

## **DC 201 Syllabus - Introduction to Screenwriting - Fall Quarter 2017 - Brian Mellen**

**bmellen@cdm.depaul.edu**

**Office hours: Tu 1:30pm to 5:30pm - 14 E. Jackson Rm. 200B By Appt. Only**

### **Summary of Course:**

Introduction to Screenwriting focuses on narrative storytelling and encourages students to find their unique voices. Emphasis is placed on telling the story in terms of action and characters. The difference between the literary and visual medium is explored through individual writing projects and group analysis. Students will analyze feature films and animated shorts in depth and will provide a final short screenplay of their own which adheres to a traditional dramatic structure.

**Prerequisites:** None.

*\* Syllabus is subject to change*

### **Course Objectives:**

By the end of the term students will:

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

### **Learning Domain:**

Courses in the Arts and Literature domain ask students to extend their knowledge and experience of the arts while 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 better understand the original audience that witnessed a work of art and how its meaning and significance changes over time. These courses focus on works of art or literature, however the process of analysis may include social, cultural, and historical issues. Genres covered in this domain include literature, the visual arts, media arts, the performing arts, music, and theater.

### **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.
  - Articulate and explain the “content” of that work and/or its methodology of production.
2. Students will be able to comment on the relationship between form and content in a work.

- How does the 14-line sonnet both enable and inhibit its practitioner, for example?
  - What are the generic expectations of a particular form?
  - How does an artist complicate, enrich, or subvert such expectations?
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. Students will be able to contextualize a work of art.
    - Do so with respect to other works of art in terms of defining its place within a broader style or genre.
    - 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:**

1. Students will analyze screenplays and compare them to the actual movies so they will be able to see how the written story concretely translates into the film form. In addition, these exercises illustrate how the screenplay follows (or not) the general principles of a story, principles that we study all along the quarter, with an emphasis on characters, structure, actions, visuals, and dialogue.
2. Students will watch and discuss film segments as well as short films (animation and live action) in class to understand how, more than anything else, actions, dialogue, and visuals (especially in animation) define the form of a screenplay and the way it is written.
3. Students will complete their own screenplay by the end of the quarter.

### **Writing Expectations:**

Students will be expected to complete a minimum of 5-10 pages of writing for this course.

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

The written assignments are all related to the final screenplay (10 pages) due at the end of the quarter. They follow the step-by-step process of writing for the screen.

1. Students will have to work on different ideas and themes for a short story.
2. Students will have to develop the main characters of the story they have chosen to write.
3. Students will write a step-outline for their screenplay as well as one fully developed short with dialogue.
4. Students will develop and complete a short screenplay (10 pages).

**Course Management System:** D2L

**Textbooks and printed resources:**

Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting, Newly Revised & Updated,  
Field, Syd, 2005. ISBN: 978-0385339032

The Hollywood Standard: The Complete and Authoritative Guide to Script Format and Style,  
2nd edition, Riley, Christopher, 2009. ISBN 13: 9781932907636

**Recommended Texts:**

Tools of Screenwriting: A Writer's Guide to the Craft and Elements of a Screenplay,  
Howard, David, 1995. ISBN 13: 9780312119089

The Art of Dramatic Writing  
Egri, Simon & Schuster/Touchstone, 1972. ISBN: 978-0671213329

**Software for formatting a screenplay:**

You will be required to use screenwriting software toward the end of the course.  
Final Draft is strongly recommended for those with a focus on screenwriting,  
producing and/or directing – The software is \$129.99 with a student discount at:

<http://store.finaldraft.com/final-draft-10-edu.html>

You can also obtain a free download of the Celtx screenwriting program at:

[www.celtx.com](http://www.celtx.com)

**Drop Dates:**

Wednesday, Sept. 13 (by 8am): Last day to add (or swap) classes  
Tuesday, Sept. 19: Last day to drop classes with no penalty  
Tuesday, Oct. 24: Last day to withdraw from classes

**Grading:**

Attendance & Participation	10%
Quizzes	10%
Morning Pages/Journal	5%
First Draft of Screenplay	10%
Assignments	20%
Midterm Exam	20%
Final Screenplay	25%

**Grading Scale:**

A = 100-93, A- = 92-90, B+ = 89-87, B = 86-83, B- = 82- 80, C+ = 79-77, C = 76-73, C- = 72-70, D+ = 69-67, D = 66-63, D- = 62-60, F = 59-0.

