

# DePaul University School of Cinematic Arts

## SCWR 101-501: Screenwriting for Majors

Section 501: Tuesdays 1:30pm-4:45pm

Lewis Center (25 E. Jackson Blvd), room 1507

Classes: Tuesdays January 9, 2024 – March 12, 2024

Final: Tuesday, March 19, 2024 @ 2:30-4:45pm

Professor Daniel Kravitz

Office hours - by appointment( in person or over zoom) Mon/Tues - 12:30-2:30

Email: [DKRAVIT1@depaul.edu](mailto:DKRAVIT1@depaul.edu)

I will return emails as soon as possible. If I don't return an email within 24 hours feel free to email me again, I won't mind. I get a lot of emails:)

**Date of document Jan. 3, 2024**

Drop dates. link to <https://academics.depaul.edu/calendar/Pages/default.aspx> for drop dates.

### Course Introduction:

Storytelling is a craft. Short Form storytelling is a craft. Long Form storytelling is a craft. A screenplay is the tool used to communicate that storytelling craft to actors, directors, producers, casting directors, costume designers, and anyone else involved in the making of the film, in a succinct, and unobstructed way. So they can “watch” the film in their mind as they read the script, before the film is even made. As a screenwriter, you are placing onto paper, and into the mind of the reader, a distinct vision of a film or story. Is screenwriting then also a craft? Yes! THE craft. Because it includes not just the storytelling craft but the delicate, powerful craft of *communicating* a story in an exact way. It's highly specialized, extremely important and, to this screenwriter, sacred work. Sacred because it has the power to create, out of nothing but one's mind, the absolute magic of great storytelling and filmmaking - which then can be delivered to a wider audience. But remember, the screenplay is the presentation of a fundamentally sound story. To write a screenplay that really works, you need a story that really works.

In this class we are going to explore how to do both - create stories(shortform) that work, and create an effective way to communicate them (the screenplay.)

We will start with the story. We will really work on “story.” I believe the “story” craft is the most important craft to master as a filmmaker. And with the “screenplay” skills we develop, we will become experts at finding and create great stories.

This is super fun stuff...and very empowering for those of you imaginative folks who want to do this with your time. I look forward to sharing all I can about screenwriting to help you on your journeys.

\*It's worth noting that screenplay writing is its own special form of narrative writing. It's got its own set of guidelines that make it most effective. Embrace this, celebrate it, and watch, in wonder, as you become a screenwriter!

### **Course Description:**

This course introduces digital cinema majors to dramatic writing for motion pictures. The topics covered include theme, plot, story structure, character, and dialogue. Emphasis is placed on telling a story in visual terms. Films and scenes examined in this class will highlight creators and characters from a wide range of diverse backgrounds and intersectional identities.

**Course Prerequisites:** None

### **Course Outcomes:**

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

### **Learning Objectives:**

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

- employ standard screenplay format
- become proficient in telling stories that work, understanding the elements of a story that works in the short form.
- identify elements of character, and narrative structure

- demonstrate expanded visual writing skills
- apply a deliberate process to their creative writing
- produce original writing on a deadline
- revise their writing based on feedback from the professor and their peers when the writer deems that feedback helpful.
- evaluate the work of their peers and formulate helpful feedback

### **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 and films to screen will be provided by the instructor.

### **Screenwriting Software:**

You will be required to use screenwriting software. [FINAL DRAFT](#), [FADE IN](#), [HIGHLAND](#), [WRITER'S DUET](#), and [CELTX](#) are options. Google Doc and Word templates are not to be used. WRITER'S DUET and HIGHLAND provide versions that are free for students. Screenwriting majors may be able to get a free copy of Final Draft from the school.

### **Course Management:**

This course will be housed on [D2L](#). I will be available for office hours at the times listed above, and at other times if special arrangements are needed, by appointment only. To make an appointment please send me an email.

Additional reading content, records, grades, discussion boards, submissions, and assignment/calendar updates can be found there.

Course meetings will involve lectures, class discussions, screenings and readings, and workshops. We will take one roughly fifteen-minute break each session.

