

DePaul University School of Cinematic Arts

SCWR 390: Topics in Screenwriting

Writing the Sci-Fi Pilot

Spring, 2023

Wednesday, 1:30-4:45 PM, Lewis Center 1007

Professor Brad Riddell (he/him): brad.riddell@depaul.edu

Office Hours: Monday 12PM-5PM | Wednesday 12PM-1PM | [Zoom Only](#)

Grading Assistant, Esperanza Benavides: ebenavid@depaul.edu

Course Description:

Advanced study in screenwriting focusing on a specific genre such as: Science Fiction, Film Noir, Comedy, Action-Adventure, Nonfiction, etc. May be repeated for credit.

Prerequisites:

SCWR 101 or 100

Learning Objectives:

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

- utilize their interests, passions, and concerns as fuel for story development
- determine which sci-fi sub-genres and aesthetics most appeal to them
- analyze the structure, character development, and theme of television pilots
- apply a focused creative process toward the development of their own pilot
- collaborate with others in the process of building a analytical presentation
- evaluate the writing of their peers and formulate helpful feedback

Course Outcomes

- A bible and pitch deck for an original science fiction pilot

Course Materials

Reading material will be provided by the instructor. While effort will be made to provide screening materials through library course reserves, students may need to have access to Apple+, Amazon Prime, HBO Max, and Hulu. Please let me know if that will be an issue and I will do my best to assist or provide an alternative.

Course Management:

This course is managed on D2L. The course links, calendar, news updates, content, and submission and discussion forums can be found there. I will be available [on Zoom](#) for office hours at the times listed above, and by special arrangement if needed. You can make an appointment by logging into Bluestar using the QuickLinks tab [here](#). If my standard office hours do not work for you, please send an email to make other arrangements. I will try to respond to emails related to this course within 24 hours, but I am slower on nights and weekends.

Course Schedule:

Week 1: March 29 – April 5

- JOURNAL + Group Conversation
- LECTURE: Course Introduction + Defining Our Mission
- READ: *Orphan Black*
- ASSIGNMENTS: *Orphan Black* D2L post + Ideation Assignment 1

Week 2: April 5 - 12

- JOURNAL + Group Conversation
- DISCUSS: *Orphan Black*
- LECTURE: The Big Three: Character, World, Tone
- WORKSHOP: Ideation Assignment 1
- READ: *The Peripheral*
- ASSIGNMENTS: *The Peripheral* D2L Post + Ideation Assignment 2

Week 3: April 12 - 19

- JOURNAL + Group Conversation
- DISCUSSION: Group 1 presents and leads *The Peripheral* discussion
- LECTURE: Legs and Format
- WORKSHOP: Ideation Assignment 2
- READ: *Sense8*
- ASSIGNMENTS: *Sense8* D2L Post + Ideation Assignment 3

Week 4: April 19 – 26

- JOURNAL + Group Conversation
- DISCUSSION: Group 2 presents and leads *Sense8* discussion
- LECTURE: Design Tools
- WORKSHOP: Ideation Assignment 3
- READ: *The OA*
- ASSIGNMENT: *The OA* D2L Post + Project One Sheet

Week 5: April 26 – May 3

- JOURNAL + Group Conversation
- DISCUSSION: Group 3 presents and leads *The OA* discussion
- LECTURE: The Pitch
- WORKSHOP: Project One Sheet
- READING: *Stargate SG-1*
- ASSIGNMENT: *Stargate SG-1* D2L Post + 5 Minute Project Pitch

Week 6: May 3 – 10

- **GUEST LECTURE: *Stargate SG-1* writer, Heather Ash**
- WORKSHOP: Speed Dating Pitch-O-Rama
- READING: *The X-Files*

- ASSIGNMENT: *The X-Files* D2L Post + Pilot Beat Sheet Draft 1 + Opening Scene

Week 7: May 10 - 17

- JOURNAL + Group Conversation
- DISCUSSION: Group 4 presents and leads *The X-Files* discussion
- LECTURE: Current Pilot Structures (as best we can tell)
- WORKSHOP: Pilot Beat Sheet Draft 1 + Opening Scene
- READING: *Battlestar Galactica* pilot + Show Bible (Yes, read them both!)
- ASSIGNMENT: *Battlestar* D2L Post + Revised Beat Sheet + Last Scene

