



TV 301 – DC 442

801

The Writers Room: Developing the Hour-Long Drama

Winter 2015-2016

Room: 14 E Jackson Room 209

Wednesday 5:45pm – 9:00pm

Course Management System: D2L

José A. Soto

Office Hours: Mondays & Wednesdays
11:30 am – 1 pm
(Loop CDM 506)

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Course Description:

This is a creative and intense course that takes you from the germ of a story idea to a fully thought out one-hour drama. In this class, you will work with your colleagues and the instructor to enhance your skills in storytelling and in laying out a complete season of your show for cable, broadcast or digital distribution.

Course Objectives:

- Students will recognize the structure and organization of the typical Writers Room of an Hour-Long Television Drama.
- They will develop their own original hour-long drama series working as Show runners for a group of their screenwriting peers, who will serve as Executive Story Editors and Staff Writers.
- They will write for other show runners in the group 6 Outlines, with their respective Beat Sheets; and finally, a fully rewritten screenplay for their own TV show (55-65 pages).
- Graduate students will write the final script (55-65 pages) of the 7-episode season developed in class.

Students should note that this course will be in a Workshop format. That means that you have to submit on time your assignments so show runners may read and critique them. It also means that you have to participate in session discussions of your classmates' projects. We will function as closely to a "writer's room" as we can, and that entails enthusiastic participation and offering constructive criticism, even if it's not your own work. If you are not willing to do this, you have to reconsider taking this course.



I encourage students to approach me about suggestions for more in-depth readings and/or projects related to television series, movies for television, sit-com, reality programming and other TV related subjects.

Reading:

Recommended: Landau, Neil (2014) THE TV SHOWRUNNER'S ROADMAP; Focal Press

You are also invited to examine the following magazines that report on the newest developments in this thriving industry:

VARIETY

THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER

These lectures will be supplemented with handouts from the instructor over the course of the semester.

Grading:

Final grades will be based on the development of 6 Outlines for other Showrunners in the group, a Rewritten Pilot, and the first draft of the Final Episode as well as class participation and attitude. Because it has to present shows on time every hour of every day, television is one of the most demanding industries, this charge carries over to those who are preparing for it, which is why missed deadlines will result in assignment failure.

Outlines – 40%:

Rewritten Pilot – 25%

Final Episode – 25%:

Participation – 10%

All assignments must be typed and free of grammatical, spelling and punctuation errors. It's your work; you're responsible for its quality. All Outlines and Scripts must be in proper Screenwriting format. Use of screenwriting software such as Final Draft or Celtx www.celtx.com is HIGHLY recommended.



Grading Standards:

Letter Grade	Minimum % of Total Points	Letter Grade	Minimum % of Total Points
A	92	C+	78
A-	90	C	72
B+	88	C-	70
B	82	D+	68
B-	80	D	60
		F	0

Course Policies:

1. Participation

At this level students should be interested in the subject of the class. The only way to see this is through participation in class, either asking questions or adding constructive comments to other student's presentations.

2. Attendance

It does not constitute a specific part of your grade, but perfect attendance is required. Most of the information you need to complete your assignments will be discussed in-class; also examples of what you have to do will be given there. Subjects and/or assignments will not be discussed outside of the programmed sessions. This makes attendance critical, and thus not an issue to be negotiated. However if you have to miss a class or a deadline, make sure to plan ahead, and inform the instructor in advance. Calling in advance does not automatically excuse an absence or a missed deadline, but it is the only way to present your case. If you fail to communicate before the next class period to explain an absence or a missed deadline, they will not be excused. Please note that work, non-emergency medical and dental appointments, hangovers, intramural games, visitors from out of town, fixing your roommate's computer, fraternity/sorority events, arguments with boyfriends or girlfriends and studying for other classes do not constitute excused absences or missed assignments.

In order to petition for an excused absence, students who miss class due to illness or significant personal circumstances should complete the Absence Notification process through the Dean of Students office. The form can be accessed at <http://studentaffairs.depaul.edu/dos/forms.html>. Students must submit supporting documentation alongside the form. The professor reserves the sole right whether to offer an excused absence and/or academic accommodations for an excused absence.



3. Tardiness

One true thing in all professional fields is the lack of tolerance for tardiness. Employers do not generally tolerate such behavior, and employees who offer weak, irritating excuses frequently find themselves unemployed and unemployable. We will be working under the same rules.

Remember it is your responsibility to make the arrangements when a deadline or a class has to be missed. I will treat you professionally, expecting of you a responsible attitude. This means that it is you who must be worried about solving the problem, not me.

4. Missed Assignments

Since screenwriting is a cumulative effort, if you fail to turn in any of the assignments you will fail the course. There will be no exceptions. This is a zero-tolerance policy. I have no time or patience for those who are not going to take this class seriously. Many students have flunked my courses for this reason. If you cannot make it a priority to complete all assignments, you better consider not taking this course. One more thing, turning-in an assignment does not guarantee you will have a passing grade, although the opposite will be true. Not turning them in will fail you inevitably.

