

**DEPAUL UNIVERSITY: SCHOOL OF CINEMATIC ARTS**

**SCWR 353/453-901 Writing the Episodic Drama**

Spring 2020

Wednesdays 5:45pm-9:00pm (CST)

Remote

**Instructor: Fatou Samba**

Office Hours: Tuesday 11:15am-12:45pm (CST), Wednesday 4:00pm-5:30pm (CST)

Drop-ins won't be available. Please schedule a Zoom meeting with me in Blue Star or by email to meet during my office hours or by appointment. Once scheduled, I will send you a link to the meeting.

Phone: I will provide my cell number during our first Zoom session

Email: [fsamba@depaul.edu](mailto:fsamba@depaul.edu)

**Course Description:**

In this course, students analyze hour-long dramatic teleplays and examines the storytelling techniques necessary to write an hour-long television dramatic series with an emphasis on characterization and structure. This course also features a specific focus on successful dramatic predecessors, various formats of hour-long drama teleplays, and the definition and significance of "show bibles". Students will create an original hour-long pilot.

**Prerequisite:** SCWR 250 or SCWR 451

**Course Outcomes:** Episodic outline, series bible, original one-hour drama pilot

**Learning Objectives:**

Upon successful completion of this course students will be able to:

- create an original one-hour drama pilot
- develop a series bible to showcase the unique tone and tenor of the show
- analyze the current market for one-hour drama series on network, cable, and streaming services
- assemble a practical episode outline for the one-hour drama series pilot
- evaluate the work of their peers and formulate helpful feedback

**Previous Course Number:** DC 307 or DC 407

**Required Software:**

Final Draft or comparable screenwriting software such as Celtx, Highland (only for Mac), and Fade In.

Students can request a free, fully functional, 18-week Final Draft 11 EDU TRIAL for one personal machine. They can only make this request once by using their .EDU school email address on the form found here:

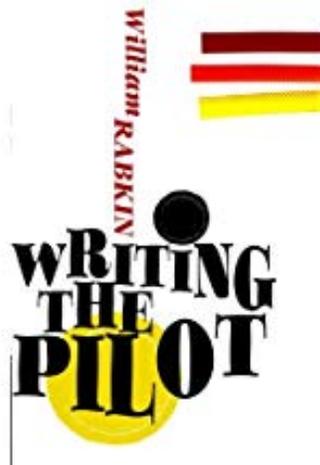
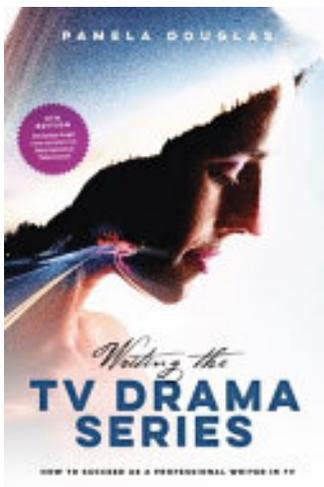
[https://trial.finaldraft.com/edutrial/?utm\\_campaign=EDU&utm\\_source=hs\\_email&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_content=85046040&hsenc=p2ANqtz-8-kB11xYScYydmJRvtQBm5ZXyv7b0L\\_430ZR2a-KrfVDZorzEy-ugtX175\\_LArq6mNPZJCP\\_RGdRaIB2AOHOySgGRbZQ&hsmi=85046040](https://trial.finaldraft.com/edutrial/?utm_campaign=EDU&utm_source=hs_email&utm_medium=email&utm_content=85046040&hsenc=p2ANqtz-8-kB11xYScYydmJRvtQBm5ZXyv7b0L_430ZR2a-KrfVDZorzEy-ugtX175_LArq6mNPZJCP_RGdRaIB2AOHOySgGRbZQ&hsmi=85046040)

### IMPORTANT!

Please note that **ONLY THE FORM AT THE ABOVE URL OFFERS THE 18-WEEK EDU TRIAL**. DO NOT request the regular 30-Day Trial or the web form will subsequently deny your EDU Trial request.

#### Recommended Textbooks:

- Writing the TV Drama Series: How to Succeed as a Professional Writer in TV by Pamela Douglas ISBN13: 9781615932931
- Writing the Pilot by William Rabkin



Any other required supplementary reading materials such as pilot scripts will be posted on D2L.

## COURSE MANAGEMENT

### Asynchronous vs. Synchronous Online Learning:

This class will be run BOTH asynchronously and synchronously.