Week 8: May 17 - 24

- JOURNAL + Group Conversation
- DISCUSSION: *Battlestar* discussion
- LECTURE: Fate, Self-Determinism, & my Brush with *Battlestar* + Bibles & Decks
- WORKSHOP: Revised Beat Sheet + Last Scene
- READING: *Paper Girls*
- ASSIGNMENT: *Paper Girls* Post + Bible & Deck Draft 1

Week 9: May 24 – May 31

- JOURNAL + Group Conversation
- DISCUSSION: Group 5 presents and leads *Paper Girls* discussion
- LECTURE: Anthologies
- WORKSHOP: Bible & Deck Draft 1
- READING: *San Junipero*
- ASSIGNMENT: *San Junipero* Post + Bible & Deck Draft 2

Week 10: May 31 – June 7

- JOURNAL + Group Conversation
- DISCUSSION: Group 6 presents and leads *San Junipero* discussion
- LECTURE: Limited Series
- READING: *Devs*
- WORKSHOP: Bible & Deck Draft 2
- ASSIGNMENT: *Devs* Post + Final Bible & Deck + Revised Pilot Beat Sheet

Finals Week: June 7

- *Devs* Post + Final Bible & Deck + Revised Pilot Beat Sheet due at 1:30 PM. Pilot materials must be combined into one PDF document & submitted to D2L.

Assignments

D2L Posts

You will write a 300-word post for each pilot discussed in class, responding to the prompts provided by your classmates. These posts should be written in an academic style, free from typos and grammatical mistakes, and be supported by citations from

the material provided in class as well as your own additional research. Posts are due before the start of the next class and are essential to fuel our in-class discussions.

Note: group presentations replace the D2L post. You will not need to write a post during a week when your group is presenting.

Group Presentation

The class will be divided into six groups (of five people), each of which will present one assigned pilot. These presentations should be fifteen minutes in length, include clear and full participation from everyone in the group, and provide thorough analysis of the assigned pilot. Each group will also submit the writing prompt for their pilot the week before their presentation. Group members will grade each other anonymously via a Google form.

1. Week 3, April 12: Group 1 presents and leads *The Peripheral* discussion
2. Week 4, April 19: Group 2 presents and leads the *Sense8* discussion
3. Week 5, April 26: Group 3 presents and leads *The OA* discussion
4. Week 7, May 10: Group 4 presents and leads *The X-Files* discussion
5. Week 9, May 24: Group 5 presents and leads *Paper Girls* discussion

Writing Assignments

There will be eight weekly assignments given to incrementally develop your pilot. These assignments are due to D2L as PDF files before class begins each week and must be posted to **both** Submissions and Discussions at that time.

Grading

This course utilizes an approach known as “ungrading.” You will be awarded up to 60% of the total points available for group participation, your group presentation, and delivering completed assignments on deadline. Assignments will be deemed complete at my discretion based on stated parameters and expectations. The remaining 40% of the score will be determined by the individual students themselves.

At the end of the quarter, students will be asked to reflect upon their performance and assign themselves a grade that represents the level to which they demonstrated professionalism and investment in the course, showcased techniques and ideas discussed in class, offered a unique perspective with a clear voice in their writing and presentations, challenged themselves to develop a viable project that matters to them personally, and the degree to which they successfully responded to feedback.

Group scores for feedback and weekly participation, as well as the group presentation, will be given anonymously by your peers. It will be comprised of the average score they enter on an anonymous Google form.

The instructor grades, group evaluation grades, and student self-evaluation grade will be combined to yield a final score. I reserve the right to raise a student-evaluation grade, but I will not lower a student-assigned grade once it has been delivered to me.

Feedback Score Awarded by Group:	10 points
Presentation Participation Awarded by Group:	10 points
D2L Posts Deadline (1 point) + Completion (1 point):	20 points
Pilot Project Deadlines (1 point) + Completion: (1 point)	20 points
End of Quarter Self-Evaluation:	<u>40 points</u>
	100 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 in some respect, F is substantially unsatisfactory work. Late work will be penalized by half unless we have made special arrangements.

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 and address challenging issues so long as that work does not seek to glorify or advocate for hate, violence, or discrimination.