5. Attitude

We are going to be spending a lot of time discussing other student's or your own work. This will be made in an orderly fashion, no matter how vehemently or fervently we feel for an argument, we have to be able to provide it in a disciplined manner. It is better to wait and later speak than not speaking at all. My evaluation of your attitude and attention will be based on your participation during discussion as much as it will be based on your assertiveness when making a comment. Students who are not insightful enough to value the learning opportunities inherent to this class tend to do poorly.

6. Use of Technology

Cellular phones and other similar devices will not be tolerated. In my mind, they are a clear indication of a bad attitude. I recommend students to turn off or switch to silence mode such devices. If your other commitments are so pressing that they cannot wait until the end of the session, it may be in your best interest to reconsider the priority you place on being here. In any case, students whose phones and/or computers make noise during class will be asked to leave immediately.



7. Uncivilized Behavior

Even though you are students who must constantly thrive to grow, we need to start acting professionally. This is why there will be no tolerance for uncivilized behavior. I require an orderly ambiance to be able to make the most of each session.

By accepting this syllabus, you are indicating that you understand my expectations for students concerning attitude and work ethic.

I reserve the right to drop any student with an F if he/she has excessive absences, engages in disruptive behavior, has a poor attitude, or in any other way is clearly not taking the class seriously.

8. Ethics

Although your grade does not contain an ethics component like some other courses, I require complete honesty in producing your work. Working as a group does not mean that the rest of the participants should do all the work for you. Non-Participation will be considered plagiarism. Plagiarism is useless to you anyway. By having someone else do the work for you, you are missing an opportunity to immerse yourself in the television industry. You are also waiving your right to learn. If you are willing to do that, then you have to evaluate if it's worth the aggravation and the time you invest in this course.

By accepting this syllabus, you are indicating that you understand the seriousness of academic dishonesty and realize I will impose the harshest sanctions possible if I can prove you have engaged in such behavior. You are also indicating that you understand what constitutes academic dishonesty; I will not tolerate an excuse that claims the student did not know he/she was engaging in academic dishonesty.

9. Plagiarism

Plagiarism, cheating and/or fabrication will not be tolerated. They are serious offenses – both in course and in media careers. Thus I reserve the right to drop any student with an F if he/she engages in any form of academic dishonesty. I further reserve the right to recommend other sanctions as may be appropriate.

More information can be found at <http://academicintegrity.depaul.edu/>.

10. Withdrawal

Students who withdraw from the course do so by using the Campus Connection system <http://campusconnect.depaul.edu>. Withdrawals processed via this system are effective the day on which they are made. Simply ceasing to attend, or notifying the instructor, or nonpayment of tuition, does not constitute an official withdrawal from class and will result in academic as well as financial penalty.



11. Retroactive Withdrawal

This policy exists to assist students for whom extenuating circumstances prevented them from meeting the withdrawal deadline. During their college career students may be allowed one medical/personal administrative withdrawal and one college office administrative withdrawal, each for one or more courses in a single term. Repeated requests will not be considered. Submitting an appeal for retroactive withdrawal does not guarantee approval.

College office appeals for CDM students must be submitted online via MyCDM.

The deadlines for submitting appeals are as follows:

Autumn Quarter: Last day of the last final exam of the subsequent winter quarter

Winter Quarter: Last day of the last final exam of the subsequent spring quarter

Spring Quarter: Last day of the last final exam of the subsequent autumn quarter

Summer Terms: Last day of the last final exam of the subsequent autumn quarter

12. Special Accommodations:

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:

Student Center, LPC, Suite #370

Phone number: (773)325.1677

Fax: (773)325.3720

TTY: (773)325.7296

Course Organization and Schedule:

We will meet at 14 E Jackson Room 209, Wednesdays at 5:45 pm. I will give you some time to ask questions regarding the logistics of the assignments and their due dates and then we will immediately proceed to the workshop. We will take a small break at 7:15 to resume activities at 7:30. For the first part of the quarter I will moderate the writers room with the showrunner, but the second it will be each showrunner that must moderate the meeting. We



will leave few minutes before the class ends to answer specific questions of the projects you will be handling.

The first part of the quarter, sessions 1 through 5 we will dedicate an hour to workshop each of the student's show ideas. The goal is to establish at least 4 beats for each of the 6 episodes (plus the pilot). At the end of each hour the creator of the idea, who will function as a showrunner, will pick 3 story editors who will write a 28 beat outline of each of two episodes. The showrunner will select which episodes the story editors will develop.

Within a week, the story editor has to submit his/her outlines to the showrunner. The showrunner will review the outline and submit it to the professor exactly two weeks after his/her idea was worked. The professor will send comments and suggestion to the showrunner, who, in turn will evaluate and decide which changes to enact. Showrunners will ask story editors for changes and, once the showrunner has them, he will submit a final version of these outlines to the professor.

Weeks 6 through 10 will be dedicated to presentations of the final outlines, and the overall progression of the series. These will be criticized in the writers room and polished for delivery by the end of the quarter.

Each showrunner will be in charge of writing a pilot, or rewriting, in case he/she has one already, and also write the 7th and final episode of the season.

This is a tentative course schedule. There may be several circumstances that will most likely change it. I reserve the right to change the class schedule if circumstances make it necessary. You may receive at least one revised schedule before the semester is over. If deadline or assignment dates change, I will tell you well in advance.