**Asynchronous** learning involves coursework delivered by web, email, and message boards that are posted in online forums. A benefit of asynchronous learning is that you're able to be self-paced. For the purposes of this class, that means that there will be weekly pre-recorded lectures posted to D2L that you can watch whenever you like but before a given deadline.

In addition to the lectures, you will also watch AND read assigned television pilots, which we will discuss during our weekly Zoom sessions and on the Discussions Board on D2L. Ensure that you watch all of the lectures AND the assigned episode(s) BEFORE the weekly Zoom meetings, as the screenings will guide our discussion.

**Synchronous** online learning means working together at the same time. Chat rooms and online conferences are good examples of synchronous communication. For the purposes of this class, it means that we'll be conducting weekly synchronous Zoom sessions, both as a whole class and in groups. During these meetings we'll discuss the weekly screenings, pitch show and episode ideas, as well as workshop script pages through live table reads.

This is also an opportunity for you to ask any questions you may have. The meetings will always be held during the allotted class time (Tuesdays between 1:00pm and 4:15pm Central Standard Time), but not necessarily for the entire 3 hours. Be sure to check D2L every week for meeting times, as they vary.

In the event that technology fails us during any of our Zoom sessions, which is likely to happen because the whole world will be using it now, there will always be a plan B to ensure we don't miss any actual class time. If a session is interrupted, I will be sure to create a weekly discussion board that you can post your work, answers, and feedback to instead.

If I find that the Zoom sessions aren't as effective in terms of providing feedback, or we continue to experience technical difficulties, the class may become completely asynchronous. If that happens, you will post your answers to the screening prompts on the discussion board on D2L. I will also have you read each other's work on your own time and provide written feedback on the discussion board before the given deadline.

### **D2L:**

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 and you will find links to the syllabus, materials, weekly assignments, etc.

**Zoom:**

We will also be using Zoom extensively in this course. You will not need to sign up for an account. I will post weekly links to our sessions on D2L, and you should be able to simply run it through your browser to attend the meetings. You can also download the Zoom app, if preferred.

You will need internet access, a camera and a microphone to fully participate with Zoom. It is possible to use a phone or a tablet, though a computer or laptop is preferable. In addition to communicating through video conference, Zoom will also allow you to share your screen and chat with me or with each other during our sessions. When the time comes for workshopping, Zoom also allows me to send you into breakout rooms where you can workshop in groups.

Visit the link below for more information on how to use Zoom:

[https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/206175806-Top-Questions?flash\\_digest=0d96b1924dbc68c124d363d5d255d51fda1a78e2](https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/206175806-Top-Questions?flash_digest=0d96b1924dbc68c124d363d5d255d51fda1a78e2)

**Tech Support:**

Students having any tech issues this quarter should email [scaavsupport@depaul.edu](mailto:scaavsupport@depaul.edu).

This new resource is for general tech support and will serve as a unified point of contact for these issues. This email address will be monitored by during the following hours:

Monday through Friday: 8:30am – 8:30pm

Saturday: 10:00am – 6:00pm

Sunday: 12:00pm – 6:00pm

**Online Streaming Services:**

For the first few weeks, you will watch a number of television pilots based on the weekly lectures. This will require you to have access to several streaming services (Hulu, Netflix, Amazon Prime and HBO). Most of you have access to at least three of them. As such, instead of making you subscribe to the ones you don't already have, I encourage you to consider sharing your login information with no more than one person in the class, if necessary. One person may have access to a site another person doesn't and vice versa. An exchange would therefore be beneficial to both parties. You can create a temporary password if you're worried about continued use beyond this class.

That said, I want to make clear that sharing your login information for the purposes of this class is not a requirement, and I will not share who has access to what streaming site without that person's expressed consent. I am also willing to share my own login information to ensure everyone has access to every episode, if needed.

If you don't have access to all the streaming sites and would like to pay for your own subscriptions or get a free trial, that's up to the individual student.

If an episode isn't available to everyone for any reason, I'll either change the episode that week to ensure everyone has access or provide the written script instead.

Be on the lookout for any updates regarding the screenings on a weekly basis.

### **Weekly Pilot Screenings:**

- You are required to watch the weekly lectures BEFORE you watch or read the episodes for that week. This is how you will know what to look for in any given episode. The discussion prompts will be based on the lectures, so you will not be able to properly engage without having watched them.
- You are required to watch the episodes even if you've watched them before. There are two reasons for this:
  - 1: The point of the screenings is to *analyze*, something we rarely do when just watching TV for fun. As such, I want you to watch the episodes through an analytical lens, keeping in mind the standards and practices you've learned that week.
  - 2: The episode should be fresh in your mind to ensure you're able to properly participate in the post-screening discussions.
- I highly encourage you to take notes, either while watching or directly after. Bring your notes to the Zoom meeting to ensure you're prepared for the discussion. You may think you'll remember everything, but trust me, you won't.

