DePaul University School of Cinematic Arts

SCWR 341: Pitching Seminar

Winter, 2024
Wednesday 1:30-4:45 PM, Daley 213
Instructor: Brad Riddell: brad.riddell@depaul.edu
Office Hours: Via Zoom W/TR 10AM – 1PM and by appointment.
https://depaul.zoom.us/my/riddell

Description:

This advanced course focuses on developing vetted story pitches for existing student projects and how to pitch a unique take on intellectual property. The lectures and in-class workshops will focus on preparing for pitch meetings with an emphasis on how to read the dynamics of a room and creating a unique brand that resonates with producers and executives.

Prerequisites: DC 288

Course Outcomes:

One feature film pitch, one television pitch, one open writing assignment, adaptation or rewrite pitch, and a final revised pitch for one of the above.

Learning Objectives:

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

- identify strategies for showcasing the commercial attributes of their projects
- evaluate their story concepts based on the current film and television markets
- produce unique, professional-quality story pitches
- assess and apply peer and instructor feedback to revise their story pitches

Textbooks

The Hollywood Pitching Bible: A Practical Guide to Pitching Movies and Television by Ken Aguado, ISBN13: 9781500191764 https://bit.ly/3sW64LH

Course Management:

This course will be housed on **D2L**. I will be available on Zoom for office hours at the times listed above and by arrangement if needed, but all meetings are by appointment only. You can make an appointment by logging into Bluestar using the QuickLinks tab here. If my hours do not work for you, send me an email to make arrangements.

Course meetings will involve lectures, class discussions, and lots of pitches. We will take one fifteen-minute break each session after the lecture and before the pitches.

To provide quality feedback and personal attention to everyone, students will be broken into two groups: A and B. Each group will pitch in alternating weeks. Your pitch pages for each assignment will be due the day before you pitch.

NOTE: on a week your group is *not* pitching, you will be released from class after the lecture and discussion. Attendance rules (below) apply whether you pitch or not.

My goal is for you to receive feedback on your assignments and discussion posts before your next assignment is due – generally within six days. I try to respond to emails as soon as possible but am slower on nights and weekends.

Course Schedule:

Week 1: January 10
- Course introduction
- Lecture on *Pitching Basics*
- Read *The Hollywood Pitch Bible*: pages 1-10, 33-91
- Post project list and personal statement to submissions and discussions
- Syllabus Quiz Due

Week 2: January 17
- Lecture on Feature Pitching
- Group discussions of project list and statement
- Group A Feature Pitch Pages Due Tuesday, January 23rd by 9AM.

Week 3: January 24
- Group A delivers feature pitches.
- Take Quiz 1
- Group B Feature Pitch Pages Due Tuesday, January 30th by 9AM.

Week 4: January 31
- Lecture on *TV Pitching* and *Using Visuals*
- Read *The Hollywood Pitch Bible*: pages 93-114, 137-148 + Bible Guide + Netflix
- Group B delivers feature pitches.
- Group A TV Pitch Pages Due Tuesday, February 6 by 9AM.

Week 5: February 7
- Group A delivers TV Pitches, pages, and pitch decks.
- Take Quiz 2
- Group B TV Pitch Pages Due Tuesday, February 13th by 9AM.

Week 6: February 14

- Lecture on *Adaptation, Rewrite, & OWA Pitching*
- Read *The Hollywood Pitch Bible*: pages 115-123, 149-166.
- Take Quiz 3
- Group A Adaptation, Rewrite, or OWA Pitch Pages Due Tuesday, February 21 by 9AM.

Week 7: February 21
- Group A delivers Adaptation, Rewrite, or OWA Pitch, and pitch pages.
- Group B Adaptation, Rewrite, or OWA Pitch Pages Due Tuesday, February 27th by 9AM.

Week 8: February 28
- Lecture *In The Room* and *Video Pitching*
- Read Picturing During Virus
- Group B delivers Adaptation, Rewrite, or OWA Pitch, and pitch pages.

Week 9: March 6
- Individual Meetings with Instructor to discuss final pitch selection.

Week 10: March 13
- Rehearse final pitches in groups.

March 20th: Link to your recorded revised pitch is due on D2L at 5PM in Discussions.

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.

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.

Assignments

Quizzes: 20% (4 x 5 points each)
Pitch Pages: 15% (3 x 5 points each)
Feature Pitch: 15%
TV Pitch: 15%
Adaptation, Rewrite, or OWA Pitch: 15%
Final, revised Pitch: 20%

- There will be three short quizzes on the reading assignments, worth 5% each. The first quiz is on the syllabus only.
- Pitch pages are your personal organization tool for preparing your pitch. I want to see what and how you prepared before you pitch.
- Pitches will be graded according to the rubric found on D2L.

Grading Policy

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.**

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 to aid 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 errors or omissions made by the AI.

- Failure to adhere to these guidelines will be considered a violation of DePaul's Academic Integrity Policy.

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 note especially graphic/intense content that I intend to present and will do my best to foster a classroom environment in which we can relate safely, courageously, compassionately, and contemplatively 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 pitch or discuss that work in class.

If you would like to make me aware of other triggers (especially ones not named above), let me know 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 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. 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 your preferences early in the quarter so that I may make 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.

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 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 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. 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.