

SCWR 342 Feature Development

When: Thursday · 5:45pm – 9:00pm
Where: 14 East Jackson / RM 211 / Loop Campus

Instructor: Matt Quinn · mquinn@cdm.depaul.edu · 312-362-5807
Office hours: Monday · 11:00am – 1:00pm, Thursday · 11:00am – 1:00pm

Summary of Course

This course offers a practical approach to the screenwriter's role in the development of a feature film. Emphasis will be placed on obtaining a greater understanding of narrative conventions, script analysis and the film market. From agents to studio executives, we will examine the varying points of view that comprise the development process. Constructive analysis will be used to break down feature length produced screenplays and student work. The assignments and class discussions are designed to expose the inner workings of Hollywood and provide a framework for what it takes to succeed in the entertainment industry.

Course Objectives

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

- Evaluate the current feature spec and pilot market.
- Identify classic Hollywood storytelling conventions.
- Explain how the development process works in the studio system.
- Analyze spec screenplays and teleplays with professional coverage assignments
- Write development notes with a focus on identifying concerns and providing viable solutions to improve the material.

Content Warning

This course recognizes that to engage with media is to engage with historic and ongoing problematic representation, as well as the ways that harmful representation impacts audiences in different ways. Please be aware you may encounter racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, and otherwise violent or socially violent material in the assigned readings. In an effort to replicate professional coverage assignments, you will not be notified of this material in advance. It is the job of the story analyst and development writ large to identify these issues and find constructive ways to address them before a project is greenlit for production. Students may inform the professor of any material that they cannot engage with to find a suitable alternative.

Attendance

Attendance and participation are mandatory. An absence, which is defined as not showing up to class or arriving more than 10 minutes late to class, constitutes a reduction in your overall grade.

D2L

You will be using D2L extensively in this course. To log on, go to:

<https://login.depaul.edu/ldap/login?service=https%3a%2f%2fd2l.depaul.edu%2fd2l%2fcustom%2fcas> and enter using your campus connect logon and password. Once you are logged on, click on the course number link and you will find links to the syllabus, course outline, discussion forums, weekly assignments, etc.

Prerequisites

SCWR 100 or SCWR 101

Grading

Participation	10%
Coverage Assignments	50%
Development Notes	10%
Draft Comparison Project	20%
Development Team Pitch Project	10%

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.

Textbooks

"Breakfast with Sharks" by Michael Lent ISBN-10: 060981043X (Recommended)
Additional readings provided by instructor

Participation

Participation in the weekly Industry Update discussion forum on D2L is mandatory, as this counts towards your participation grade – Minimum of one post per week.

Course Outline

Week 1 – January 11th

Lecture: Course Intro, Business of Screenwriting, Coverage Overview
Assignment: *Breakfast with Sharks* (Chapter 4), Industry Update, Coverage 1

Week 2 – January 18th

Lecture: Screenwriting Conventions – Developing a Blockbuster
Assignment: Industry Update, Coverage 2, Coverage 3

Week 3 – January 25th

Lecture: Screenwriting Conventions – Character Driven Writing Sample
Assignment: Industry Update, Coverage, Coverage 5

Week 4 – February 1st

Lecture: Production Companies & Producers
Assignments: Breakfast with Sharks (Chapters 10, 11 and 12), Industry Update, Coverage 6, Coverage 7

Week 5 – February 8th

Lecture: Movie Studios & Studio Execs
Assignments: Breakfast with Sharks (Chapters 8, 9, and 15), Industry Update, Coverage 8

Week 6 – February 15th

Lecture: Networks & Network Execs
Assignments: Industry Update, Coverage 9, Coverage 10

Week 7 – February 22nd

Lecture: Development Notes
Assignments: Breakfast with Sharks (Chapters 10, 11, and 12), Industry Update, Development Notes

Week 8 – February 29th

Lecture: Agents, and Managers
Assignments: Breakfast with Sharks (Chapter 1, 2, 3, 16, 17, 20 and 21), Industry updates, Draft Comparison

Week 9 – March 7th

Lecture: Pitching & Breaking In
Workshop: Development Team Pitch
Assignments: Breakfast with Sharks (Chapter 5, 6, 19), Industry Update, Draft Comparison

Week 10 – March 14th

Lecture: Draft Comparison Review, Development Team Pitch Presentations
Assignments: Development Team Pitch Project

Week 11 – March 21st

Development Team Pitch Project Presentations

Assignments

Coverage Assignments (50% of final grade)

There are ten coverage assignments in this course – Due dates can be viewed in the Course Outline section of the syllabus. Your job in these assignments is to decide whether or not the script provides the template for a cinematically viable movie. Once you make that decision, your comments must back up this evaluation - without wavering. Your opinion is not wrong if you make a definitive argument to support your position.

