

**DEPAUL UNIVERSITY: SCHOOL OF CINEMATIC ARTS**

**SCWR 250 - Introduction to Television Writing**

Spring 2020

Wednesdays 1:30pm-4:45pm (CST)

Remote

**Instructor: Fatou Samba**

Office Hours: Tuesdays 3:00-4:30pm (CST), Wednesdays and Thursdays 11:45am-1:15pm (CST) or by appointment. Drop-ins won't be available. Please schedule a Zoom meeting with me in Blue Star or by email.

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

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

**Course Description:**

This course focuses on writing the sitcom and one-hour drama television formats. Students will examine the conventions of serialized and procedural series and will learn how the collaborative dynamic of the writer's room impacts story. The lectures and workshop provide a foundation of what it takes to be a professional staff writer and culminate in crafting a spec episode of a current television series.

**Prerequisites:** SCWR 100 or SCWR 101

**Course Outcomes:** Episodic outline, spec script for an existing series

**Learning Objectives:**

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

- create a spec script for an existing television series that captures the tone and tenor of the show
- recognize the different formats for television
- employ standard format for the chosen television series
- identify elements of scene craft, character development, and narrative structure
- apply a work-flow process to their creative writing
- revise their writing based on feedback from the professor and their peers
- evaluate the work of their peers and formulate helpful feedback

**Required Textbooks:**

- None
- Any other required supplementary reading materials such as television scripts or other documents will be posted on D2L.

### Required Software:

Final Draft is the industry standard and is highly recommended. A student discount can be found here:

<https://store.finaldraft.com/final-draft-11-edu.html>

**All assignments are to be saved in PDF!**

Previous Course Number: DC 272

### Online Streaming Services:

For the first six weeks, you will watch a number of television pilots based on the weekly lectures. This will require you to have access to two streaming services: Hulu and Netflix.

If you don't already have access, both sites offer a 30-day free trial. As such, you wouldn't have to pay for more than 1-month use. Alternatively, students can watch all the required shows before the trial runs out. If you choose the latter option, be sure to ask me for the screening prompts before watching the episodes.

## 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 assigned television pilots, which we will discuss during our weekly Zoom sessions. 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 beat sheets, outlines and actual 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 (Wednesdays between 1:30pm and 4:45pm 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 at some point, I will be sure to create discussion boards 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.

### **Student Participation Guidelines**

The DePaul [Code of Student Responsibility](#) applies to online behavior as well as in-person or classroom behavior. The following are policies for the course meetings with Zoom:

- General – Sign in with your preferred first name and last name. If you do not have access to a computer or smartphone with internet access, call into class. This is not optimal; try to locate an internet-enabled device to use for this course. Please stay engaged in class activities. Close any apps on your device that are not relevant and turn off notifications.
- Video – Turn on your video when possible. It is helpful to be able to see each other, just as in an in-person class. You may elect to turn off your video if you have limited internet

bandwidth, no webcam or if you're unable to find an environment without a lot of visual distractions.

- Audio – Mute your microphone when you are not talking. Be in a quiet place when possible and turn off any music, videos, etc. in the background.
- Sharing the meeting link, ID number, or password with anyone outside of the class is prohibited.
- Sharing meeting recordings with anyone outside of the class is prohibited.

### Technology Considerations

- If you need assistance during a video call, contact DePaul's Technology Support Center at 312.362.8765.
- If connectivity issues impact your audio/video quality, try turning off your camera.
- If you're experiencing issues with Zoom, you can use a site like [speedtest.net](https://www.speedtest.net) to check your internet connection speed. A good minimum upload/download speed for video conferencing is at least 1.5Mbps.

### Participation Expectations

- Treat video conferences as you would a regular class session on campus. Be prepared to be attentive and engaged during meetings.
- Be on time or notify your instructor if you will be late or unable to attend.
- Minimize distractions, such as televisions and cell phones, when possible.
- Don't engage in other activities during sessions (driving, cooking, cleaning, etc.)
- If you think you might have trouble actively participating in meetings, let your instructor know in advance, if possible.

If students would like pro accounts to host meetings of their own, they can follow these steps.

