DEPAUL UNIVERSITY: SCHOOL OF CINEMATIC ARTS

SCWR 400-704: Foundations of Screenwriting
Fall 2021
Wednesdays 5:45 – 9:00PM
CDM, Room 708 (243 S Wabash Ave)

Instructor: Fatou Samba
Office Hours (ONLINE ONLY):
Tuesdays 12:00pm-3:00pm - Zoom Link: https://depaul.zoom.us/j/93068240493
Thursdays 3:45pm-5:15pm - Zoom Link: https://depaul.zoom.us/j/92536752447

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.

Email: fsamba@depaul.edu
Phone: 872-302-7209

Course 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 in order to create memorable stories, characters, and settings. Additionally, students will learn basic screenwriting skills such as character development, constructing atmosphere, and the fundamental components of a scene.

Prerequisites: None

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, and narrative structure
- 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

Required Software:

Final Draft or comparable screenwriting software such as Celtx, Highland (only for Mac), and Fade In.
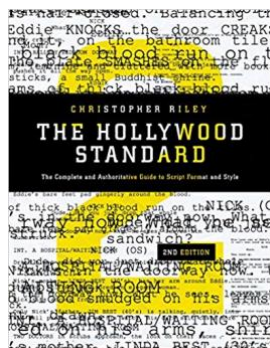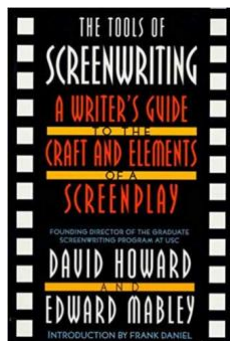
A student discount can be found here: https://store.finaldraft.com/final-draft-12-edu.html

All assignments are to be saved as PDF!

<u>Required Textbooks</u>

The Tools of Screenwriting by David Howard and Edward Mabley ISBN: 9780312119089

The Hollywood Standard by Christopher Riley ISBN: 9781932907636

<u>Previous Course Number:</u> DC 501

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COURSE MANAGEMENT

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<u>Covid-19 Health and Safety Precautions</u>

Keeping our DePaul community safe is of utmost importance in the pandemic. Students, faculty and staff are expected to (1) wear a mask as required at all times while indoors on campus; (2) no eating and drinking in classrooms; (3) keep current with their COVID-19 vaccinations or exemptions; (4) stay home if sick; (5) participate in any required COVID-19 testing; (6) complete the online Health and Safety Guidelines for Returning to Campus training; and (7) abide by the City of Chicago Emergency Travel Advisory. By doing these things, we are Taking Care of DePaul, Together. The recommendations may change as local, state, and federal guidelines evolve. Students who do not abide by the mask requirement may be subject to the student conduct process and will be referred to the Dean of Students Office. Students who have a medical reason for not complying with any requirements should register with DePaul's Center for Student with Disabilities (CSD).

<u>Course Management</u>

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.

Attendance:

Attendance and participation are mandatory. An unexcused absence, which is defined as not showing up to class or individual meetings, 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 class or a deadline, plan ahead and inform me in advance. 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 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.

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. Any assignment submitted after the deadline will automatically receive zero points. As such, once the deadline has passed, don't bother submitting. To avoid this, I suggest not waiting until the last minute to upload your homework. Be sure that you're also submitting the correct assignment. If for some reason D2L is giving you a hard time uploading, email it to me instead.

Three Creative Assignments (15% of final grade)
These exercises will be based on the screenwriting conventions we cover in class. Specific guidelines for each exercise will be provided after the lectures and will be critiqued in class the following week. Each assignment is 5% of your final grade (15% in total).

Loglines for Short Script (5% of final grade)
Develop three premise ideas for your short film. You will eventually develop one of these ideas into a short screenplay. Each premise should include character (protagonist), conflict (what is the central conflict of the narrative?) and a sense of resolution. Be mindful of the aim and limitations of the short film medium.

Outline or Treatment of Short Script (15%)
Taking your chosen idea, please develop a scene-by-scene outline for your short film. Use your plot points!

Short Script Draft I (15% of final grade)

A few things to keep in mind as you write your scripts:

- 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.
- Re-read your narrative for clarity - It may be a good idea to have a friend/family member look over the script as well.
- Standard screenwriting formatting is required. Refer to texts for the course, the scripts we read in class, and your instructor for assistance.
- Action description should be lean - Only revealing what can be heard/seen on screen.
- Use your plot points as a guide.
- Avoid exposition heavy dialogue - Always ask yourself, "Is there a way I can communicate this information visually?"
- Your script must be at least 6 pages (not including title page) but should not exceed 10 pages.
- Ask questions if you need help.
- 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.

