

DePaul University
School of Cinematic Arts

DC 507-801: Feature THESIS II

T, 5:45-9:00 PM in 14 E. Jackson room 207, Loop Campus

Professor Brad Riddell: brad.riddell@depaul.edu, 312-362-5212

Office Hours: T,W,R 10:00 AM – 12PM in CDM 521 and by appointment.

Description:

Students revise and polish the first draft of their thesis screenplay. This script is to serve as the culminating piece in the MFA writing portfolio, and must be approved by a vote of the thesis committee for degree conferral.

Objectives:

- analyze notes received from peers and thesis committee
- design a rewrite plan to address those notes
- complete professional, deadline-driven script revisions
- evaluate others' revisions objectively, comprehensively, and with tact

Outcomes:

- Complete revision plan
- Complete script revision plus a polish
- Delivery of the revised draft of the thesis screenplay
 - **NOTE:** The revised and polished second draft will be due to committee members by the end of day **March 17th**.

COURSE MANAGEMENT:

You will be using D2L extensively in this course. To log on, go to:
<https://d2l.depaul.edu/d2l/home> and enter using your campus connect username and password. Once you are logged on, click on the course number link.

Schedule:

WEEK 1, January 3rd, Discuss Revision Process, Notes for Group B, four monologues:
Deng/Riley, Kelly/O'Connor

WEEK 2: January 10th, Notes for Group A, six monologues: **Nikolaus/Larios, Jewell/Paris, Murphy/Taylor**

WEEK 3: January 17th, Group B rewrite plan, rewritten Act One, six monologues:
Darrow/Heim/Dumas (each does two)

WEEK 4: January 24th, Group A rewrite plan, rewritten Act One

WEEK 5: January 31st, Group B rewritten to End Act Two

WEEK 6: February 7th, Group A rewritten to End Act Two

WEEK 7: February 14th, Group B rewritten to end of script

WEEK 8: February 21st, Group A rewritten to end of script

WEEK 9: February 28th, Group B polish

WEEK 10: March 7th, Group A polish

WEEK 11: March 14th, Both Groups proof and tweak

Finished, revised thesis scripts due to committees by MARCH 17th at 6 PM.

Procedures:

Classes may include lectures but will always feature a workshop session. Students will be divided into two groups to maximize attention on the greatest amount of material possible. Look under “Groups” on D2L to find yours. It is vitally important that all students submit work on time, and that all students **pre-read** the material thoroughly before class to offer detailed notes.

Beginning Week 3, work must be submitted to D2L by midnight on Sunday. We need two days of reading time. If it is not delivered on time, it cannot be critiqued.

Software:

Final Draft is the industry standard and provides functions that will be useful in this class. You should own it and be using it by now. We can get you a discount. That said, I prefer all work be delivered in PDF format all the time.

Grading:

Your weekly writing amounts to 20% of your overall grade. Each week you submit, five points will be awarded for hitting the deadline, five points for completing the required page count, and ten points for quality (see rubric for quality breakdown).

Participation is absolutely crucial. It will account for 20% of your overall grade, or ten points per week. I expect you to read the material, contribute great notes, and maintain a positive, supportive attitude in the room. I want to know that you read the material by the way in which you discuss it.

Your completed and approved rewrite plan will serve as the midterm, and represents 100 points, or 20% of your grade.

Completeness of the final draft and making the deadline earns 20%, and the attached rubric will assign the script's creative quality for the other 20%.

A = 100-93, A- = 92-90, B+ = 89-88, B = 87-83, B- = 82-80, C+ = 79-78, C = 77-73, C- = 72-70, D+ = 69-68, D = 67-63, D- = 62-60, F = 59-0. C- is the minimum passing grade.

Attendance:

Tardiness and absences are counterproductive to your goal of becoming a great writer and my goal of being a great teacher. Contact me ASAP if you will be late or absent. Unapproved absences forfeit an entire letter grade.

In-Class Workshops

By enrolling in this course, you agree to share your ideas and writings with the professor and other students in the class. You must acquire express written consent from any writer in the class should you wish to share his/her work with someone who is not enrolled in this course. Feedback is an essential part of the writing process. We must respect each other, our collaboration, and the work at hand. Be truthful, but sensitive when giving notes. Be prepared to solve problems instead of just pointing them out.

Creative Subject Matter

As this is a creative writing course, controversial subject matter may enter into the conversation. Students have the right to express themselves artistically in their writing and address challenging issues. If you become uncomfortable with a conversation for personal reasons, you may be excused for the remainder of that class without penalty. Inclusion of individuals from the class, or direct personal attacks on members of the class will not be tolerated in course material. If you feel you are being individually targeted by material written or discussed in class, please inform the instructor as soon as possible.

Decorum and Civil Discourse:

DePaul University is a community that thrives on open discourse that challenges students, both intellectually and personally, to be socially responsible leaders. It is the expectation that all dialogue in this course is civil and respectful of the dignity of each student. Any instances of disrespect or hostility can jeopardize a student's ability to be successful in the course. The professor will partner with the Dean of Students Office to assist in managing such issues.

Laptops/Cell Phones:

If your computer and the mind attached to it drift away from class, and I so much as suspect you of online activities not related to the task at hand, you will lose laptop privileges for the entire semester. Phones must be silenced and stowed.

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 with your professor. But know this: plagiarism will earn you an F in this course.

Alterations:

The professor reserves the right to alter the syllabus at any time. Students will be apprised of any and all changes with clear instructions should they occur.