### **Post-Screening Discussion:**

These discussions count towards your attendance and participation grade. Please come prepared to talk about the episodes based on the prompts provided by me. Again, this is why taking notes is important. The discussions offer a way for you to demonstrate that you have watched the lectures and the weekly episodes, and they're a great way for you to stay engaged in the class and get some face-to-face time with your classmates.

### **Readings:**

As a part of this class you will be required to read and analyze several pilot scripts. These will be posted on D2L. The analysis portion will consist of responding to a series of prompts about the reading on the corresponding discussion board. Failure to complete the readings and respond to the prompts will result in a reduction of your participation grade.

**Attendance:**

Attendance and participation are mandatory. An unexcused absence, which is defined as not showing up to Zoom sessions, constitutes a reduction in your participation grade. Missing 3 or more sessions will result in an automatic failure in the class.

If you have to miss a Zoom session or a deadline, make sure to plan ahead, and inform me in advance. Be sure to also let me know if you're having technical problems that are preventing you from joining the session on time. Letting me know 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.

In order to petition for an excused absence, students who miss sessions 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.

**Participation:**

At this level students should be interested in the subject of the class. The only way to see this is through participation during our Zoom sessions, either asking questions, participating in class discussions, or adding constructive comments to other student's presentations and works. Feedback is an essential part of the class, and it's the only way for you to learn and grow as a writer. Students who don't provide feedback on their classmates' work can't expect to receive feedback on theirs. Failure to participate will result in a reduction of your grade.

**Time Zones:**

Some of us will be in different time zones for the duration of Spring Quarter. All times provided by me, including Zoom sessions and due dates/times will be in Central Standard Time. It is your responsibility to ensure you are present and on time for the meetings and that you turn in your work on time no matter what time zone you're in.

**Assignments:**

All assignments for this course must be typed, submitted on D2L and saved as PDF. Assignments not saved as PDF will receive a reduction in points, and you will be asked to reupload it correctly.

Assignments will be treated like absences, meaning that without prior approval and a documented reason for missing the deadline, LATE WORK WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED. There will be no exceptions. This is a zero-tolerance policy.

**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.

**Online activities:**

For obvious reasons we will all be on our computers, tablets or phones during class sessions. That does not mean that you are free to browse online, be on social media or do other things not related to the task at hand.

If I so much as suspect you of unrelated online activities, you will be asked to leave the session, which will result in a reduction of your participation grade.

**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.

**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](http://cdm.depaul.edu/enrollment).

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.

**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

TTY: (773)325.7296

**Grading:**

Final grades will be based on the development of a Pitch Brief and Bible, an Outline and a TV Pilot, 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 without prior approval from me will result in assignment failure.

Loglines – 5%

Pitch Brief – 15%:

Beat Sheet – 5%

Series Bible – 15%

Outline – 15%

Pilot First Draft – 30%

Participation – 15%

All assignments must be typed and free of grammatical, spelling and punctuation errors. It's your work; you're responsible for its quality. All Scenes and Scripts must be in proper Screenwriting format.

**Grading Rubric:**

A	95-100	C	73-76
A-	90-95	C-	70-72
B+	87-89	D+	67-69
B	83-86	D	63-66
B-	80-82	D-	60-62
C+	77-79	F	0-60

**Have fun!**

You've just slogged through a lot of boring text about rules and practices, and while they are important, so is this last part. I love TV. I love watching TV, I love writing TV (sometimes), and I love talking about TV. I hope you do as well. Yes, this is a college/grad level class designed to make you grow as a writer and storyteller, and while doing this online isn't ideal, I still hope we all have some fun and enjoy the class as much as we can under the circumstances. This is a trying time for everyone, and I'm sure there'll be a lot of trial and error during this process. Be patient with me, and I promise to be patient with you. We're in this together!