Please bring a copy of the assignment to class for workshop and submit a copy to the corresponding Submissions link on D2L.

Rewrite of Short Script (15% of final grade)

A few things to keep in mind as you REWRITE your scripts:

- The rewrite of your script be a marked improvement over your first draft.

- You must include a cover page.

- Use notes you received from the instructor, workshops and self-evaluation in order to craft your revised draft.

- Characters, dialogue, structure and scene work should be completely reevaluated and enhanced.

- 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. Refer to the textbook for this class, the scripts we read in class, and your instructor for assistance.

- Your script must be at least 6 pages (not including the title page) but should not exceed 10 pages.

Final Draft Due (15% of your final grade)

Workshops:
By enrolling in this course, you agree to share your ideas and writings with the professor and other students in the class. That means that you must submit your assignments on time so other students may read and critique them in class. It also means that you have to participate in session discussions of your classmates' work that entails enthusiastic participation and offering constructive criticism. Feedback is an essential part of the writing process. If you are not willing to do this, reconsider taking this course.

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. 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.

Workshop Guidelines

- First and foremost, a workshop is about the piece of writing, not the writer. Both the writer and those critiquing the piece need to keep in mind that the goal is to make the writing the best it possibly can be.

- Workshops are never destructive. They are constructive. Writing is never "bad." The writing is addressed so that it can get stronger.

- We will always start with something that is working in the piece.

- Then we will go to the aspects that are not yet fully developed or that are not quite working yet.

- The writer must stay quiet during the workshopping of her or his piece.

- If the majority of the readers agree on a particular element of the piece that is working or not working, listen. If the readers are completely divided, it simply may just be a matter of opinion.

- The writer should always listen, but ultimately must trust his or her gut. The writer's name will be on the page when all is said and done.

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.

Inclusivity Statement:

We are committed to the presence and contributions of all persons regardless of age, culture, abilities, bodies, ethnic origin, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, marital status, nationality, race, religion, or socioeconomic status. We believe that prejudice, oppression, and discrimination are detrimental to the growth of a rich and vibrant learning community. We believe that learning communities are filled with diverse participants, and that supporting the visibility of such diversity enhances the experiences of all community members. As such, this class environment values inclusiveness and the maintenance of a safe and accountable space for all participants.

Maintaining a safe and accountable environment means that we commit to treating each other with respect and care. It also means that it's understandable to make mistakes, and that we hold each other and ourselves accountable as we grow, by acknowledging and appreciating the diversity of voices and experiences within our community and commit to ensuring that all are welcome in this learning classroom.

We have in this space a boundary for language and behavior that steps on, infringes on, and or specifically harms the mental and emotional wellbeing of all participants in this class (students and teachers) and when such things appear, we will stop, when able, to address.

To report a concern about another student's conduct: https://offices.depaul.edu/student-affairs/student-life/student-conduct/Pages/default.aspx

To report a concern about faculty conduct: https://offices.depaul.edu/human-resources/employee-relations/equal-opportunity/Pages/Discrimination-and-Harassment.aspx

Students can also contact the Dean of Students Office with any concerns. https://offices.depaul.edu/student-affairs/about/departments/Pages/dos.aspx

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.

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.

Phone number: (312)362-8002
TTY: (773)325.7296

Preferred Name & Gender Pronouns
Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender, gender variance, and nationalities. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the quarter so that I may make appropriate changes to my records. Please also note that students may choose to identify within the University community with a preferred first name that differs from their legal name and may also update their gender. The preferred first name will appear in University related systems and documents except where the use of the legal name is necessitated or required by

University business or legal need. For more information and instructions on how to do so, please see the Student Preferred Name and Gender Policy: https://offices.depaul.edu/secretary/policies-procedures/policies/Pages/default.aspx

Resources for Students in Need of Support

Safety and Mental health safety are important. If you find yourself in a state of distress, depression, or unsafe circumstances, please make use of any of the following resources should you seek counseling.

DEPAUL STUDENT COUNSELING
Full time and Part time DePaul students may schedule appointments with the University Counseling Service Info here: https://offices.depaul.edu/student-affairs/support-services/counseling/Pages/default.aspx

The front desk staff is working remotely and will answer your call directly. If they are taking another call, please leave a message and your call will be returned within a business day. **If you would like to be contacted by a counselor please call** (773) 325-7779 or (312) 362-6923.

