

## WRITING THE EPISODIC DRAMA – WINTER 2018

DC 307, Section 501

Tuesdays, 1:30pm to 5:45pm

14 East Jackson, Room 207

Instructor: Nathan DeWitt, MFA

Office Hours: Mondays: 12:30pm to 1:00pm, 4:45 to 5:45pm, Tuesdays : 10:30am to 1:30pm (I am in and out of my office frequently during office hours so please let me know if you will be stopping by).

Office: CDM 616

[ndewitt@depaul.edu](mailto:ndewitt@depaul.edu)

Prerequisites: DC 101 or DC 201

Course Management System: D2L.

### **Course Description:**

This course examines the storytelling techniques necessary to write an hour-long television dramatic series with an emphasis on characterization and structure. Students will create an original hour-long pilot.

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 dialogue and 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. A portion of each student's script will be read aloud at least once during the course in the equivalent of a "Table Read." Polite discourse is expected at all times.

### **Course Objectives:**

Students will:

- Become familiar with the television industry, the development of ideas for scripted television series and the professional television writing process.
- Learn and practice good television storytelling technique.
- Learn and practice thorough, professional character and deadline driven story development
- Gain exposure to professional writing practices and pace
- Foster and maintain the environment of a professional writers room
- Hone, refine and advance the practices of giving and receiving thoughtful, articulate criticism
- Consistently deliver outstanding creative and analytical work

### **Papers, Homework, Notes and Scripts:**

All assignments for this course must be typed and submitted online. **NO LATE WORK IS ACCEPTED! Homework is not accepted via email unless solicited. Please do not send me assignments via email unless I ask for them first.**

Assignments are expected to be free of spelling and grammatical errors. It's YOUR work, YOU'RE responsible for its clarity.

### **Reading:**

Scripts and various other articles will be disseminated by the Professor as warranted but most of the reading in this course will consist of creative submissions from your classmates.

Students should also get in the habit of reading the entertainment industry trades, such as Variety, Deadline Hollywood and The Hollywood Reporter to better familiarize themselves with the television industry.

### **Viewing:**

Since this course focuses on studying television and television storytelling it's very important students have access to Netflix, Hulu, Amazon Prime, HBO Go, HBO Now, FX Now and/or an ability to purchase episodes on iTunes or Amazon. Please do not pirate materials for this course.

### **Attendance:**

Attendance and participation are mandatory and is worth 10% of the final grade. Students are allowed one unexcused absence per quarter in this course. A second unexcused will result in a drop in a student's participation grade by 50 points, a third unexcused absence drops this grade to 0. A fourth unexcused absence results in failure of the course.

### **A Note About Privacy:**

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:**

**The Course is out of 1,000 possible points.**

Compare Contrast Paper, 50 points

Pitches, 100 points

3 Show Breakdowns, 100 points

Show Bible, 100 points

Outline, 200 points

Script Pages, 100 points

Final Script, 250 points

Attendance and Participation, 100 points

## **Grading Scale:**

A: 93.5-100%; A-: 92.5-93.49%

B+: 89.5-92.49%; B: 83.5-89.49%; B-: 82.5-83.49%

C+: 79.5-82.49%; C: 73.5-79.49%; C-: 72.5-73.49%

D+: 69.5-72.49%; D: 63.5-69.49%; Below 63.5% is an F

Add/ Drop dates can be found here: <https://offices.depaul.edu/oa/academic-calendar/Pages/Full-Year-2017-2018.aspx>

## **THE SCHEDULE:**

### **January 2:**

#### **Week 1:**

Lectures:

TV Basics, The TV Industry

In class Viewing:

Law & Order: SVU “Payback” (pilot)

Six Feet Under “Pilot” (time permitting)

Homework:

Compare/ Contrast Paper. Watch the Pilot episode of “Breaking Bad” (Netflix) and read the pilot script. Write a 1-2 page paper (250-700 words) comparing and contrasting the script and the produced episode.

Due: January 9 by the start of class on D2L.