The main tool for communicating your analysis is called "coverage". Coverage is generally a three-page analysis of a script, teleplay or manuscript, which breaks down as follows:

- One Page Summary - This includes a Logline (one sentence description of the project), Brief Synopsis (one paragraph description of the project) and Comment Summary (one paragraph description on your evaluation of the material)
- One Page Synopsis (two pages for manuscript) - One page (no more/no less). The synopsis should be broken down into three paragraphs - One for each act of the screenplay.
- One Page Comments - One page (no more/no less).

Comments for scripts that are a PASS usually follow this structure:

- Paragraph 1 - Brief Summary
- Paragraph 2 - What Works
- Paragraph 3 - Primary Concern
- Paragraph 4 - Second Primary Concern
- Paragraph 5 - Summary

Comments for scripts that are a CONSIDER usually follow this structure:

- Paragraph 1 - Brief Summary
- Paragraph 2 - Best Attribute
- Paragraph 3 - Second Best Attribute
- Paragraph 4 - Concerns (must be minimal - if any)
- Paragraph 5 - Summary

As stated previously, the reader must have a definitive position on the screenplay and the writer, which must support one of the following ratings:

Recommend - Never use this rating as you are essentially telling an executive to drop everything they are doing and buy the script immediately.

Consider - Encourages the executive to look at the material.

Consider w/res - Do not use this rating because you are essentially saying, "The script is good, but I'm not sure". Remember, they are hiring you for your opinion - Give your opinion and don't waiver.

Track - This rating essentially says the script is flawed, but future efforts should be looked at closely because there is talent on the page. Track is only for new writers with no

previous track record (use IMDB).

Pass – This rating essentially says there is not enough talent or intrigue in the concept/execution to warrant a closer look.

The templates for coverage can vary from company to company, but the content is essentially the same. You will find a zip file on the D2L Content page for the course, which contains coverage samples, coverage template, and ratings guides.

Development Notes (10% of final grade)

Using the Development Note template and script in the attached zip file found in the Content tab link on D2L, write development notes on an assigned screenplay. The ultimate goal of the notes is to convey what works and what does not work in the current draft and how to move forward.

This project is worth 10 points (10 percent of your final grade) and must be submitted to the corresponding D2L Submission link before class on Thursday, February 29th – Late submissions will not be accepted.

Keep in mind, development notes differ from coverages because you are not only identifying problems, but you are also offering solutions on how to fix them. It's also important to note that these projects have been purchased by the studio or production company that is paying you - Therefore, you do not want to trash the concept (in fact, you must think it's brilliant - Like SONIC THE HEDGEHOG kind of brilliant). The wrath of your critique should be reserved for the execution of the draft.

Your notes should break down as follows:

- One page for Act 1
- Two pages for Act 2
- One page for Act 3
- Two pages of Comments
- Total of six full pages
- Use 12-point Courier Font

Draft Comparison (20% of final grade)

Using the Development Note template and scripts in the attached zip file found in the Content tab link on D2L, write development notes on the second draft of an assigned screenplay. You must read both the first and second drafts of the assigned screenplay, using the first draft as a foundation for your comments on the second draft. The goal of the notes is to let the development team know what adjustments have been made and how to move forward from the current draft.

This project is worth 20 points (20 percent of your final grade) and must be submitted via the corresponding D2L Submission link before class on Thursday, March 14th – Late submissions will not be accepted. I'm giving you two weeks to complete this project, so please make sure you give the time, effort, and attention to detail the assignment calls for.

Do not automatically assume that the second draft is a marked improvement over the first effort. In some instances, the second draft can be a dramatic step backward. Keep in mind, development notes differ from coverages because you are not only identifying problems, but you are also offering solutions on how to fix them. It's also important to note that these projects have been purchased by the studio or production company that is paying you - Therefore, you do not want to trash the concept (in fact, you must think it's brilliant - Like BARBENHEIMER kind of brilliant). The wrath of your critique should be reserved for the execution of the draft.

Your notes should break down as follows:

- One page for Act 1
- Two pages for Act 2
- One page for Act 3
- One page for Draft Comparison
- Three pages of Comments
- Total of eight full pages
- Use 12-point Courier Font

Development Team Pitch Project (10% of final grade)

You will work with your assigned group members to present a 15-minute story pitch on an assigned screenplay. Each group member should focus on a certain aspect of the property (story, characters, casting, budget, marketing, etc.) to formulate a team pitch to present to the class on Thursday, March 14th. There are no rules or expected format for the pitch other than making a strong attempt as a team to "sell" your assigned script within the allotted time frame.

The Development Team Pitch Project grade is worth a total of 10 points.

Changes to the 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 sent via email.