OFFICE OF HEALTH PROMOTION AND WELLNESS
Health Promotion and Wellness (HPW) provides holistic education, support and resources for individuals to establish and sustain long-term, healthy behaviors.

In light of the COVID-19 impact on the University, the Office of Health Promotion and Wellness programs and services remain open and can be accessible to students remotely. Students can meet with a staff member via Zoom. Appointments can be requested by calling 773-325-7129 or completing this online intake form.

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!

Grading:

Attendance and Participation: 20% (includes discussions, workshops, Morning Pages, and Spark Journals)
First Three Creative Assignments: 15%
Loglines: 5%
Outline/Treatment of Short: 15%
First Draft: 15%
Second Draft: 15%
Final Draft: 15%

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 in some respect, F is substantially unsatisfactory work.

Course Schedule:

Week 1, September 8th
Course introduction, Formatting, Storytelling basics, Developing your Voice,

Read: *The Tools of Screenwriting* from page ix through page 27
 The Hollywood Standard: from xvii through page 27, 29-62, 63-80

Creative Assignment 1: (Storytelling)
Due: Tuesday September 14th at 12:00pm. Upload to submissions folder & discussions board.

Spark Journal and Morning Pages due next class

Week 2, September 15th
Conflict and Character
Workshop: Storytelling

Read: *The Tools of Screenwriting* pages 28-29, 43-54, 63-76, 78-83
 The Hollywood Standard: 131-139

Creative Assignment II: (Conflict and Characters)
Due: Tuesday September 21st at 12:00pm. Upload to submissions folder & discussions board.

Spark Journal and Morning Pages due next class

Week 3, September 22nd
Visual Storytelling and Dialogue
Workshop: Conflict and Character

Read: *The Tools of Screenwriting*, pages 30 through 39; 60 through 62; 84 through 90

The Hollywood Standard: 81-111

Creative Assignment III: (Visual Storytelling and Dialogue)
Due: Tuesday September 28th at 12:00pm. Upload to submissions folder & discussions board.

Spark Journal and Morning Pages due next class

Week 4, September 29th
Putting it all together: Writing the dramatic scene (including loglines)
Workshop: Visual Storytelling/Dialogue

Read: *The Tools of Screenwriting*, pages 91 through 94
Assignment: THREE LOGLINES for Short Films
Due: Wednesday October 6th at 5:45pm. Upload to submissions folder & discussions board.

Week 5, October 6th
Writing the Short Film (including step outlines and treatments)
Workshop: Pitch Loglines

Read: *The Tools of Screenwriting*, pages 76 through 78; pages 55 through 59.
Assignment: STEP OUTLINES or TREATMENTS for short films
Due: Tuesday October 12th at 12:00pm. Upload to submissions folder ONLY.

Week 6, October 13th
Remote Zoom Session: INDIVIDUAL MEETINGS WITH ME

Come prepared to discuss your STEP OUTLINE or TREATMENT for your short film

Assignment – FIRST DRAFT of short scripts
Due: Wednesday October 20th at 5:45pm**.** Upload to submissions folder & discussions board.

CAST ALL READERS BEFORE CLASS.

Week 7, October 20th

Workshop: FIRST DRAFT of short script (Group 1)

Assignment: FIRST DRAFT of short script (Group 2)
Due: Wednesday October 27th at 5:45pm. Upload to submissions folder & discussions board.

CAST ALL READERS BEFORE CLASS.

Week 8, October 27th
Workshop: FIRST DRAFT of short script (Group 2)

Assignment: FIRST DRAFT of short scripts (Group 3)
Due: Wednesday November 3rd at 5:45pm**.** Upload to submissions folder & discussions board.

CAST ALL READERS BEFORE CLASS.

Week 9, November 3rd
Workshop: FIRST DRAFT of short scripts (Group 3)

Read: *The Tools of Screenwriting*, pages 95 through 97

Assignment: ALL SECOND DRAFTS of short scripts
Due: Wednesday November 10th at 5:45pm. Upload to submissions folder & discussions board.

CAST ALL READERS BEFORE CLASS.

Week 10 November 10th
Workshop: ALL SECOND DRAFTS (workshop in groups)

Assignment: THIRD AND FINAL DRAFTS
Due: Wednesday, November 17th at 5:45pm. Upload to submissions folder ONLY.

Week 11 November 17th
FINAL scripts due, Wednesday November 17th at the beginning of class.

Alterations:

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.