**Course Schedule:**

**WEEK 1  
APRIL 1**

RECORDED LECTURE: TV basics, Types of Shows, Why Write a Pilot, Concept, Conflict & Theme

Be sure to watch these lectures **BEFORE** our first Zoom session. We're not meeting for the full 3 hours, which means you should have time to watch the clips during our allotted class time if you start at 5:45pm (CST)

**Synchronous Zoom Session:** Introductions, Syllabus Review, Questions

Group 1: 7:00pm-8:00pm (CST)

Group 2: 8:15pm-9:00pm (CST)

**HOMEWORK:**

3-5 loglines for TV show ideas

Upload to the Submissions Folder AND Discussions Board

PILOT READING & ANALYSIS: *Grey's Anatomy*: Pilot OR *The Good Wife*: Pilot

Choose ONE of the shows and respond to the prompts on the corresponding Discussions Board.

SCREENING & ANALYSIS: *The Shield*: Pilot (Hulu)

We'll discuss *The Shield* during our next Zoom session.

**DUE: Wednesday April 8<sup>th</sup> at 5:45pm (CST)**

**WEEK 2****APRIL 8**

**Synchronous Zoom Session:** (See below for times)

POST-SCREENING DISCUSSION: *The Shield*

WORKSHOP: Pitch Loglines

GROUP 1: 5:45pm – 7:30pm (CST)

GROUP 2: 7:45pm – 9:00pm (CST)

**HOMEWORK:**

RECORDED LECTURE: Main Characters, Supporting Characters, Ensembles

Pitch Brief & Verbal Pitch (GROUP 1)

Students will develop a Pitch Brief of the show they want to write. Be prepared to pitch your show to the class during the next zoom session using the pitch brief as a template (5-10 minutes).

Follow the instructions given by the professor and refer to the document provided in class or to the document labeled Pitch Brief.pdf in D2L. Everybody should submit their Pitch Briefs by **Tuesday April 14<sup>th</sup> at 5:45pm.**

Pitch Brief should be double-spaced and no longer than three pages, and must include:

- Title
- Premise-Log Line

- Type of show & Genre
- Theme
- Style/ Tone
- Locale
- Principal Characters
- Where you see the show going- ARE there 100 episodes in your idea?

*DO NOT WORRY about the plot of the Pilot right now. Think about the show as a concept first and foremost.*

Upload to Submissions Folder AND Discussions Board

**DUE: Tuesday April 14<sup>th</sup> at 5:45pm (CST)**

PILOT READING & ANALYSIS: *The Sopranos*: Pilot OR *Breaking Bad*: Pilot

Choose ONE of the shows and respond to the prompts on the corresponding Discussions Board.

SCREENING & ANALYSIS: *Big Little Lies*: Somebody's Dead (HBO)

GROUP 1 will discuss the screening during our next Zoom session.

GROUP 2: Respond to the prompts on the corresponding Discussion Board.

**DUE: Wednesday April 15<sup>th</sup> at 5:45pm (CST)**

### **WEEK 3**

**APRIL 15**

**Synchronous Zoom Session: 5:45-9:00pm (CST) (GROUP 1 ONLY)**

POST-SCREENING DISCUSSION: *Big Little Lies*

WORKSHOP: Pitch your show to the class (5-10 minutes)

### **HOMEWORK:**

RECORDED LECTURE: The Pilot Story, Structure, Beat Sheet, Show Bibles

Pitch Brief & Verbal Pitch (GROUP 2)

Students will develop a Pitch Brief of the show they want to write. Be prepared to pitch your show to the class during the next zoom session using the pitch brief as a template (5-10 minutes).

Follow the instructions given by the professor and refer to the document provided in class or to the document labeled Pitch Brief.pdf in D2L. Everybody should submit their Pitch Briefs by **Tuesday April 21<sup>st</sup> at 5:45pm (CST)**.

Pitch Brief should be double-spaced and no longer than three pages, and must include:

- Title
- Premise-Log Line
- Genre
- Theme
- Style/ Tone
- Locale
- Principal Characters or Character
- Where you see the show going- ARE there 100 episodes in your idea?

*DO NOT WORRY about the plot of the Pilot right now. Think about the show as a concept first and foremost.*

Upload to Submissions Folder AND Discussions Board

Create a Beat Sheet for your pilot (GROUP 1).

Upload to Submissions Folder.

**DUE: Tuesday April 21<sup>st</sup> at 5:45pm**

SCREENING & ANALYSIS: *Friday Night Lights*: Pilot (Amazon Prime)

GROUP 2 will discuss the screening during our next Zoom session.

GROUP 1: Respond to the prompts on the corresponding Discussions Board.

**DUE: Wednesday April 22<sup>nd</sup> at 5:45pm (CST)**

Begin developing your pitch brief into a Show Bible (GROUP 1) – These will be due at the end of the quarter.

