

WRITING THE TV THESIS I – FALL 2015-2016 (This is the first of a two course sequence)

DC 508 701

Tuesdays, 5:45pm to 9:00pm

CDM Center Room 924

Instructor: Nathan DeWitt, MFA

Office Hours: Tuesdays: 2:30pm to 5:45pm, Thursdays: Noon to 1:30pm, Fridays 12:30pm to 2:00pm.

I am in and out of my office frequently during office hours so please let me know if you will be stopping by. I'm also available by appointment.

Office: CDM 616

ndewitt@cdm.depaul.edu

Course Management System: D2L.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Students will complete a show bible, pilot, and future episode of an original television concept. In a workshop environment, students will get extensive feedback from their instructor and peers. The thesis project is to serve as the culminating piece in the student's MFA screenwriting portfolio and must be approved by a Thesis Committee in order for a student to graduate. (This is the description for the two course series. This Quarter we'll be doing part one).

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

- Close examination of project selection process
- Exploration of personal connection (compulsion) in strong creative writing
- Thorough, professional character and deadline driven story development
- Exposure to professional writing practices and pace
- Continued mastery of television storytelling style and narrative technique
- Fostering and maintaining the environment of a professional writers room
- Refining and advancing the practices of giving and receiving thoughtful, articulate criticism
- Consistent delivery of outstanding creative and analytical work

This class will, as closely as possible, mirror the real world dynamic between Writer and Development Executive with the Student in the role of Writer and the Instructor in the role of Development Executive, minus the contradictory notes and creativity-crippling fear of losing his job.

The instructor will mentor the students to ensure he brings out the voice of the student writer. At the same time, he'll monitor the students' writing to make sure the voices of the characters are clear, the plot moves along with escalating tension, the themes ring true and the work is technically, structurally and grammatically correct and properly formatted. **We write like professionals in this class.**

A lot of this course will be Workshop format. We'll be doing our best to duplicate the atmosphere of a Writer's Room. As with a real writing staff, the class will have the opportunity to offer constructive criticism of each other's work. They will also participate in group rewrites, where they will be expected to help improve the work of their classmates, both in terms of shaping concept but also honing story and tightening scenes.

COURSE OUTCOMES:

- Instructor approved completion of a professional level Outline for a Pilot Script
- A professional level Show Bible
- Sitcom writers will also be expected to write pitches for a spec episode of an existing show.

- Delivery of First Draft of a TV Thesis Pilot Script (**This is due December 15, 2015**).

REQUIREMENTS:

Actively participate in class discussions, read and critique your own and fellow students' work, complete all homework assignments. **Strict adherence to deadlines is expected.** Attendance is MANDATORY. This is a lot of work to do in 10 weeks. DO NOT FALL BEHIND!

ASSIGNMENTS:

All work must be typed and submitted on D2L by the deadline. **After Class Two, this deadline will be Sunday nights at 6:00pm.**

Students will receive an email Sunday nights with the reading for class on Tuesday. You are expected to READ ALL OF THE MATERIAL and be ready to discuss it in class on Tuesdays. **If the professor gets the sense students are not doing the reading, he reserves the right to demand written notes on everything.**

SPELLING, GRAMMAR AND PUNCTUATION:

You're in your second year of an MFA program in writing. There is NO EXCUSE for submitting work which contains spelling, grammatical or typographical errors. It's your work, you're responsible for its clarity. The course policy on such errors is as follows:

- After the third spelling, grammatical or typographical error, your grade on the assignment is lowered a full letter grade.
- After the fifth spelling, grammatical or typographical error, your grade on the assignment is lowered two full letter grades.
- **After the eighth spelling, grammatical or typographical error, we stop reading your work and you forfeit the right to class feedback for that week.**

A NOTE ABOUT TALKING 'SMACK':

Writer's are competitive. I'm not going to sit here and pretend we're all at the same skill level and will all get along famously. Nor am I going to pretend I don't know people are going to talk about each other's work, sometimes in derogatory terms. But I don't want to see it. I don't want to hear about it. And it's absolutely forbidden in my classroom. If you feel the need to badmouth someone's work, please do so in PRIVATE. Note: **THE INTERNET IS NOT PRIVATE!** You'd be surprised who stumbles across your Twitter, Facebook or Blog. So let's please be respectful and remember we're all in this to become better writers.

That said, this is a Workshop, not some wimpy poetry retreat. Sometimes in a workshop people lose fingers. That's just how you learn. Be hard on your classmates' writing and respect them when they're hard on yours. We're all in here to get better and you can't do that without a little constructive criticism. But cruelty and rudeness will not be tolerated. **Ideally, by the end of this course you'll be observant and analytical enough to never make a critique unless it's also accompanied by a suggested fix.**

LASTLY:

By and large, you may say anything in this class, except one phrase. "You didn't get what I was going for." This phrase is the hallmark of young, defensive artists across all media and it's usually the first phrase they utter upon hearing criticism and suffering the pangs of an injured ego. However, it is a nonsense expression, demonstrating a lack of understanding of the relationship between writer and reader. If your work is muddled, vague or otherwise ineffective it is not the reader's responsibility to 'get it,' it is your responsibility to improve your writing. In writing, onus of clarity is on the creator, not

the beholder. If I didn't get what you were going for it is because you did not take me there. When feedback comes, don't get defensive. Let your ego go, listen to what's being said, consider new approaches. **The first step to improving your writing is to take ownership of its shortcomings.**

GRADING:

Pitches: 5%

Character Biographies: 10%

Character Biographies and Story Document (CBSD): 10%

Outline, Draft One: 10%

Outline, Draft Two: 20%

Show Bible: 25%

Class Participation: 20%

THE SCHEDULE:

Classes may contain lectures, screenings or guest speakers, but the bulk of our time will be spent in a workshop environment.

