

Engine30 USCers and Instructors Biographies



CHIMA BENSON has always wanted to know *everything*: the newest restaurants, hottest boutiques, up and coming designers, on trend fashions, beauty secrets, bands behind the chart toppers, the plushiest nightclubs, world-renowned hotels and celebrity dish. Her need to know naturally led her to journalism covering pop culture and entertainment. Having traveled the world, she has been fortunate to experience a myriad of cultures and lifestyles, but she finally settled down at the University of Texas long enough to attain her Bachelor's degree in Communications. Benson has since interviewed celebrities from A to Z-list for various outlets and contributed to many online publications.



GABRIELLE CANON is a Renaissance Scholar and graduate from the University of Southern California. She has had work published in the *LA Weekly*, *Huffington Post*, on the Latinos and Economic Security website, and in *The Deli*, a music magazine. As a freelance writer she has dedicated her time to advocating for nonprofits, and has done segments for "The Insighters," a syndicated talk radio program that focuses on domestic politics, the environment, and international affairs.



CHIE DAVIS began as a producer for CBS Newspath during her senior year at Sarah Lawrence. She moved to traffic reporting for Cablevision's Metro Traffic & Weather and also covered local news at WZBN-TV in New Jersey. Chie has done event hosting for Wendy Williams, voiceovers for syndicated radio and worked as a correspondent for *Brooklyn Review*, a television news magazine. She recently developed Ocean Style TV from a concept into a travel and lifestyle TV show broadcast to viewers in the US, Caribbean and UK. She is currently a writer and video contributor for *The Huffington Post* and *Ebony.com*.



SAMANTHA ("MAX") DE LEVE was born in Los Angeles and is the first in an otherwise-Dutch family to be raised in America. She attended the opera program at the Los Angeles County High School for the Arts before coming to USC as an undergrad, where she majored in classical vocal performance and philosophy. She initially specialized in Mozart performance before becoming interested in pre-serial works by the Second Viennese and

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contemporary classical music. Philosophically, she is interested in epistemology and aesthetics. She is a generalist and a shameless auto-didact for whom the greatest sin is a lack of curiosity.



LEILA DOUGAN is from Cape Town, South Africa. She completed her degree in journalism at Rhodes University after which she worked as an investigative journalist for one of the country's longest-running television programmes, *Carte Blanche*, based in Johannesburg. She shoot, edits, scripts and produces her own documentaries and is also interested in photojournalism. She has worked on environmental documentaries, focusing on conservation in lower income communities. Art has also had a profound influence on her career after reporting on the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown, as well as the Cape Town International Jazz Festival.



SARAH FISCH is a contributing writer for the award-winning Texas contemporary *Glasstire* and former arts and culture editor at *The San Antonio Current*. A native of San Antonio, Texas, she spent 2000-2008 in New York City, where she graduated Summa Cum Laude from The New School University, did stand-up comedy and wrote seven published children's books. She was awarded the 2010 San Antonio Artist Foundation Grant winner for Literary Arts and a fellowship for the 2010 USC/NEA Arts Journalism Institute for Theater and Musical Theater. Her journalistic work has appeared in *San Antonio Magazine*, *The Santa Fe Reporter*, *Nextbook: A Gateway to Jewish Literature*, and *The Rivard Report*.



MELISSA KAPLAN loves innovative teamwork and manifesting powerful ideas. A Master's candidate in USC Annenberg's Specialized Journalism (The Arts) program, she is a seasoned multimedia producer and freelance writer (APM's *Marketplace*, *The Boston Globe*), social media consultant (Unilever, Guayaki Yerba Mate), songwriter (The Hard to Get), and musical performer (The Bitchfits). She uses everything at her disposal to tell a story.



BRIAN LAURITZEN is an award-winning arts journalist for [Classical KUSC](#), consistently one of the highest-rated public radio stations in the United States. He can be heard weekday afternoons from 1:00-4:00. Additionally, Brian is the producer and host of nationwide concert broadcasts of the [Los Angeles Philharmonic](#) as well as KUSC's weekly arts magazine [Arts Alive](#) and a weekly choral music program.

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ERIN LEIKER is in her second year of USC Annenberg's Masters of Specialized Journalism (The Arts) program. With a Bachelor's Degree in Interior Architecture from Woodbury University plus what she's learning now, she aims to find new ways to bring the experience of architecture to the internet. She's also a tech geek and sometimes graphic designer.



HELENA LIIKANEN-RENGER is a foreign news journalist and news producer from Finland. She has worked for the biggest commercial TV channel called MTV3 since 2003. During the nine years in the company Helena has worked in several different positions: as an EU journalist, a journalist for the "Morning Show" and a correspondent to Sweden. Before joining MTV3 Helena gathered experience from a nationwide tabloid newspaper, a web portal and an independent TV production house. Helena graduated from University of Helsinki in 2002 as a Master of Social Sciences. She is married and has a daughter.



SAMANTHA LONDON comes to USC Annenberg's Specialized Journalism (The Arts) program on the heels of two degrees in piano performance. In 2010 she graduated *summa cum laude* from the University of Michigan with her Bachelor of Music. More recently, she completed a Master of Music in the same area at Western Michigan University. Now outside of the practice room, Samantha plans to examine classical music from a writer's perspective. In particular, she hopes to study the field with a broad lens: to assess how it is functioning today and to find some paths it might pursue tomorrow.



