

WRITING THE SITCOM (Winter 2015)

DC 306/406

Thursdays: 5:45 – 9:00 pm

Room: #222 CDM Building.

Instructor: Christopher Parrish

Office Hours: Tuesdays 4:00 – 5:30pm

Office: CDM 465

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Course Description: In this course, students analyze half hour situational comedy teleplays. The course will feature a specific focus on story-telling styles and techniques of successful sitcom predecessors, various formats of sitcom teleplays and methods for pushing original projects out into the world. Students will create an original sitcom pilot.

Prerequisite: DC 400 Writing the Television Spec Script

Type of Instruction: Lecture, discussion, in-class activities, screenings

Content Changes: Depending on time factors, the lectures, assignment and guest speaker projected for the term may require alteration or rescheduling.

Please bring either your laptop or something to take notes with for each class. On occasion, instructor will require multiple hard copies of your work brought in to class.

Written assignments should be double-spaced in 12-point font. **All assignments must be posted on D2L. Do not email me your assignments. It will not be graded.**

Course Management System: D2L

Readings: PDFs of pilot teleplays posted on D2L.

Software: Final Draft is **strongly recommended** for this course.

Withdrawal Drop Dates: January 16, 2015 – Last day to drop classes with no penalty. February 20, 2015 – Last day to withdraw from WQ 2015 classes.

Course Objectives:

Students will learn to craft situation comedy spec pilot loglines, beatsheets, outlines and complete their own sitcom pilot spec

Students will learn the craft of verbally pitching situation comedy spec pilots

Students will develop and craft their own personal creative “voice” by identifying and exploring themes, personal experiences and their own unique perspectives

Students will analyze sitcom comedy pilot scripts and compare to their produced episodes

Students will interact with a Hollywood-based television writer with a track record of writing and selling situation comedy television pilots and gain up-to-date insight into the spec sitcom pilot business

Learning Outcomes:

- Students will compare and contrast pilot teleplays with their corresponding produced television episodes.
- Students will execute verbal pitches of their television pilots according to current industry standards.
- Students will complete their own sitcom spec pilot teleplay, shaped by their own original voice and perspective, while adhering to current television industry writing standards.

Grading:

- (5%) Spec Sitcom Pilot Loglines
- (10%) Verbal Presentation of Spec Pilot
- (10%) Spec Sitcom Pilot Lead Character Bios
- (10%) Spec Sitcom Pilot Beatsheet
- (10%) Spec Sitcom Pilot Outline
- (10%) Cold Open and First Act of Script
- (30%) Complete Spec Pilot Teleplay
- (5%) Spec Sitcom Pilot Plan of Attack / Cover Letter
- (10%) Class Participation

Attendance:

Each week’s class consists of lectures, discussions, in-class activities and/or screenings. Your attendance is mandatory. For the purposes of this class, an absence is defined as either not showing up for class or showing up 15 minutes after class has begun. All unexcused absences will result in a reduction of the class participation grade.

Assignments:

Homework assignments must be completed by the date to which they are assigned in the syllabus. Reasonable deadlines are given for completion for each assignment. Consequently late assignments will not be accepted.

Incomplete work may receive partial credit on a case by case basis (Late assignment = F.)

Exceptions:

A.) Medical emergency. You must contact me within 24 hours of the assignment due date and submit support documents within 48 hours of the assignment due date.

B.) Personal emergency. If you miss an assignment deadline because of any other reason besides a medical one, you must submit compelling evidence supporting your excuse within 24 hours of the assignment due date.

Schedule: (Schedule may be subject to change. Instructor will announce any such changes in class and/or send email.)

Week 1: January 8, 2015

Classroom Activity #1: Introductions

Lecture:

A Brief History of the Spec Pilot Business

Origin Story Pilots vs. Hit-the-Ground-Running Pilots (Pros & Cons)

Structure Recap

Classroom Activity #2:

Script Reading and Dissection of a Produced Network Sitcom Pilot (Class Choice from D2L)

Homework Assignment:

Begin brainstorming ideas for your spec sitcom pilot.

Due Date: None

Week 2: January 15, 2015

Lecture:

Exploring Theme: What's Your Sound? (Themes, Message to the World, What's Your Passion? What Enrages You?)