Week One: September 15:

Introductions and Development

Come to class with between one and three ideas you think you'd like to write as your Thesis. We will spend 15 minutes casually discussing each students' idea or ideas. Plan to take notes on suggestions from other students and the professor.

Homework: Focused Brainstorming, viewing of pilots, series snapshot pitch.

Prepare a more focused pitch for you show. Write up a one page pitch for each of the ideas you are considering. The pitch should include logline, setting, story structure (procedural, serial, anthology series, etc), themes, tone, comparable shows and some information about the main character of the series. This is meant to be a snapshot of the idea but it's not just what the story is about, it's also about where it could be sold. Who would buy this idea? What other shows are like this idea? This writing is due on D2L at the start of class on Tuesday, September 22.

Week Two: September 22:

Pitches and Development.

Come to class prepared to discuss your more focused idea or ideas. Again, each student will be given 15 minutes of class time for discussion. Plan to take notes on suggestions from other students and the professor.

Groups will be assigned based on an advanced system of randomness known as alphabetical order. We break you up into groups in order to make the workload more manageable for everyone.

Homework: Character biographies for your lead characters, Group One

Again, after week 2, all work is due on D2L by 6pm on Sundays. Students will then receive an email with the reading for that week and are expected to have read everything and be ready to discuss it Tuesday evening. **If the professor gets the sense students are not doing the reading, he reserves the right to demand written notes on everything.**

Week Three: September 29:

Characters Group One

Homework: Character biographies for your lead characters, Group Two

Friday, October 2, 2015 THESIS COMMITTEE MEETINGS

Week Four: October 6:

Characters Group Two

Homework: Group One: CBSD. (Character Biographies and Story Document) Formatting will be discussed.

Week Five: October 13:

CBSD Group One

Homework: Group Two: CBSD.

Week Six: October 20:

CBSD Group Two

Homework: Outlines, Group One (formatting will be discussed)

Week Seven: October 27:

Outlines Group One

Homework: Outlines, Group Two

Week Eight: November 3:

Outlines Group Two

Homework: Revised Outlines, Group One

Week Nine: November 10:

Outlines Group One Redux

Homework: Revised Outlines, Group Two

Week 10: November 17:

Outlines Group Two Redux

Homework: Show Bibles, ALL.

Tuesday, November 24, 2015 at 6:00pm: Show Bibles Due (this is your FINAL for Fall Quarter)

First Draft of Pilot Script (and Show Bible) due to Thesis Committee: December 15 by the end of the day.

Yes, you read that correctly. At no point in this first Quarter will we be writing script pages as a group. Just as in professional TV, we will develop solid outlines as a group and writers will be sent off on their own to pen the scripts with a deadline. You will get your last set of outline notes on November 17 and the draft of your script is due December 15. You will be expected to manage your time accordingly. As a point of reference, pro TV writers get SIX DAYS to write a script from outline. You will have four weeks. I will be available by phone and email during this time if you need assistance. **Under no circumstances will extensions be given on the December 15 deadline.**

SCHOOL POLICIES:

Online Instructor Evaluation

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 two weeks. Students do not receive reminders once they complete the evaluation. Students complete the evaluation online at <https://mycti.cti.depaul.edu/mycti>

Email

Email is the primary means of communication between faculty and students enrolled in this course outside of class time. Students should be sure their email listed under "demographic information" at [CampusConnect](#) is correct.

Academic Integrity Policy

This course will be subject to the academic integrity policy passed by faculty. More information can be found at <http://academicintegrity.depaul.edu/>

Plagiarism

The university and school policy on plagiarism can be summarized as follows: Students in this course should be aware of the strong sanctions that can be imposed against someone guilty of plagiarism. If proven, a charge of plagiarism could result in an automatic F in the course and possible expulsion. The strongest of sanctions will be imposed on anyone who submits as his/her own work any assignment which has been prepared by someone else. If you have any questions or doubts about what plagiarism entails or how to properly acknowledge source materials be sure to consult the instructor.

Incomplete

An incomplete grade is given only for an exceptional reason such as a death in the family, a serious illness, etc. Any such reason must be documented. Any incomplete request must be made at least two weeks before the final, and approved by the Dean of the College of Computing and Digital Media. Any consequences resulting from a poor grade for the course will not be considered as valid reasons for such a request.

Resources for 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 either the PLS Program (for LD, AD/HD) or The Office for Students with Disabilities (for all other disabilities) at:

Student Center, LPC, Suite #370 Phone number: (773)325.1677 Fax: (773)325.3720 TTY: (773)325.7296