

## OPENING REMARKS on April 24, 2026

Visit of Principal Chief Chuck Hoskin Jr. Cherokee Nation – Darren Star  
Screening Room, UCLA TFT



*From left to right: Dean and Distinguished Professor Celine Parreñas Shimizu, Cherokee Nation Principal Chief Chuck Hoskin Jr. and Senior Director of Cherokee Film Jen Loren*

Good afternoon.

It is my distinct honor to welcome you to TFT.

Today, we gather for a conversation that matters deeply — about education, innovation, and creative expansion in the Cherokee Nation, and about the essential work of preserving language, culture, and

community for generations to come that we can contribute as TFT to these consequential efforts.

Before I introduce our distinguished guest, let me tell you a little about where we are sitting together.

UCLA TFT is one of the great film and theater schools in the world — what many call the Public Ivy. Our alumni include Francis Ford Coppola, Tim Robbins, Carol Burnett, Alexander Payne, and Alexander Payne, among so many others who have shaped what we see, feel, and remember as a culture. And you could argue — I do argue — that UCLA TFT is responsible for the diversification of Hollywood unlike any other school.

That case begins with the LA Rebellion.

In the early 1970s, right after the Watts Uprising, a multiracial, multinational group of student filmmakers entered UCLA through a program called EthnoCommunications — funded to be responsive to communities of color across Los Angeles. African American, Asian American, Chicano, Latino, Native American filmmakers came together, made extraordinary films, and changed what Hollywood could imagine. Charles Burnett. Julie Dash. Haile Gerima. Billy Woodberry. Barbara McCullough. Alile Sharon

Larkin. Their films are among the best ever made. And their central conviction — that telling your own story is a profound act of self-determination — remains the living DNA of this school.

As a student, I arrived at UCLA in 1992. That legacy is still here. It will always be here. And it is why a conversation like today's feels part of claiming that inheritance.

Because what the Cherokee Nation has built — under Principal Chief Hoskin's leadership — is a class in exactly that conviction. The belief that your language, your stories, your voice are the foundation for community strength.

I share something that one of our own incoming TFT faculty members — Joseph Erb — someone close to Chief Hoskin and a member of the Cherokee Nation — offered me in preparing for today. He said:

*“Media is the most powerful form of communication in the world. If Sequoyah were alive today, he would be a filmmaker.”*

I believe that. And I believe it is why we are all in this room together.

It is my profound honor now to introduce Principal Chief Chuck Hoskin Jr. — leader of the Cherokee Nation, the largest tribal nation in the United States, with more than 450,000 citizens. A lawyer by training. Pragmatic. Policy-minded. And deeply committed to building systems that serve his people with care, vision, and lasting impact.

During COVID-19, he prioritized vaccinating Cherokee language speakers first — understanding that they are not only elders, but carriers of irreplaceable cultural knowledge. This is governance as care. Care for people. Care for language. Care for the cultural inheritance that sustains a Nation. He established the Durbin Feeling Language Center — the largest investment in Cherokee language preservation in the Nation’s history. He has never been afraid to stand up for what he believes in, and he makes agreements only when they genuinely benefit the Cherokee people.

The Cherokee Nation has believed in education as empowerment and self-determination since before most American institutions could claim the same. As early as 1820, Cherokee students were attending Ivy League universities — among the earliest documented Native students to pursue formal higher education in the United States. That long view of education is powerfully present in Chief Hoskin’s leadership today.

And Chief Hoskin — we know you came here as part of your eternal looking for purpose that benefits your people. I want you to know we are looking for the same thing. And I believe we can find it together.

When communities invest in their own narratives through media, education, language, and cultural expression, they are not simply participating in storytelling. They are sustaining presence, dignity, and sovereignty.

That is why this visit matters so much to us. The Cherokee Nation's work in media and storytelling — including its investment in Indigenous filmmakers and creative infrastructure — reminds us that narrative is not peripheral to community life. It is central to how a people see themselves, teach the next generation, and carry knowledge forward.

It is my great privilege to welcome Principal Chief Chuck Hoskin Jr. to TFT, and to present him with this award in recognition of his visit and his vision for Indigenous media, storytelling, and the generations of Bruins and Cherokee students who will carry this work forward.