### **January 9:**

#### **Week 2:**

Lectures:

Development

The Professional TV Writing Process

Characters

In class Viewing:

Damages “Get me a Lawyer”

The Following “Pilot” (time permitting)

Homework:

Pitches. Prepare a pitch or a couple of pitches for the series ideas you’re thinking about writing in this course. You will have 10 minutes next class to pitch your idea to the room. Please also prepare a write-up of your pitch and submit it to D2L.

Due: January 16 by the start of class on D2L.

**January 16:****Week 3:**

Pitch Day: Students will pitch their Show ideas and receive feedback from their fellow students and the instructor. PITCHERS: Be prepared to TAKE NOTES while we discuss your idea. You will not remember everything, so write it down.

Lectures:

Story Basics

Giving and Receiving Criticism

Homework:

Three Breakdowns. Breakdown THREE pilot episodes similar in tone, style or premise to the show you plan to write in here. Format will be discussed and a handout will be provided.

Due: January 23 at the start of class on D2L.

**January 23****Week 4:**

Lectures:

Tension and the Writer's Toolbox

In class viewing:

TBD

Homework:

Show Bibles and Pilot Episode Beat Sheets, Group 1. (Format will be discussed)

Due: FRIDAY before next class by 5:00pm. (January 26 by 5:00pm)

Friday evening you'll get an email from the professor with Group 1's Show Bible's and Pilot Episode Beat Sheets. Read them all and be prepared to discuss at length on Tuesday.

**January 30:****Week 5:**

Discussion:

Group 1's Show Bibles and Pilot Episode Beat Sheets.

Lecture:

Outlines and Outline Formatting

In class viewing:

TBD

Homework:

Show Bibles and Pilot Episode Beat Sheets, Group 2. (Format will be discussed)

Due: FRIDAY before next class by 5:00pm. (February 2 by 5:00pm)

Friday evening you'll get an email from the professor with Group 2's Show Bible's and Pilot Episode Beat Sheets. Read them all and be prepared to discuss at length on Tuesday.

**February 6:****Week 6:**

Discussion:

Group 2's Show Bibles and Pilot Episode Beat Sheets.

In class viewing:

TBD, possible guest

Homework:

Outlines, Group 1. (Format will be discussed)

Due: FRIDAY before next class by 5:00pm. (February 9 by 5:00p)

Friday evening you'll get an email from the professor with Group 1's Outlines. Read them all and be

prepared to discuss at length on Tuesday.

**February 13:**

**Week 7**

Discussion:

Group 1's Outlines.

Lecture:

Script Formatting

In class viewing:

TBD, possible guest

Homework:

Outlines, Group 2. (Format will be discussed)

Due: FRIDAY before next class by 5:00pm. (February 16 by 5:00p)

Friday evening you'll get an email from the professor with Group 1's Outlines. Read them all and be prepared to discuss at length on Tuesday.

**February 20:**

**Week 8:**

Discussion:

Group 2's Outlines.

In class viewing:

TBD, possible guest

Homework:

Teasers and Act Ones, Group 1. (Format will be discussed)

Due: February 27 before next class on D2L.

**May 27:**

**Week 9:**

Table Read.

Teasers and Act Ones. We will read Group 1's pages aloud in class and discuss.

In class viewing:

TBD, possible guest.

Homework:

Teasers and Act Ones, Group 2. (Format will be discussed)

Due: March 6 before next class on D2L.

**March 6:**

**Week 10:**

Table Read.

Teasers and Act Ones. We will read Group 2's pages aloud in class and discuss.

In class viewing:

TBD, possible guest.

Homework:

Finish your script! Due FRIDAY, MARCH 16 by 9:00pm.

**FINAL:**

**Your completed PILOT SCRIPT (up to 65 pages, NO LONGER).** You will be expected to incorporate the feedback and notes given by the instructor and class into your Pilot Script. This

feedback may change your show dramatically.

**DUE ONE D2L: 9:00pm SHARP on March 16, 2018.**

## **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 PLuS 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