- Go to [depaul.zoom.us](https://depaul.zoom.us) and sign in with your Campus Connect credentials.
- Visit [zoom.us/download](https://zoom.us/download) to download the Zoom Client for Meetings. You can also download the mobile and desktop apps from this site.
- When using the app, log in using your new Username@depaul.edu email address and existing Campus Connect password. Choose the "Sign in with SSO" option and specify the "depaul.zoom.us" domain, if prompted.

If you have trouble with the link or app, you can also call a phone number to listen in on the meeting. Call one of these numbers:

+1 646 876 9923  
 +1 669 900 6833  
 +1 301 715 8592

Then, enter our Meeting ID.

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

### **Weekly Pilot Screenings:**

- You are required to watch the weekly lectures BEFORE you watch 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 meetings 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.

**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, 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.

**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 also result in a reduction of your participation grade.

**Time Zones:**

Some of us will be in different time zones for the duration of the 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, free of grammatical, spelling and punctuation errors. It's your work; you're responsible for its quality.

Assignments must be 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.**

**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.

**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.

**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

**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.

**Grading:**

Show breakdowns: 15%, Series overview and pitch: 10%, Loglines: 5%, Beat Sheet: 10%, Outline: 15%, Final script: 30%, Class Participation: 15%

**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

Students in all undergraduate classes, with the exception of those in CEO cohort programs, may opt to change the grading basis for any or all of their courses to Pass/D/Fail. A grade of Pass (P) will indicate that the student's work met expectations for a grade of at least C-. Work that would merit a grade of D+ or D in the traditional grading basis would still earn a D+ or D. Work that does not merit a passing grade will earn a Fail (F). The Pass/D/Fail grading option may apply to any graduation requirement, including courses in the major, minor, Liberal Studies Program or open electives.

<https://resources.depaul.edu/coronavirus/faqs/Pages/classes-academics-students.aspx>

### **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 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 some 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 SEPTEMBER 9**

RECORDED LECTURE: The Spec Episode, Spec Dos and Don'ts

Be sure to watch these BEFORE our first Zoom session. We're not meeting for the full 3 hours, which means you have time to watch the clips before we meet if you start at 1:30pm CST.

#### **Synchronous Zoom Session: 3:00pm-4:45pm (CST)**

Introductions: Who am I? Who are you? What are you watching right now? Favorite shows. What show(s) are you considering writing a spec script for?

Syllabus Overview, Questions about the class & lectures.

#### **HOMEWORK:**

Decide what show you want to spec and email me letting me know which one you choose.

READING: Television Format & Style Standards (on D2L)

RECORDED LECTURE: TV Basics

SCREENINGS & ANALYSIS: RAMY: Between the Toes (Hulu), SEX EDUCATION: Pilot (Netflix)

Be sure to watch every lecture and TV episode BEFORE our next Zoom session.

**DUE: Wednesday September 16<sup>th</sup> at 1:30pm (CST)**

**WEEK 2**

**SEPTEMBER 16**

**Synchronous Zoom Session: 1:30pm (CST)**

Questions about the lecture

POST-SCREENING DISCUSSION: RAMY & SEX EDUCATION

**HOMEWORK:**

Write an Overview of your chosen series and prepare a 5-10-minute verbal Zoom Pitch to the class based on this overview. You do not have to decide what your episode is going to be about yet. The point is to simply introduce the show and the characters to people who may not be familiar with it. (example provided on D2L)

Upload your written overview to the Submissions Folder AND the Discussion Board for everyone to access.

Write a Pilot Breakdown of your chosen series (example provided on D2L).

RECORDED LECTURE: Plot & Story, A, B & C stories, Loglines

SCREENING & ANALYSIS: THIS IS US: Pilot (Hulu), BLACK-ISH (Hulu)

**DUE: Wednesday September 23<sup>rd</sup> at 1:30pm (CST)**

**WEEK 3**

**SEPTEMBER 23**

**Synchronous Zoom Session: 1:30pm (CST)**

Questions about the lecture

POST-SCREENING DISCUSSION: THIS IS US, BLACK-ISH

WORKSHOP: 5-10-minute pitches of chosen TV series

**HOMEWORK:**

Write 3-5 loglines for different episode ideas you may want to write for your chosen series. Be prepared to pitch them to the class. Upload to Submissions Folder AND Discussion Board.

