DePaul University School of Cinematic Arts

SCWR 400-701: Foundations of Screenwriting

Autumn, 2021
Wednesday 5:45-9:00 PM, 14 East Jackson, #507
Professor Brad Riddell: brad.riddell@depaul.edu
Office Hours online only: Tues and Weds 2PM-5PM, and by appointment.
Office hours link: https://depaul.zoom.us/my/riddell

Description:

Students begin their screenwriting journey with a strong foundation in the basic building blocks of solid, engaging storytelling. Students will mine their own lives to create memorable stories, characters, and settings. Films and other creative works analyzed in this class will reflect creators and stories from underrepresented groups, highlighting a wide range of diverse backgrounds and intersectional identities. Additionally, students will learn basic screenwriting skills such as character development, constructing atmosphere, and the fundamental components of a scene.

Course Outcomes:

In addition to completing several writing assignments, students are expected to develop, outline, and write a short screenplay.

Learning Objectives:

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

- employ standard screenplay format
- identify elements of scene craft, character development, & narrative structure
- identify how diverse backgrounds and perspectives uniquely affect story and character development across multiple genres
- demonstrate expanded visual writing skills
- apply a work-flow process to their creative writing
- produce original writing projects on a deadline
- assess their own work and that of their peers

Textbooks and Printed Resources

"Tools of Screenwriting" by Howard & Mabley ISBN-10: 0312119089 (Required)
"The Hollywood Standard" by Christopher Riley ISBN-10: 1932907637 (Required)
Additional readings provided by instructor.

Screenwriting Software:

You will be required to use screenwriting software. Do not purchase yet if you have not already. We will discuss this in class. **All assignments are delivered in PDF.**

Course Management:

This course is housed and managed on **D2L**. Everything is there, so check it out.

Course Schedule:

Week 1: September 8
- Welcome and course introductions.
- LECTURE: What is a Screenplay + Visual Storytelling
- IN-CLASS: ASSIGMENT: Mood and Atmosphere
- ASSIGNMENT: Preparation for a Date, Group 1 Presentation
- READING:
  - *Tools of Screenwriting:* About Screenwriting and Basic Storytelling (3-40), Characterization (63-65), Planting & Payoff, Elements of the Future (pages 72-76), Visuals (88-90)
  - *The Hollywood Standard:* Forward, Introduction, and Quick Start Guide (through page 27)*,* Shot Headings (29-62), Direction (63-80)
  - *Script Frenzy*

Week 2: September 15
- LECTURE: Character Development
- IN-CLASS ASSIGNMENT: Memory
- Group 1 Presentation
- WORKSHOP: Preparation for a Date
- ASSIGNMENT: Roommates, Group 2 Presentation
- READING:
  - *Tools of Screenwriting:* Protagonist, Conflict, Obstacles (43-49*),* Activity & Action (81-83), Dramatic Irony (68-70), Dramatic Scene (91-94), Exposition (60-62)
  - *Mamet* (on D2L)

Week 3: September 22
- LECTURE: Writing Scenes with Conflict, Goals, Stakes, and Urgency
- IN-CLASS ASSIGNMENT: Experience
- Group 2 Presentation
- WORKSHOP: Roommates
- ASSIGNMENT: Interrogation Scene, Group 3 Presentation
- READING:
  - *Tools of Screenwriting:* Dialogue (84-87)
  - *The Hollywood Standard:* Dialogue (81-102), Transitions, Punctuation (103-111) Special Pages (131-139)

Week 4: September 29
- LECTURE: Dialogue
- IN-CLASS ASSIGNMENT: Observation
- Group 3 Presentation
- WORKSHOP: Interrogation Scene
- ASSIGNMENT: Seduction Scene, Group 4 Presentation
- READING:

Tools of Screenwriting: Premise, Main Tension, Theme, Unity (49-59), Outlining, Plausibility (76-80)

Week 5: October 6
- LECTURE: Exposition
- IN-CLASS ASSIGNMENT: Adaptation
- Group 4 Presentation
- WORKSHOP: Seduction Scene
- ASSIGNMENT: The Wrongest Person, Group 5 Presentation + Group 1 Presentation
- AT-HOME SCREENING: Short Films Part 1

Week 6: October 13
- LECTURE: Writing the Short Script Part I
- IN-CLASS ASSIGNMENT: Openers
- WORKSHOP: The Wrongest Person
- Group 5 Presentation + Group 1 Presentation
- ASSIGNMENT: Three Pitches + Loglines for Short Screenplays
- AT-HOME SCREENING: Short Films Part 2