A indicates excellence, B indicates good work, C indicates satisfactory work, D work is unsatisfactory in some respect, F is substantially unsatisfactory work

### **Course Lectures/Reading Assignments:**

Lecture presentations will occur weekly. The textbooks offer an opportunity for independent learning that supplements the lecture presentations. The instructor will use both the classroom and the textbooks. Lectures may introduce additional material not available in the readings, and the readings may explore concepts not mentioned in class. BOTH SOURCES ARE NEEDED.

### **Student responsibilities:**

Each student is responsible for their time management and for meeting the expectations in the syllabus. The instructor is not responsible for reminding students of assignment deadlines in class. In the event of an absence, it is the student's responsibility to contact the instructor for an assignment sheet detailing any homework. If an assignment is listed on the syllabus you are still responsible for completing the assignment on time.

### **Deadlines:**

Late assignments will not be accepted for grading and written feedback will be given at the instructor's discretion. You will not be eligible for an A in the class unless you turn in all assignments on time.

### **Attendance & Participation:**

This course demands class participation - attendance is mandatory. Students arriving more than 15 minutes late, or leaving before class is dismissed will be considered absent. You are allowed two (2) unexcused absences. After that, each successive absence will affect your Participation grade. Excessive tardiness will also be penalized.

### **Examinations:**

Students who do not take exams during the regularly scheduled time will receive a failing grade for exams unless they have contacted the instructor in advance to arrange for a make-up exam.

### **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 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.

### **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](http://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](mailto:csd@depaul.edu).

Lewis Center 1420, 25 East Jackson Blvd.

Phone number: (312)362-8002

Fax: (312)362-6544

TTY: (773)325.7296

### **Plagiarism:**

Plagiarism on assignments or cheating tests are serious offenses and earn the student a failing grade for class. There are no exceptions to the rule. If you are in doubt about the definitions of plagiarism, consult your student handbook.

### **Content Changes:**

Depending on time factors, the assignments projected for the term may require slight alteration or rescheduling.

## CLASS SCHEDULE

*\* Syllabus schedule is subject to change*

### **Week One 09/07 and 09/12**

Introduction to Course and Requirements, Screenwriting vs. Traditional Writing, What is a movie? Conflict

***Readings:*** Field Ch. 1-3

Assignment #1 (Due at 10/17): Buy a notebook and start writing your morning pages. Write at least two pages a day, five days a week, from now until the midterm. These pages can be about anything. They don't have to be profound or particularly insightful for that matter. They don't even have to make sense - just write. I won't read what you write in the notebook (unless you want me to).

Assignment #2 (Due 09/14): Write about three different moments in your life or someone else's that could make a good starting point for a movie. Write about why you think each of these moments could make an interesting basis for a story in a movie. Devote at least a paragraph for each moment. Bring a hard copy to class and upload to D2L as a .PDF. No Word documents. Points will be deducted for not following instructions.

### **Week Two 09/14 and 09/19**

What defines character?

***Readings:*** Field - Ch. 4-6, Riley pp. 1-11, 20-21

Assignment #3 (Due 09/21): Create a character. Write a character biography for the protagonist of your story. Be as specific as you can - the more details the better. Also, keep in mind, nothing is chiseled in stone.

Also, turn your three movie moments ideas into loglines. Include your loglines on your Assignment #3 document. You will share these ideas in class next week.

