

**DC 201-801**

Introduction to Screenwriting  
Spring Quarter 2014  
Tuesday 6:00-9:15  
Location TBD

**Instructor: Benjamin Kumming**

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Office: CDM 930  
Phone: 312-362-6728  
Office Hours: Before and after class, and by appointment

COLWeb: coltube.cdm.depaul.edu  
D2L: <http://d2l.depaul.edu>

**Required Resources**

Screenplay for *Fargo*, by Joel and Ethan Coen  
available online and via D2L  
Celtx software, screenplay formatting software  
available free at [celtx.com](http://celtx.com)  
Supplemental readings, as assigned, available via D2L  
Recommended Resources: *Screenplay*, Syd Field.  
*Adventures in the Screen Trade*, William Goldman.

**Course Description**

This course is an introduction to and overview of the elements of theme, plot, character, and dialogue in dramatic writing for cinema. Emphasis is placed on telling a story in terms of action and the reality of characters. The difference between the literary and visual medium is explored through individual writing projects and group analysis. Development of synopsis and treatment for a theatrical screen play: theme, plot, character, mise-en-scene and utilization of cinematic elements. PREREQUISITE(S): None.

**Course Objectives**

By the end of the term, students will:

- Demonstrate an understanding of the fundamentals of effective storytelling.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the three act screenplay structure.
- Write a complete short screenplay focusing on developing characters and creating tension.

**Learning Domain Description**

DC201, Introduction to Screenwriting, is included in the Liberal Studies program as a course with credit in the Arts and Literature domain. Courses in the Arts and Literature domain ask students to extend their knowledge and experience of the arts by developing their critical and reflective abilities. In these courses, students interpret and analyze particular creative works, investigate the relations of form and meaning and through critical and/or creative activity come to experience art with greater openness, insight, and enjoyment. These courses focus on works of literature, art, theater, or music as such, though the process of analysis may also include social and cultural issues. Students who take courses in this domain choose three courses from such choices and literature, the visual arts, media arts, music, and theater. No more than two courses can be chosen from one department or program.

### **Learning Outcomes**

1. Students will be able to explain, in well-written prose, what a work of art is about and/or how it was produced.
2. Students will be able to comment on the relationship between form and content in a work.
3. Students will be able to assess the formal aspects of their subject and put those qualities into words, using, when appropriate, specialized vocabulary employed in class and readings.
4. Student will be able to contextualize a work of art. They will be able to do so with respect to other works of art in terms of defining its place within a broader style or genre. They will also be able to contextualize a work of art in terms of contemporaneous aesthetic, social, or political concerns, discussing how these might shape the work's reception and how that reception might differ amongst various peoples and historical periods.

### **How Learning Outcomes Will Be Met**

Research and presentation project in which the students will conduct an analysis of a feature-length film and discuss choices the film's creators made in telling its story.

### **Writing Expectations**

Students will be expected to complete a minimum of 5-7 pages of writing for this course.

### **How Writing Expectations Will Be Met**

Completion of a short screenplay, minimum 10 pages in length.

### **Important Dates**

No-penalty drop deadline: April 11 2014

Withdraw with grade of "W" deadline: May 16 2014.

### **Course Policies**

*Attendance:* Much of the class will depend upon the presence and participation of all students. Therefore, a strict attendance policy will be maintained.

Attendance is mandatory, and I will take a quick count every class and after every break. Students arriving more than 5 minutes after the start of class, or after the end of a break, will be marked as late, without exception. Two lates will be considered one absence. Students who have more than one absence (meaning two lates or one full missed class), will receive a reduction in their final grades.

If you are ill, please let me know ahead of time. If you do so, I will excuse one absence in the quarter. If you're seriously unwell for more than a week straight and must miss two classes, we'll handle that on a case-by-case basis.

*Participation:* You are also expected to chip in once in a while in class discussions. Your thoughts and opinions on the subjects being discussed and the films we watch are important, valid, and may be of help to other students.

We will be reading and commenting on the work of your fellow students (yes, sharing is required). It is vital that we create an affirmative and comfortable environment in which each of us can express ourselves honestly. If a student cannot manage to treat the others with personal respect and intellectual care, he or she will be asked to leave the class. I will provide specific guidelines for critiquing other students' work in class.

*Laptops and Phones* are prohibited. Please turn off your ringers and pack up your iPads. They are a distraction to you, others, me, everyone, and do more damage to our ability to function in the world than we think. Students with University-approved special need for such a device will be required to provide proper documentation.