## Course Schedule:

### Module 1, Jan. 9 All items assigned are due before the next class

- LECTURE: The short form in story and in screenwriting. What is a screen story? What are the hallmarks of a short film vs. a feature film? Where do we get our ideas? What makes for an interesting story, for an interesting character? What are anecdotes? What are stakes? Screen short film. Loglines.
- Assignment -
  - Logline exercise.
  - 3 ideas for a short.
- READING:
  - *Tools of Screenwriting: About Screenwriting and Basic Storytelling* (3-40), Visuals (88-90),
  - *The Hollywood Standard: Forward, Introduction, and Quick Start Guide* (through page 27)

### Module 2, Jan. 16

LECTURE: Sharing our ideas. Elements of story? 3 act structure(beginning, middle, end.) What helps stories to work as stories? What different types of shorts can we explore? Review - What makes for an interesting story, for an interesting character? What are anecdotes? What are stakes? Screen short film.

- READING:
  - *The Hollywood Standard: Forward, Introduction, and Quick Start Guide* (27-85)
    - *The Tools of Screenwriting: Exposition* (60-62), *Characterization* (63-65), *Planting & Payoff* (72-74),
- ASSIGNMENTS:
  - Announced in class.

### Module 3, Jan. 23

LECTURES: Proposal (theme/goal/audience) and Treatment. Story and dramatic structure. Review- What different types of shorts can we explore?

- READING:
  - *Tools of Screenwriting*: Dialogue (84-87), Protagonist, Conflict, Obstacles (43-49), Activity & Action (81-83), Dramatic Irony (68-70), Dramatic Scene (91-94)
  - *The Hollywood Standard*: Dialogue (81-102), Transitions, Punctuation (103-111) Special Pages (131-139)
- ASSIGNMENTS:
  - Proposal and Treatment for First Script
  - Announced in class.

#### **Module 4, Jan. 30**

- LECTURES: Story and character workshopping, going over ideas, reading treatments.
- READING:
  - Announced in class
- ASSIGNMENTS:
  - Announced in class.

#### **Module 5, Feb. 6**

LECTURES: Writing the Short Script. Format and writing visually.

- READING:
  - Other - Assigned in class.
  - *Tools of Screenwriting*: Premise, Main Tension, Theme, Unity (49-59), Plausibility (76-80)
- ASSIGNMENTS:
  - Announced in class.

#### **Module 6, Feb. 13**

- LECTURE: Dialogue
- READING:
  - *The Tools of Screenwriting: Outlining (76-78)*
- READING:
  - Announced in class
- ASSIGNMENTS:
  - First draft of script

### **Module 7, Feb. 20**

- LECTURE: Workshop and review.
- ASSIGNMENTS:
  - Announced in class.
- READING:
  - Announced in class

### **Module 8, Feb. 27**

- LECTURE: The First Draft. Workshop and review.
- ASSIGNMENTS:
  - Announced in class.
- READING:
  - Announced in class

### **Module 9, March. 5**

- LECTURE: Rewriting
- READING:
  - *Tools of Screenwriting: Rewriting (95-97)*
  - Announced in class

- **ASSIGNMENTS:**

- Second(final) draft

## **Module 10, March 12**

LECTURE: Moving forward, Tying up any loose ends.

## **Assignments**

Assignments need to be finished and turned in on time(prior to next class) in order for you to do well and learn well in this class...and to get credit. Do your homework and do it on time. If you miss class, get the assignment from a fellow student so you can stay current - take full responsibility for your success or failure in this class.

You will be graded on:

- Style and Format
- Professional presentation
- Creative execution of the assignment
- Effort and commitment to the assignment and its learning objectives
- Mastery of assignment and its learning objectives

You will submit two drafts of your short script, 6 -10 pages (no longer than 12 pages.)

Here are some things to keep in mind:

- Show don't tell. Ie. unless someone is wearing a t-shirt that says, "john's mom," you've got to figure out how to otherwise communicate that to the audience - implied, or directly addressed. But making assumptions in your descriptions

that can't be backed by a visual or by dialogue is not screenwriting writing. Do screenwriting.

- Spelling, grammar, and punctuation count - proofread your work. For Reals!
- Standard screenwriting formatting is required, once assigned.
- You must include a properly formatted cover page for your script.
- Re-read your narrative for clarity - it may be a good idea to have friends, or anyone with brains and patience to look over the script as well. The story needs to work, in its simplest form. It needs to “work.”
- Action description should be lean - only revealing what can be heard/seen on Screen. I.e. Screenwriting.
- Develop a clear beginning, middle, and end to what you are confident is a good story. What's a good story? Be ready to defend your answer.
- Don't wait until the last minute to do these assignments. It takes time to develop a solid narrative - you won't be able to do it in one night and achieve the great story (or grade) you want. Use the class workshop time and feedback from me and your fellow students to gain confidence and create the best version of your stories and scripts. Remember, the story ( and your goal for the story) needs to “work.” We'll keep talking about what that means.