Week 7: OCTOBER 20
- LECTURE: Writing the Short Script Part 2
- WORKSHOP: Pitches and Loglines
- Group 2 Presentation
- ASSIGNMENT: Outline for Short Script, Group 2 Presentation
- AT-HOME SCREENING: Short Films Part 3

Week 8: October 27
- LECTURE: The First Draft
- Group 2 Presentation
- WORKSHOP: Short Script Outline
- ASSIGNMENT: First Draft of Short Screenplay, Group 3 Presentation
- AT-HOME SCREENING: Short Films Part 4

Week 9: November 3
- LECTURE: Rewriting
- Group 3 Presentation
- WORKSHOP: First Drafts of Short Scripts
- ASSIGNMENT: Second Draft Short Scripts, Group 4 & 5 Presentations
- READING:
  - *The War of Art* on D2L
  - *Tools of Screenwriting:* Rewriting (95-97)
- AT-HOME SCREENING: Short Films Part 5

Week 10: November 10
- LECTURE: Process and Professionalism
- Group 4 & 5 Presentations
- WORKSHOP: Revised Short Scripts
- ASSIGNMENT: Final Draft Short Script

Week 11: November 17 at 5:30 PM
Final Draft of Short Screenplay due on D2L

Assignments

Scene Assignments
You will write a total of five scene exercises throughout the quarter. Specific guidelines for each exercise will be provided on D2L. You are expected to submit a copy to your group's discussion board and submissions.

Each scene assignment is 10% of your final grade (50% in total). Please save files as a PDF, and use your last name and the name of the assignment: YourNameInterrogationScene.pdf

You will be graded on:

- Style and Format
- Creative execution of the assignment within the given parameters
- Use of dramatic techniques presented in class and the readings

Presentations

Each workshop group will select a screenplay or pilot from those provide by the professor and make a five-minute presentation on intriguing elements of format and style within the work. Each group will also lead one discussion covering a selection of short films curated by the professor. You will be graded on the quality of discussion, organization of content, and adhering to time limits.

Short Script First Draft
You will submit two drafts of a short script that is to be no longer than 12 pages. Here are some things to keep in mind:

- Show don't tell. Show don't tell. Show don't tell. Show don't tell.
- Spelling, grammar, and punctuation count - proofread your work, proofread it again, and then proofread it one more time just to be sure.
- Standard screenwriting formatting is required.
- You must include a properly-formatted cover page.
- Re-read your narrative for clarity - it may be a good idea to have a friend look over the script as well.

- Action description should be lean - only revealing what can be heard/seen on screen.
- Develop a clear beginning, middle, and end.
- Avoid exposition-heavy dialogue - Always ask yourself, "Is there a way I can communicate this information visually?"
- Don't wait until the last minute. It takes time to develop a solid narrative - you won't be able to do it in one night and achieve the grade you want.

Short Script Second Draft
The final script is to be no longer than 12 pages. Points to consider:

- The second draft of your script should read as a marked improvement over your first effort. Correcting typos and making small tweaks is not a rewrite.
- Use notes you received from the instructor, workshops, and your own self-evaluation to craft your revised draft. Get outside opinions if you can.
- Characters, dialogue, structure and scene work should be completely reevaluated and enhanced.
- Spelling, grammar, and punctuation count even more. Proofread again.

Short Script Final Draft
This draft should be 12 pages or less, error-free, ready to shoot, and have addressed all issues discussed in class. It should represent your very best effort.

Grading Policy
Scene Assignments: 10 points each (50 total)
Presentations: 5 points each (10 total)
Short Loglines: 5 points
Short Script Outline: 5 points
Short Script Draft 1: 10 points
Final Script Draft: 20 Points

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.

A indicates excellence, B indicates good work, C indicates satisfactory work, D work is unsatisfactory, F is substantially unsatisfactory. Late work is rarely accepted.

Academic Support Resources
https://resources.depaul.edu/coronavirus/faqs/Pages/classes-academics-students.aspx

COVID Social Distance and Mask Policy

Keeping our DePaul community safe is of utmost importance in the pandemic. Students, faculty, and staff are expected to (1) wear a cloth face covering at all times while on campus, both inside buildings and outside on the grounds; (2) maintain physical distance (at least six feet) in all DePaul spaces (including classrooms, meeting

rooms, hallways, rest rooms, offices, and outdoor spaces); (3) conduct a daily self-screening process for the symptoms of COVID-19 using the #CampusClear app before coming to campus; (4) complete the online Health and Safety Guidelines for Returning to Campus training; and (5) abide by the City of Chicago Emergency Travel Order. By doing these things, we are Taking Care of DePaul, Together. The recommendations may change as local, state, and federal guidelines evolve. Students who have a medical reason for not complying should register with DePaul's Center for Student with Disabilities (CSD).

