male mentor as she rebuilt her life in her twenties after escaping sex trafficking. Voight became the first man she trusted and he saw something special in Brook as she served him pancakes at LA's famed Hamburger Hamlet each week. His belief in Brook reinforced her belief in herself and has led to her many achievements since then.

The mutual alignments evidenced with Voight's appearance with Studio Lab are part of the ongoing evolution and growth of the *Sugar* project. As part of this effort Semkhor founder David Shapiro has allied with Bello's More Too Life in a unique way to gain philanthropic support to fight sex trafficking and distribute supportive original content.

Ringling College and Semkhor are developing documentary projects with Bello that highlight the root causes of human exploitation with the idea that the creation of original, meaningful and compelling programming can be used as an engine for social justice.

**www.MoreTooSugar.com is the nexus for this ongoing multi-media narrative created to expand global awareness on the causes and effects of sexual exploitation, give a voice to victims and provide information to those seeking help.**



PHOTO BY ELAN PHOTOGRAPHY

## KEVIN SMITH

Above: Blogger and filmmaker Kevin Smith speaks to Ringling film students

## Kevin Smith Discovers Studio Lab

BY RICH SCHINELLER

Writer, comedian, film director, actor and internet sensation Kevin Smith initially visited Ringling College last March to talk with students and Studio Lab supporters. Sarasota surprised him, with Smith commenting:

**“This is a huge arts community. There was nothing but art, art this, art that, art everywhere. I had no idea. You guys are the best kept secret in Florida.”**

After a couple of days of working with students and meeting faculty and film supporters in the community, his visit quickly morphed into a production meeting, with Smith enthusiastically pitching ideas for programming he could bring to Ringling College.

“Who's hungrier than a student at a college?” Smith said. “I guarantee you, I'm going to work with these cats and be embarrassed at how much better they are at the job. I honestly will get more working with these people than they will probably get working with me.”

The end result is that Kevin Smith and his team will begin production on their, as of yet untitled, project with the Ringling College Studio Lab and Semkhor Productions at the new soundstage this summer.



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“Entering the ranks of top U.S. film schools, Ringling College Film and our new Soundstage Complex will further our program and our students’ experience. Trust me—the best is yet to come!”

Dr. Larry R. Thompson, President of  
Ringling College of Art and Design



#RINGLINGSTUDIOS #RINGLINGCOLLEGE

For information on how to support Studio Lab and the Film program, contact the Office for Advancement at 941-309-4733 or [giving@ringling.edu](mailto:giving@ringling.edu)