### Short Script Second Draft

The final script, is the final draft of your first draft and is to be 6 -10 pages (no longer than 12 pages.) Points to consider:

- Incorporate notes you received from the instructor, classmates, others, and your own self- evaluation to craft your revised draft. Get outside opinions if you can. The goal of your final script is to present a script that “works.” We will discuss, at length, what that means for us. Make sure you understand what I mean when I say, “Does it work?” If you don't understand, ask me.
- Spelling, grammar, and punctuation count even more in your final draft. Proofread again. All format or spelling or grammar mistakes will be counted heavily against your grade. This is to reflect both our commitment to excellence



in our work, and the standards of the film industry.

## Grading

Attendance - 10 percent.

-Two Quizzes - 10 percent..

-Writing and weekly idea development assignments - 40 percent.

-Short Script Draft 1 - 10 percent

-Final Script Draft 2 - 30 percent

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 will not be accepted.

## Screenwriting Policy on the Use of AI

The screenwriting program is committed to fostering the unique voices and perspectives of up-and-coming screenwriters as evidenced by our motto: “learn your craft, find your voice, make your mark.” Writers should be aware that AI (generative artificial intelligence) is a tool. It does not create; it aggregates and repurposes existing content created by humans. AI may facilitate the story development process but cannot replace what each individual writer brings to a story: their distinctive point of view and voice. We understand that students may wish to use AI tools in the development and early drafts of screenplays and screenwriting assignments. To do so with academic integrity students must understand and adhere to the following:

- Developing ideas, creative problem-solving, honing one’s voice, and engaging in rewriting are at the core of the writing process, and the use of AI is not a replacement for enhancing these fundamental skills.

- Acknowledge your use of AI. For any assignment that you complete using AI, you must include a paragraph that explains 1) what AI tool you used, 2) what prompts you used, and 3) a clear explanation of how it helped you engage in the writing process.
- AI-assisted work may be accepted as part of the development of any project (including story ideation, character development, world-building, basic outlining, etc.), but the entirety of your screenplay/writing assignment must be authored by you.
- AI makes mistakes. You are responsible for any errors or omissions made by the AI tool.
- Failure to adhere to these guidelines will be considered a violation of DePaul's Academic Integrity Policy.

## **Attendance:**

Students are expected to attend every class and arrive on time. Each unexcused absence beyond the first equates to a loss of ten points from the student's final score.

## **Content Warnings**

The films, shows, clips, readings, lectures, student work, and class discussions in this course may engage deeply with potentially sensitive or traumatizing material such as: violence, sexual assault/r\*pe, sexism, racism, police brutality, transphobia, homophobia, abuse, suicide, blood, and body-shaming among others.

I will do my best to foster a classroom environment in which we can relate safely, courageously, compassionately, and contemplatively with difficult and important content.

If you would like to make me aware of triggers for you, let me know and I will do my best to help you navigate them.

If you believe any piece of course content may be potentially triggering to you, I will happily search for replacement material that you may view or read instead.

### **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](mailto:csd@depaul.edu). Students who register with the CSD are 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.

### **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 a request to address you by a specific 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 note that students may make name and pronouns revisions within university systems. 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](#).

### **Respect for Diversity and Inclusion at DePaul University as aligned with our Vincentian Values - 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.

### **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 in their work so long as that work does not seek to glorify or advocate for hate, violence, or discrimination, or involve the professor or a member of the class without their permission.

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.

### **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 CDM 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/or sent via email.

This syllabus is a very dynamic scaffolding which needs to be viewed through the context of any announced changes happening in real time in the classroom.

Adjustments or changes made to the syllabus during the class overrule anything initially written on the syllabus. So pay attention to what is stated in class. If you miss class make sure you communicate with a classmate about any assignments, lecture information, or anything that might affect a change to the syllabus.

## **Copyright Statement:**

### **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 Connection 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.

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.

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: Winter Quarter: Spring Quarter: Summer Terms:

## **Incomplete:**

Last day of the last final exam of the subsequent winter quarter

Last day of the last final exam of the subsequent spring quarter  
Last day of the last final exam of the subsequent autumn quarter  
Last day of the last final exam of the subsequent autumn quarter

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.

(Syllabus prepared with additional content, assignments, ideas, and various other information taken from Riddell SCWR 101 syllabus. Any information directly or indirectly similar to anything in Riddell SCWR 101 syllabus is to be attributed to Riddell.)