Food and Drink

Eating and drinking in class are not allowed at this time. Students needing accommodation should contact the Center for Students with Disabilities. Faculty needing accommodation should contact Human Resources. We will take at least one break in class to allow for fresh air, hydration, and eating.

Attendance:
Students without an excused absence forfeit their assignment grade for the first two classes they miss. Three absences will constitute course failure.

Excused Absence:
To petition for an excused absence, students who miss class 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.

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:
Student Center, LPC, Suite #370
Phone number: (773)325.1677

Creative Subject Matter and Civil Discourse:
DePaul is a community that thrives on open discourse that challenges students, both intellectually and personally, to be socially responsible leaders. Controversial or sensitive subject matter may find its way into our conversations. Students have every right to express themselves artistically and address challenging issues so long as the work itself does not glorify hate, discrimination, or violence of any kind – or involve the professor or another member of the class without their given permission. Conversely, it is the right of the audience, or in this case, the class, to express how work makes them

feel, and to do so respectfully and constructively. If you become uncomfortable with a conversation for any reason, you may be excused from the remainder of class without penalty. It is the expectation that all dialogue in this course will be civil and respectful of the dignity of each student. Any instances of disrespect or hostility will 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 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.

Changes to Syllabus:
This syllabus is subject to change as necessary during the quarter. If a change occurs, it will be thoroughly addressed during class, posted under Announcements in D2L, and students will be notified via email.

Online Course Evaluations:
Instructor and course evaluations provide valuable feedback that can improve teaching and learning. The greater the level of participation, the more useful the results. As students, you are in the unique position to view the instructor over time. Your comments about what works and what doesn't can help faculty build on the elements of the course that are strong and improve those that are weak. Isolated comments from students and instructors' peers may also be helpful, but evaluation results based on high response rates may be statistically reliable (believable). As you experience this course and material, think about how your learning is impacted. Your honest opinions about your experience in and commitment to the course and your learning may help improve some components of the course for the next group of students. Positive comments also show the department chairs and college deans the commitment of instructors to the university and teaching evaluation results are one component used in annual performance reviews (including salary raises and promotion/tenure). The evaluation of the instructor and course provides you an opportunity to make your voice heard on an important issue – the quality of teaching at DePaul. Don't miss this opportunity to provide feedback!

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism:
This course will be subject to the academic integrity policy passed by faculty. More information can be found at http://academicintegrity.depaul.edu/. 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.

Withdrawal:

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.

Retroactive Withdrawal:

This policy exists to assist students for whom extenuating circumstances prevented them from meeting the withdrawal deadline. During their college career students may be allowed one medical/personal administrative withdrawal and one college office administrative withdrawal, each for one or more courses in a single term. Repeated requests will not be considered. Submitting an appeal for retroactive withdrawal does not guarantee approval.

College office appeals for CDM students must be submitted online via MyCDM. The deadlines for submitting appeals are as follows:

Autumn Quarter: Last day of the last final exam of the subsequent winter quarter
Winter Quarter: Last day of the last final exam of the subsequent spring quarter
Spring Quarter: Last day of the last final exam of the subsequent autumn quarter
Summer Terms: Last day of the last final exam of the subsequent autumn quarter

Incomplete:

An incomplete grade is a special, temporary grade that may be assigned by an instructor when unforeseeable circumstances prevent a student from completing course requirements by the end of the term and when otherwise the student had a record of satisfactory progress in the course. CDM policy requires the student to initiate the request for incomplete grade before the end of the term in which the course is taken. Prior to submitting the incomplete request, the student must discuss the circumstances with the instructor. Students may initiate the incomplete request process in MyCDM. All incomplete requests must be approved by the instructor of the course and a CDM Associate Dean. Only exceptions cases will receive such approval. If approved, students are required to complete all remaining course requirement independently in consultation with the instructor by the deadline indicated on the incomplete request form. By default, an incomplete grade will automatically change to a grade of F after two quarters have elapsed (excluding summer) unless another grade is recorded by the instructor. An incomplete grade does NOT grant the student permission to attend the same course in a future quarter.