**WEEK 4  
APRIL 22**

**Synchronous Zoom Session: 5:45-9:00pm (CST) (GROUP 2 ONLY)**

POST-SCREENING DISCUSSION: *Friday Night Lights*

WORKSHOP: Pitch your show to the class (5-10 minutes)

**HOMEWORK:**

RECORDED LECTURE: Outlines, Dialogue and Exposition – setting up the world of your story

Create a Beat Sheet for your pilot (GROUP 2)

Develop your Beat Sheet into an Outline (GROUP 1)

Upload to Submissions Folder ONLY.

**DUE: Tuesday April 28<sup>th</sup> at 5:45pm (CST)**

SCREENING & ANALYSIS: *Watchmen*: It's Summer and We're Running Out of Ice (HBO)

Respond to the prompts on the corresponding Discussions Board.

PILOT READING & ANALYSIS: *Stranger Things*: Pilot

Respond to the prompts on the corresponding Discussion Board.

**DUE: Wednesday April 29<sup>th</sup> at 5:45pm (CST)**

Begin developing your pitch brief into a Show Bible (GROUP 2) – These will be due at the end of the quarter.

**WEEK 5****APRIL 29**

**Synchronous Zoom Session:** (Individual meetings with me)

**HOMEWORK:**

Develop your Beat Sheet into an Outline (GROUP 2)

Upload to Submissions Folder ONLY.

**DUE: Tuesday May 5<sup>th</sup> at 5:45pm (CST)**

Write Act One of your episode, including the Teaser (if you have one) (GROUP 1)

Upload to Discussions Board.

RECORDED LECTURE: Punctuation

**DUE: Wednesday May 6<sup>th</sup> at 5:45pm (CST)**

**WEEK 6**  
**MAY 6**

**Synchronous Zoom Session: 5:45pm-9:00pm (CST) (GROUP 1)**

WORKSHOP: Teaser & Act One

I will break you up into 2 groups and send you into separate breakout rooms on Zoom.

**HOMEWORK:**

Write Act One of your episode, including the Teaser (if you have one) (GROUP 2)

Upload to Discussions Board.

**DUE: Wednesday May 13<sup>th</sup> at 5:45pm (CST)**

Revise your Act One based on the feedback from me and the class (GROUP 1)

Keep working on your bibles!

**WEEK 7**  
**MAY 13**

**Synchronous Zoom Session: 5:45pm-8:00pm (CST) (GROUP 2)**

WORKSHOP: Teaser & Act One

**HOMEWORK:**

Write Act Two of your episode (GROUP 1)

Upload to Discussions Board.

**DUE: Wednesday May 20<sup>th</sup> at 5:45pm (CST)**

Revise your Act One based on the feedback from me and the class (GROUP 2)

**WEEK 8**  
**MAY 20**

**Synchronous Zoom Session: 5:45pm-8:00pm (CST) (GROUP 1)**

WORKSHOP: Act Two

I will break you up into 2 groups and send you into separate breakout rooms on Zoom.

**HOMEWORK:**

Write Act Two of your episode (GROUP 2)

Upload to Discussion Board.

**DUE: Wednesday May 27<sup>th</sup> at 5:45pm (CST)**

Revise your Act Two based on the feedback from me and the class (GROUP 1)

**WEEK 9**

**MAY 27**

**Synchronous Zoom Session: 5:45pm-8:00pm (CST) (GROUP 2)**

WORKSHOP: Act Two

HOMEWORK: Write Act Three of your episode (BOTH GROUPS)

Upload to Discussion Board

**DUE: Wednesday June 3<sup>rd</sup> at 5:45pm (CST)**

**WEEK 10**

**JUNE 3**

**Synchronous Zoom Session: 5:45pm-8:00pm (CST) (BOTH GROUPS)**

WORKSHOP: Act Three

I will break you up into 4 groups and send you into separate breakout rooms on Zoom.

**HOMEWORK:**

Completed Pilot Scripts

**DUE: Wednesday June 10<sup>th</sup> at 5:45pm (CST)**

Completed Show Bibles

**DUE: Wednesday June 10<sup>th</sup> at 11:59pm (CST)**

Upload to Submissions Folder ONLY.

**WEEK 11**  
**JUNE 10**

No class!

**ALL PILOT SCRIPTS DUE: 5:45pm (CST)**

**ALL SHOW BIBLES DUE: 11:59pm (CST)**

**SCREENINGS AND READINGS ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE!**