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.

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.

Lewis Center 1420, 25 East Jackson Blvd.

Phone number: (312)362-8002

TTY: (773)325.7296

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](#).

FEATURE SCREENPLAYS

AN EXCELLENT SCREENPLAY (in consideration for a Premiere Award)

- Displays clear mastery of format and visual writing style.
- Is free of typos and grammatical errors.
- Uses imagery over dialogue to “show instead of tell.”
- Handles exposition seamlessly.
- Feels fresh, and offers a clear sense of the writer’s voice.
- Has a clear and unique hook or dramatic premise.
- Offers a consistent tone throughout.
- Is well structured. If it is a nontraditional narrative, the arrangement successfully contributes to the overall concept of the story.
- Presents complex, original characters with a strong inner life, and develops them across an unpredictable but satisfying arc.
- Handles dialogue well, reflecting character, tone, and genre.
- Will be a strong sample for the writer and could do well in contests.
- Warrants faculty recommendation to an agent, manager, or producer.

A PASSING SCREENPLAY

- Demonstrates competence in most of the categories above and suggests that the writer possesses the potential to develop professional work.
 - Alternatively, executes several of the above categories extremely well, despite other obvious shortcomings.
- Is a polish away from being a respectable writing sample.

A SCRIPT THAT DOES NOT PASS

- Fails to demonstrate competence in most of the categories above.
 - Alternatively, it is egregiously poor in several categories despite obvious competency in others.
- Is incomplete.
- Requires at least one significant rewrite before meeting the minimum level of professional standards.

TELEVISION PILOTS**AN EXCELLENT TELEPLAY PILOT (in consideration for a Premiere Award)**

- Displays clear mastery of industry standard script formatting.
- Is free of typos and grammatical errors.
- Demonstrates clear mastery of teleplay structure, including the proper number of acts and scenes, as well as proper page count for its format.
- Contains compelling act break “cliffhangers” escalating in tension until the final act.
- Presents writer’s original voice and specific point-of-view.
- As a Sitcom, places an emphasis on original, multi-faceted characters and comedic dialogue –or– as a Drama, places an emphasis on original, multi-faceted characters and an intriguing plot.
- Introduces main characters, premise and pertinent exposition, while still telling an engaging pilot story plot not mired in backstory.
- Maintains a consistent tone.
- Handles dialogue well, reflecting character, tone, and genre.
- Includes a series bible and three beat sheets that suggest the series has legs, and that the writer has the ability to develop future episodes.
- Represents quality on a professional level, potentially serving as an effective writing sample and/or spec teleplay ready for the marketplace.
- Warrants faculty recommendation to a literary agent/manager, television executive, studio executive and/or showrunner.

A PASSING TELEPLAY PILOT

- Demonstrates competence in most of the criteria above.
 - Alternatively, executes several of the above categories extremely well, despite other obvious shortcomings.
- Suggests potential for the writer to work on a professional level.
- Does not require an extensive rewrite to become a solid writing sample and/or marketable spec script.

A PILOT THAT DOES NOT PASS

- Fails to demonstrate competence in most of the categories above.
 - Alternatively, it is egregiously poor in several categories despite obvious competency in others.
- Disregards genre format requirements.
- Is incomplete.
- Requires at least one significant rewrite before meeting the minimum level of professional standards.

SCA Screenwriting Grading Rubric

| | UNSATISFACTORY | COMPETENT | PROFICIENT | DISTINGUISHED |
|-----------|--|---|---|---|
| CONCEPT | Does not possess a concept that can support the intended format – short film, feature, TV pilot | Contains a practical, yet ultimately derivative concept that supports the intended format – short film, feature, TV pilot | Contains an original and viable concept that supports the intended format – short film, feature, TV pilot | Contains a cinematically innovative and viable concept that supports the intended format – short film, feature, TV pilot |
| CHARACTER | Lacks developed character(s) that consistently struggle to evoke empathy and/or intrigue, dialogue has little distinction of character and purpose | Presents common archetypal character(s), dialogue is often on-the-nose, yet passable | Presents well-developed and active character(s) that evoke empathy and/or intrigue, dialogue is paced appropriately and serviceable throughout | Presents complex, original, and active character(s) that garner empathy and/or intrigue from the onset, dialogue is efficient, engaging, and organic to the world of the story |
| PLOT | Fails to develop a discernable set-up, through-line, and resolution | The set-up, through-line, and resolution is evident, but largely by-the-numbers | There is a serviceable set-up, through-line, and resolution | There is an interesting set-up, compelling through-line, and satisfying resolution |
| MARKET | Struggles to grasp the basic conventions of the intended genre(s) and does not appeal to the target audience | Follows the basic conventions of the intended genre(s) – labors to draw target audience | Follows the conventions of the intended genre(s) – appeals to the target audience | Follows and elevates the conventions of the intended genre(s) – resonates with the target audience |
| TECHNICAL | Consistently lacks understanding of industry standard script format – spelling and grammar errors throughout, action description struggles to capture what can be seen or heard on-screen, and/or fails to meet the required page length for the intended format | Displays some understanding of industry standard script format – few spelling and grammar errors, action description is serviceable, and meets the required page length for the intended format | Displays an understanding of industry standard script format – free from spelling and grammar errors, action description reveals only what can be seen or heard on-screen, and meets the required page length for the intended format | Displays a mastery of industry standard script format – free from spelling and grammar errors, action description showcases the writer's unique voice, and meets the required page length for the intended format |