SEAN MALONE is a cinematographer, independent producer and film journalist. He recently wrote, produced and shot *The Invisible Man* web series, based on the novel by H.G. Wells. The series will premiere online in late 2012. On his podcast, "The Camera Report with Sean Malone," he regularly interviews prominent cinematographers and filmmakers, including Academy Award winners. The show can be found on iTunes. Before enrolling at Annenberg, Sean also taught media classes at The University of Tampa, and coached intercollegiate forensics at Florida College.

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ROBIN MIGDOL graduated from UC Davis in 2012 with a double major in English and Film Studies. While at UC Davis, she was an arts editor and arts columnist of *The California Aggie* and publicity assistant in the Theater and Dance Department. She completed internships as a writer for the Stanford University News Service and the *Palo Alto Weekly's* arts and entertainment desk. Robin also interned in marketing/communications at Stanford Hospital & Clinics. At USC, her work will focus on becoming an entertainment writer and film critic.



IMADE NIBOKUN is a graduate of Duke University who took the plunge into freelance music journalism after two years in advertising. It all started with a Tumblr blog that eventually became her soul music website, Imade in Truth.com. This platform provided the connections she needed to write interviews and editorials for urban lifestyle publications like *Heed Magazine* and spiritually conscious hip-hop sites like HeatCasters. As a master's candidate at Annenberg, Nibokun wants to improve her writing while telling intimate artist stories through music documentaries.



RICKY O'BANNON was born in a small East Texas town and grew up in the Dallas suburb of Plano. He completed a Bachelor of Journalism at the University of Missouri, where he largely focused on music and arts journalism. After graduating, he did an internship at MSN UK working for the online cars and music sections. He spent the past two years working a government beat covering politics, people and pipelines for a newspaper in Stillwater, Oklahoma.



DAVID CAMPBELL WEST has a B.S. from Lehigh University and a J.D. from Fordham University. He practiced law for almost 35 years, mostly as a partner with Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher LLP, and served as a board member of The Colburn School where he substitute taught music theory and criticism *pro bono*. West has studied piano and music theory, and has pursued photography, with a body of his work published by Leica Fotografie in 1995. He has been married to Susan since 1982, and they have two adult children.

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SASHA ANAWALT is founding director of USC Annenberg Arts Journalism Programs, including the Masters degree in Specialized Journalism (The Arts) program, a partnership with the five arts schools at USC. She also directs the USC Annenberg/Getty Arts Journalism Program, a fellowship program focused on creating new dynamic systems and tools for journalism with Douglas McLennan. They produced Engine29.org, a “pop-up” news lab in 2012 and are currently designing *Engine30* in collaboration with media partners, designers and developers. Anawalt wrote the best-selling cultural biography, “The Joffrey Ballet: Robert Joffrey and the Making of an American Dance Company.” A PBS documentary about the Joffrey Ballet that is based on her book will be released in January 2013. She recently co-produced, *The Underground: From the Street to the Stage*, a full-evening dance show choreographed by legendary krumpers, Lil ‘C and Miss Prissy. Anawalt was chief dance critic for the *Los Angeles Herald Examiner* for six years, for two years at the LA Weekly and for nearly a decade at KCRW, National Public Radio. Anawalt lives in Pasadena with her husband; they have three children.



EDWARD LIFSON has written on culture and architecture for many years as a bureau chief, foreign correspondent, and war correspondent for National Public Radio. His work has appeared on the BBC, CNN and CBC; he has written for *Nylon*, *Metropolis*, *Dwell*, *Edition29* on the iPad, *A + U*, *Architect*, *The Architect’s Newspaper*, and other media. Lifson created and hosted a popular public radio program on culture called *Hello Beautiful!* His work has received journalism’s highest honors, including Columbia- duPont, Peabody, and Edward R. Murrow awards. He currently edits the USC Architecture journal *Dispatch*, and is co-producing a National Endowment for the Humanities-funded website called *One Nation, Under Construction*. Lifson studied at the University of Paris, Boston Architectural Center and spent two years as a Fellow at Harvard University’s Graduate School of Design. He earned an MA in Journalism as an Annenberg Fellow at USC and was a USC Annenberg/Getty Arts Journalism Fellow. He works in China with USC Architecture’s American Academy in China. Lifson lived for years in each of the following: Paris, Berlin, Florence, London and New Orleans; he hails from Chicago.

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DOUGLAS MCLENNAN is the founder and editor of ArtsJournal.com, the leading aggregator of arts journalism on the Internet. Prior to starting ArtsJournal, McLennan was arts columnist and music critic for the Seattle Post-Intelligencer. A former concert pianist, he has a master's degree in music from the Juilliard School in New York. He has written on the arts for numerous publications, including as music critic for Salon, and for Newsweek, The New York Times, the Los Angeles Times, the Wall Street Journal, and the London Evening Standard. McLennan has been a music critic for National Public Radio's "All Things Considered." He was head of the board of the National Arts Journalism Program (NAJP) at Columbia University until last summer. He is a recipient of several awards for arts criticism and reporting, including a NAJP fellowship at Columbia University and a Deems Taylor/ASCAP Award for music journalism.

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