Creating Sitcom Pilots with Sustainable Conflict

Loglines & Why You Should Never Go into a Meeting Without Them (Go & School of Rock)

Classroom Activity #1:

Insane Logline Brainstorm

Classroom Activity #2:

Insane Logline Group Pitch (incorporating elements from lecture)

Classroom Activity #3:

Name that Sitcom Logline Game

Homework Assignment: 5 Original Loglines & Your 5 Minute Pilot Pitch. Choose 1 of your 5 loglines and present it in a 5 minute pitch. **(The 2 combined assignments = 15% of your final grade.)**

Due Date: Will be presented in next class (01/22/2015.) Absence = 0 on assignment.

Week 3: January 22, 2015

Classroom Activity #1: Present 5 minute sitcom pitch. Give and receive constructive verbal feedback.

Lecture:

Creating Compelling Characters (different types and their psych profiles)

Homework Assignment: Character bios for 2 - 4 main characters of show

Due Date: Post on D2L by beginning of next class (01/29/2015.)

Week 4: January 29, 2015

Classroom Activity #1: Present characters. Give and receive constructive verbal feedback.

Lecture:

The Story Stew

Balancing Pilot Story Structure & Exposition

Homework Assignment: Pilot Beatsheet.

Due Date: Post on D2L by beginning of next class (2/05/2015.)

Week 5: February 5, 2015

Classroom Activity #1: Presenting Pilot Beatsheet. Give and receive constructive verbal feedback.

Lecture:

Dialogue

Homework Assignment: Pilot Outline

Due Date: Post Group A Pilot Outline due by beginning of next class (02/12/2015.)

Week 6: February 12, 2015

Classroom Activity #1: Presenting Group A Outline. Give and receive constructive verbal feedback.

Lecture:

Location, Location, Location: A Brief Discussion on Popular Settings and Sets

Picking Groups

Homework Assignment(s):

Group A begin writing Cold Open/Teaser and Act One

Group B complete Pilot Outline

Due Date:

Group B Pilot Outline must be posted by beginning of next class (02/19/2015)

Group A Cold Open/Teaser and Act One due Week 8 (02/26/2015)

Week 7: February 19, 2015

Classroom Activity #1: Presenting Group B Outline. Give and receive constructive verbal feedback.

Homework Assignment: Group A Cold Open/Teaser and Act One Due

Due Date: Must be posted by beginning of next class (02/26/2015)

Week 8: February 26, 2015

Classroom Activity #1: Presenting Group A Cold Open/Teaser and Act One. Give and receive constructive feedback.

Classroom Activity #2: You're Doing It Wrong (On Purpose.) Class will watch a sitcom pilot, divide into groups and rewrite a chosen scene, intentionally making every possible mistake. Other groups will dissect mistakes.

Homework Assignment : Group B Cold Open/Teaser and Act One

Due Date: Must be posted by beginning of next class (03/05/2015)

Week 9: March 5, 2015

Classroom Activity: Presenting Group B Cold Open/Teaser and Act One.
Give and receive constructive feedback.

Homework Assignment #1: Spec Sitcom Pilot Plan of Attack / Cover
Letter (DUE MARCH 12, 2015)

Homework Assignment #2: Complete television pilot (DUE MARCH 19th,
2015)

Week 10: March 12, 2015

Lecture:

Strategies for Selling TV Pilots
Game Plan for Moving to L.A.

Sign Up for One-on-One Instructor Analysis of Pilot (**OPTIONAL**)

Classroom Activity #1: Guest Skype Speaker (TBA)

Assignment: Continue writing sitcom pilot. **DO NOT TURN IN HARD COPIES. DO NOT EMAIL ME YOUR FINAL. LATE SUBMISSIONS WILL NOT RECEIVE CREDIT.**

Due Date: ALL SCRIPTS MUST BE POSTED ON D2L BY THURSDAY, MARCH 19TH NO LATER THAN 11:59 PM (CST) NO EXCEPTIONS.

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism:

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

College Policies:

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 Campus Connect.

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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 contacted the Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) at: csd@depaul.edu.

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