2<sup>nd</sup> Episode Breakdown of chosen series

RECORDED LECTURE: Characterization, Story Structure, Beat Sheets

SCREENING & ANALYSIS: BREAKING BAD: Pilot, NEVER HAVE I EVER: Pilot (Netflix)

**DUE: Wednesday September 30<sup>th</sup> at 1:30pm (CST)**

**WEEK 4**

**SEPTEMBER 30**

**Synchronous Zoom Session: 1:30pm (CST)**

Questions about the lecture

WORKSHOP: Logline Pitches

POST SCREENING DISCUSSION: BREAKING BAD, NEVER HAVE I EVER

**HOMEWORK:**

Create a Beat Sheet for your episode. Upload to Submissions Folder AND Discussion Board.

3<sup>rd</sup> Episode Breakdown of chosen series

**DUE: Wednesday October 7<sup>th</sup> at 1:30pm (CST)**

RECORDED LECTURE: Outlines

Watch/read the pilot episodes of your group members' shows by Wednesday October 21st.

**WEEK 5**

**OCTOBER 7**

**Synchronous Zoom Sessions: 1:30pm (CST)**

WORKSHOP: Beat Sheets (in groups)

**HOMEWORK:**

Develop your Beat Sheet into an Outline. Upload to Submissions Folder AND Discussion Board.

READING: David Mamet (on D2L) (Do the reading before you begin work on your outline)

**DUE: Wednesday October 14<sup>th</sup> at 1:30pm (CST)**

Watch/read the pilot episodes of your group members' shows by Wednesday October 21st.

**WEEK 6**

**OCTOBER 14**

**Synchronous Zoom Session (in groups): 1:30pm (CST)**

WORKSHOP: Outlines (in groups)

**HOMEWORK:**

Write Act One of your episode, including the teaser if you have one (1-hour) (10 pages minimum)

Upload to Discussion Board only.

Watch/read the pilot episodes of your group members' shows.

**DUE: Wednesday October 21<sup>st</sup> at 1:30pm (CST)**

**WEEK 7**

**OCTOBER 21**

**Synchronous Zoom Session: 1:30pm (CST)**

WORKSHOP: Table read Act One (1-hour dramas)

**HOMEWORK:**

Write Act One of your episode, including the teaser if you have one (sitcom) (10 pages minimum).

Write Act Two of your episode (1-hour)

Upload to Submissions Folder AND Discussion Board.

**DUE: Wednesday October 28<sup>th</sup> at 1:30pm (CST)**

**WEEK 8**

**OCTOBER 28**

**Synchronous Zoom Session: 1:30pm (CST)**

WORKSHOP: Table read Act One (Sitcom)  
Table read Act Two (1-hour)

**HOMEWORK:**

Write Act Two of your episode (sitcom)  
Write Act Three of your episode (1-hour)

Upload to Submissions Folder AND Discussion Board.

**DUE: Wednesday November 4<sup>th</sup> at 1:30pm (CST)**

**WEEK 9**

**NOVEMBER 4**

**Synchronous Zoom Session: 1:30pm (CST)**

WORKSHOP: Table read Act Two (Sitcom)  
Table read Act Three (1-hour)

**HOMEWORK:**

Write Act Three of your episode (sitcom)  
Write Act Four of your episode (1-hour)

Upload to Submissions Folder AND Discussions Board.

**DUE: Wednesday November 11<sup>th</sup> at 1:30pm (CST)**

**WEEK 10**

**NOVEMBER 11**

**Synchronous Zoom Session: 1:30pm (CST)**

WORKSHOP: Table read Act Three (Sitcom)  
Table read Act Four (1-hour)

**HOMEWORK:**

Revise & complete your episode. This includes Acts 5 & 6 for applicable shows.

Upload the entire Spec Episode to Submissions Folder only.

**DUE: Wednesday November 18<sup>th</sup> at 1:30pm**

**WEEK 11  
NOVEMBER 18**

No Class! All SPEC SCRIPTS DUE at **1:30pm**.

**The syllabus is subject to change. You will be notified of any such changes. Be sure to check D2L and emails frequently for the latest updates.**