Generative AI Use Prohibited

Generative AI tools are trained on existing texts, algorithms, and models to generate content like writing, images, and videos based on prompts from users. ChatGPT, Midjourney, Google Bard, and DALL-E are examples of generative AI tools. Please refrain from using generative AI in this course for any purpose. We will be developing skills that are important to practice on your own and using generative AI may inhibit development, practice, or understanding of those skills. During class, we will discuss how and why generative AI may disrupt your learning.

If you're unsure if a specific tool makes use of AI, or if a specific tool is permitted for use on assignments in this course, please contact me. Attempting to pass off AI-generated work as your own will violate [DePaul's Academic Integrity Policy](#).

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism

This course will be subject to the university's academic integrity policy. All students are expected to abide by the University's Academic Integrity Policy which prohibits cheating and other misconduct in student coursework. Publicly sharing or posting online any prior or current materials from this course (including exam questions or answers), is considered to be providing unauthorized assistance prohibited by the policy. Both students who share/post and students who access or use such materials are considered to be cheating under the Policy and will be subject to sanctions for violations of Academic Integrity.

More information can be found at <https://resources.depaul.edu/teaching-commons/teaching/academic-integrity/Pages/default.aspx>.

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: <http://www.cdm.depaul.edu/Current%20Students/Pages/PoliciesandProcedures.aspx>

COVID-19 Health and Safety Precautions

The health and safety of everyone at DePaul depend on the cooperation of all who come to campus. By taking care of yourself, you protect the entire community. DePaul's COVID-19 response plans are based on the latest guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Chicago Department of Public Health and the university's medical advisor from AMITA Health.

Mandatory protocols must be followed by DePaul students, faculty and staff at all times on both campuses <https://resources.depaul.edu/coronavirus/guidance/health-safety-practices/Pages/default.aspx>.

Respect for Diversity and Inclusion at DePaul University

At DePaul, our mission calls us to explore "what must be done" in order to respect the inherent dignity and identity of each human 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 authors, 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.

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 at: <http://policies.depaul.edu/policy/policy.aspx?pid=332>

Online Course Evaluations

Evaluations are a way for students to provide valuable feedback regarding their instructor and the course. Detailed feedback will enable the instructor to continuously tailor teaching methods and course content to meet the learning goals of the course and the academic needs of the students. They are a requirement of the course and are key to continue to provide you with the highest quality of teaching. The evaluations are anonymous; the instructor and administration do not track who entered what responses. A program is used to check if the student completed the evaluations, but the evaluation is completely separate from the student's identity. Since 100% participation is our goal, students are sent periodic reminders over three weeks. Students do not receive reminders once they complete the evaluation. Please see <https://resources.depaul.edu/teaching-commons/teaching/Pages/online-teaching-evaluations.aspx> for additional information.

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).

Students with Disabilities

Students seeking disability-related accommodations are required to register with DePaul's Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) enabling you to access accommodations and support services to assist your success. There are two office locations:

Loop Campus - Lewis Center #1420 - (312) 362-8002

Lincoln Park Campus - Student Center #370 - (773) 325-1677

Students can also email the office at csd@depaul.edu

Students who are registered with the Center for Students with Disabilities are also invited to contact me privately to discuss how I may assist in facilitating the accommodations you will use in this course. This is best done early in the term. Our conversation will remain confidential to the extent possible.

University Counseling Services

DePaul University Counseling Services (UCS) is committed to providing a range of culturally aware and sensitive clinical services to help currently enrolled DePaul students remove barriers to academic and personal success by addressing emotional, psychological, and interpersonal concerns through multiple treatment modalities. Services offered include: group counseling, individual counseling, couples counseling, crisis management, consultation, referrals, and telereach/outreach workshops. All services are currently being offered on a virtual, remote basis with no fees due to COVID-19. To connect with the counseling center, contact our main number at (773) 325-7779 during regular business hours (Monday-Friday, 9am-5pm) to schedule an initial consultation, which is typically scheduled within 1-2 business days of your call.

If you need more immediate assistance or are in acute distress, you can call the main number during regular business hours and ask to speak with a counselor. If you are experiencing a life-threatening emergency, call 911 or go to your nearest emergency room. The Counseling Services staff has extensive experience with providing support services to individuals of varying social identities and backgrounds. Further, our counselors know that commitment to diversity, inclusivity, and anti-racism is an ongoing and open-ended journey and, as such, our counselors frequently and regularly engage in self-reflection and training opportunities to increase cultural awareness and to challenge one's own privileges and biases.

Incomplete Grades

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. All incomplete requests must be approved by the instructor of the course and a CDM Associate Dean. Only exceptions cases will receive such approval. Information about the Incomplete Grades policy can be found at <http://www.cdm.depaul.edu/Current%20Students/Pages/Grading-Policies.aspx>

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

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.