It is the right of class members to express how a student's statements or creative work make them feel, but to do so respectfully and constructively. If you become uncomfortable with a conversation for any reason, you may be excused from further reading or commenting on that work. 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 to assist in managing such issues.

Respecting Diversity and Inclusion:

At DePaul, our mission calls us to explore "what must be done" to respect the inherent dignity and identity of each person. We value diversity because it is part of our history, our traditions, and our future. We see diversity as an asset and a strength that adds to the richness of classroom learning. In my course, I strive to include diverse creators, perspectives, and teaching pedagogies. I also encourage open dialogue and spaces for students to express their unique identities and perspectives. I am open to having difficult conversations and I will strive to create an inclusive classroom that values all perspectives. If at any time the classroom experience does not live up to this expectation, please feel free to contact me via email or during office hours.

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 any 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](#).

Students with Disabilities:

DePaul Students seeking disability-related accommodations are required to register with DePaul's Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) enabling them to access accommodations and support services to assist with their success. There are two office locations: Loop Campus (312) 362-8002, Lincoln Park Campus (773) 325-1677 Email: csd@depaul.edu

Students who register with the Center for Students with Disabilities are also invited to contact Dr. Gregory Moorhead, Director of the Center, privately to discuss how he may assist in facilitating the accommodations to be used in a course. This is best done early in the term. The conversation will remain confidential to the extent possible.

Please [click here](#) for Services and Contact Information.

Trigger Warnings

The films, shows, clips, readings, lectures, student work, and class discussions in this course may engage with potentially sensitive or traumatizing material, such as: violence, sexual assault/rape, sexism, racism, police brutality, transphobia, homophobia, abuse, suicide, blood, and body-shaming among other issues. I will note especially graphic/intense content that I intend to present and will do my best to foster a classroom environment in which we can feel safe, courageous, compassionate, and considerate with difficult and important content each week.

In that spirit, I ask that you label potential triggers in your written work submitted on D2L, and then again before we discuss that work or those ideas in class.

If you would like more specific or personalized triggers identified throughout the course (especially ones not named above), e-mail me and I will do my best to flag them for you. If you believe any piece of course content may be potentially triggering to you, I will search for replacement material that you may view or read instead.

DePaul University's Land Acknowledgement

At DePaul University, we acknowledge that we live and work on traditional Native lands that are home to well over one hundred different tribal nations. We extend our respect to all of them, including the Potawatomi, Ojibwe, and Odawa nations, who signed the Treaty of Chicago in 1821 and 1833. We also recognize the Ho-Chunk, Myaamia, Menominee, Illinois Confederacy, and Peoria people who also maintained relationships with this land.

We acknowledge that these sacred homelands were ruptured by the European invasion of the Americas. In 1493, Pope Alexander VI promulgated the Doctrine of Discovery, which seized Native lands and resources with impunity. This doctrine has been used by countries throughout the Americas, including the U.S., to legitimize colonial policies of displacement and genocide toward Native peoples and to justify colonial legacies of white superiority and global capitalism.

We appreciate that today Chicago is home to the sixth-largest urban Native population in the United States. We further recognize and support the enduring presence of Native peoples among our faculty, staff, and student body. And in the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul, we reaffirm our commitment, both as an institution and as individuals, to help make our community and our society a more equitable, welcoming, and just place for all.

Emergency Plan

An emergency can occur at any time, suddenly and without warning. Proper planning is essential to minimize the impact of any emergency on the university community, operations, and facilities. [This link provides detailed information on Emergency Evacuation and Fire Alarm safety.](#) The University will use the DPU Alert to announce school closing or other emergencies. In the event of an emergency evacuation, the primary outdoor assembly area for this course will be Grant Park (Southeast corner of Jackson and Michigan Ave).

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 [here](#).

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism:

This course will be subject to the academic integrity policy passed by faculty. More information can be found [here](#). 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.

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.

Copyright Statement:

The materials provided by the instructor in this course are for the use of the students enrolled in the course. Copyrighted course materials may not be further disseminated.

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 work 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 your instructor to teaching, and these evaluation results are one component used in performance reviews (including salary raises and promotion/tenure). The evaluation of the instructor and course provides you an opportunity to make your voice heard regarding the quality of teaching at DePaul.

Withdrawal:

Students who withdraw from the course do so by using the [Campus Connect system](#). 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

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.