*Assignments:* Assignments must be turned in on time. I will not accept late work. It is better to come on time with something almost complete than to be late. Some assignments will be workshopped in class. The student will be expected to bring the required number of copies of the work to class, on time.

*D2L and COLweb:* I will utilize these two course-management systems throughout the quarter. D2L will be used for assignment turn-in and hosting files for you to download. COLweb will be used to host films and clips we screen in class for online students and for anyone in class who would like to rewatch.

*Email:* In the event of any class location changes or cancellations due to an illness on my part, I will contact you via email. Please ensure that the email address you have supplied to the University is one that you do, in fact, check.

### **Content Changes**

Depending upon time, the assignments projected for the quarter may require alteration. Any deviations from the syllabus will be addressed ahead of time in class or via email.

### **Grading**

Class Attendance and Participation: 10%

Writing Assignments: 25%

Midterm Project: 20%

Screenplay Rough Draft: 15%

Screenplay Final Draft: 30%

A Range: 100-90

B Range: 89-80

C Range: 79-70

D Range: 69-60

F 59-0

In grading your written assignments and scripts as well as your midterm presentations, I will be looking for the amount of effort apparent in the work, the satisfaction of the specific criteria for each assignment, and basic written communication skills. I expect to receive proof-read work. I will mark off for repeated spelling mistakes or other copy errors.

## **Projected Course Schedule**

(Subject to Change)

### **Week 1**

Introduction to the Class and Storytelling for Cinema

*Assignments (see assignment sheets for details)*

A1: True Story.

A2: Title and Subtitle for Autobiography.

Adopt a pet short film.

### **Week 2**

Character and Character Development

*Assignments*

A3: Character Bio.

A4: Character Assignment.

Pet Film Character Study.

### **Week 3**

Plot and Structure

*Assignments*

A5: 50 Word Story.

Pet Film Plot Synopsis.

### **Week 4**

Drama, Conflict, and the Scene

*Assignments*

A6: Conflict Assignment.

Pet Film Conflict Analysis.

Midterm Project.

### **Week 5**

MIDTERMS

Theme, Meaning, Interpretation

*Assignments*

A7: True Story/False Story.

A8: Three Story Ideas.

Pet Film Thematic Interpretation

### **Week 6**

Setting, Time, and Atmosphere

*Assignments*

A9: Atmosphere Assignment.

A10: Seduction Scene.

Pet Film Setting and Time Analysis.

### **Week 7**

Genre

Dialogue

*Assignments*

A11: Screenplay Story Outline.

A12: Eavesdropping Assignment.

A13: Pitch.

*First Draft of Screenplay Due in 2 Weeks*

**Week 8**

The Business of Screenwriting  
Pitches

*Assignments*

First Draft of Screenplay.

**Week 9**

Workshop

*Assignments*

Feature Film Analysis.

**Week 10**

One on one discussions

*Assignments*

Revised Final Screenplays.

**Online Course Evaluations**

Evaluations are a way for students to provide valuable feedback regarding their instructor and the course. Detailed feedback will enable the instructor to continuously tailor teaching methods and course content to meet the learning goals of the course and the academic needs of the students. They are a requirement of the course and are key to continue to provide you with the highest quality of teaching. The evaluations are anonymous; the instructor and administration do not track who entered what responses. A program is used to check if the student completed the evaluations, but the evaluation is completely separate from the student's identity. Since 100% participation is our goal, students are sent periodic reminders over three weeks. Students do not receive reminders once they complete the evaluation. Students complete the evaluation online in CampusConnect.

**Academic Integrity and Plagiarism**

This course will be subject to the University's integrity policy. More information can be found at <http://academicintegrity.depaul.edu/> If you have any questions be sure to consult with your professor.

**Academic Policies**

All students are required to manage their class schedules each term in accordance with the deadlines for enrolling and withdrawing as indicated in the University Academic Calendar. Information on enrollment, withdrawal, grading, and incompletes can be found at <http://www.depaul.edu/Current%20Students/Pages/PoliciesandProcedures.aspx>

**Students with Disabilities**

Students who feel they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the instructor privately to discuss their specific needs. All discussions will remain confidential. To ensure that you receive the most appropriate accommodation based on your needs, contact the instructor as early as possible in the quarter (preferably within the first week of class) and make sure that you have contact the Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) at:

Lewis Center 1420, 25 E. Jackson Blvd.  
312-362-8002  
Fax: 312-362-6544  
TTY: 773-325-7296