Bring a hard copy to class and upload to D2L as a .PDF. No Word documents. Points will be deducted for not following instructions.

**Quiz #1 Due 09/21**

### **Week Three 09/21 and 09/26**

Story Structure, Plot Points, Aristotelian Curve

***Readings:*** Field - Ch. 7-9, Riley - pp. 23-62

Assignment #4 (Due 9/28): Outline a feature film hitting all the major beats and plot points. Record the time into the movie that the major beats occur (the 10's).

Also, on a separate sheet, find (3) great character intros from produced screenplays and write them down. You don't need to write these yourself, you can just copy them from the screenplay. Make note of which movie they're from.

Bring a hard copy to class and upload to D2L as a .PDF. No Word documents. Points will be deducted for not following instructions.

### **Quiz #2 Due 09/28**

### **Week Four 09/28 and 10/03**

Premise, Treatments, Screenplay Format

***Readings:*** Field - Ch. 10-12, Riley - pp. 63-80

Assignment #5 (Due 10/05): Write a step outline for your story. You will present your outline to the class next week. Bring a hard copy to class and upload to D2L as a .PDF. No Word documents. Points will be deducted for not following instructions.

Assignment #6 (Due 10/05): Read a screenplay from the "Best Screenplays of All Time" link on D2L. Many screenplays can be found by a simple Google search or you can try looking for it on the "Simply Scripts" link found on D2L. It has to be a movie you've never seen. After reading the screenplay, watch the movie. You can watch the movie on Netflix, iTunes, or wherever you can find it. The DePaul Library in Lincoln Park has a pretty good selection of DVDs too. Write one-page about your impressions on reading a screenplay and then watching the movie. Were there any differences between the screenplay and the movie? Was there anything that surprised you about the way the movie turned out? Upload to D2L as a .PDF. No Word documents. Points will be deducted for not following instructions.

### **Week Five 10/05 and 10/10**

Presentations/Discussion of Step Outlines, Review for Midterm, Screenplay Format Cont'd

***Readings:*** Read assigned screenplay

Assignment #7 (Due 10/12): Write the opening scene or scenes to your movie. **Make sure it's a scene with dialogue.** It must be at least one page. Must be uploaded to D2L as a .PDF. Hard copy not necessary. Points will be deducted for not following instructions.

## **Week Six 10/12 and 10/17**

Midterm on 10/17

***Readings:*** Field - Ch. 13-15, Riley - pp. 81-102

Assignment #8 (Due 10/19): Begin writing your screenplay. The first three pages are due next week. Bring five copies to class next week. Must be uploaded to D2L as a .PDF. Hard copy not necessary. Points will be deducted for not following instructions.

**Quiz #3 Due 10/18**

## **Week Seven 10/19 and 10/24**

Dialogue

FIRST THREE PAGES OF SCREENPLAY DUE 10/18  
Bring five copies.

***Readings:*** Field - Ch. 16-18, Riley - pp. 103-113

Assignment #9 (Due 10/26): Continue writing the first draft. First seven pages due next week. Must be uploaded to D2L as a .PDF. Hard copy not necessary. Points will be deducted for not following instructions.

**Quiz #4 Due 10/25**

## **Week Eight 10/26 and 10/31**

Scenes

FIRST SEVEN PAGES DUE 10/25

***Readings:*** Riley - pp. 115-139

FIRST DRAFT (Due 11/02): Finish writing the first draft. Upload to D2L as .PDF only. Hard copy not necessary. Points will be deducted for not following instructions.

## **Week Nine 11/02 and 11/07**

INDIVIDUAL CONFERENCES  
Meet one on one to discuss final screenplay.

***Readings:*** Riley - pp. 113-119

## **Class Ten 11/09 and 11/14**



REVISING/REWRITING

Final scripts due in ONE WEEK.

Getting through writer's block.

Review of format.

**FINAL DRAFT OF SCREENPLAYS ARE DUE Nov. 21, 2017 by 11:59pm.**