WRITING THE EPISODIC DRAMA – WINTER 2013
DC 307 801, 810
Wednesdays: 6:00pm to 9:00pm
STDCT 330
Instructor: Nathan DeWitt, MFA
Office Hours: Mondays: 3:30pm to 5:00pm, Wednesdays 3:30pm to 5:00pm, Thursdays 11:00am to
12:30pm. (I am in and out of my office frequently during office hours so please let me know if you
will be stopping by).
Office: CDM 616 (Mondays), STDC 332 (Wednesday & Thursday).
ndewitt@cdm.depaul.edu

Prerequisites: DC 101 or DC 201.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:
This course examines the storytelling techniques necessary to write an hour long television dramatic
series with an emphasis on characterization and structure. Students will write an original pilot episode
for a one-hour television drama. Students will study pilots to learn how they work, come up with a
concept and pitch for their own Television Show, create Character Biographies for the show's principal
characters, then complete a Beat Sheet, Outline and eventually a First Draft of the Pilot for their
Television Show.

This class will, as closely as possible, mirror the real world dynamic between Writer and Development
Executive with the Student in the role of Writer and the Instructor in the role of Development
Executive, minus the contradictory notes and creativity-crippling fear of losing his job.

The instructor will mentor the students to ensure he brings out the voice of the student writer. At the
same time he'll monitor the students' writing to make sure the voices of the characters are clear, the plot
moves along with escalating tension, the dialogue and themes ring true and the work is technically,
structurally and grammatically correct and properly formatted. We write like professionals in this
class.

A lot of this course will be Workshop format. We'll be doing our best to duplicate the atmosphere of a
Writer's Room. As with a real writing staff, the class will have the opportunity to offer constructive
criticism of each other's work. They will also participate in group rewrites, where they will be
expected to help improve the work of their classmates, both in terms of shaping concept but also
honing story and tightening scenes. A portion of each student's script will be read aloud at least once
during the course in the equivalent of a "Table Read." Polite discourse is expected at all times.

A QUICK NOTE: Pilots are very difficult to write. It's an advanced form. Having written a "Spec"
TV episode prior to this course will dramatically increase your ability to perform well in this course.
While I cannot change the University's prerequisites, I'll say this: **If you have never written a
television "Spec" episode before, I STRONGLY ENCOURAGE YOU to take DC 272 Writing for
Television.**   That course covers the basics of Television Writing, both comedy and drama. I
recommend learning how some Television Shows work and writing someone else's show before you try
to write your own. DC 272 is a great place to learn.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:
In this course, students are expected to complete a draft of a script for an ORIGINAL one-hour
dramatic pilot (55-65 pages).

REQUIREMENTS:
Actively participate in class discussions, read and critique your own and fellow students' work, complete all homework assignments. ***Strict adherence to deadlines is expected.*** (If you miss an assignment or class, you better have a good reason. Attendance is MANDATORY. This is a lot of work to do in 10 weeks. DO NOT FALL BEHIND!

ASSIGNMENTS:
All assignments must be typed and free of grammatical, spelling and punctuation errors. **It's your** work, **you're** responsible for **its** quality. All Scenes and Scripts must be in proper Screenwriting format. (Use of screenwriting software such as Final Draft (if your parents will buy it for you) or Celtx (if you're on a budget) is HIGHLY recommended. (www.celtx.com)
All assignments should include your name and the date of the assignment.

A NOTE ABOUT EMAILS:
Sign them please. I have no way of knowing who EskimoPyrite@FartDartsRUs.org is unless he or she signs the email. I'm always happy to answer any questions you might have.

A NOTE ABOUT TALKING 'SMACK':
Writer's are competitive. I'm not going to sit here and pretend that we're all at the same skill level and will all get along famously. Nor am I going to pretend I don't know people are going to talk about each other's work, sometimes in derogatory terms. But I don't want to see it. I don't want to hear about it. And it's absolutely forbidden in my classroom. If you feel the need to badmouth someone's work, please do so in PRIVATE. Note: **THE INTERNET IS NOT PRIVATE!** You'd be surprised who stumbles across your Twitter, Facebook or Blog. So let's please be respectful and remember we're all in this to become better writers.

That said, this is a Workshop, not some wimpy-ass artist's studio. You know what happens in Workshops? People lose fingers. That's just how you learn. Be hard on your classmates' writing and respect them when they're hard on yours. We're all in here to get better and you can't do that without a little constructive criticism. But cruelty and rudeness will not be tolerated. ***Ideally, by the end of this course you'll be observant and analytical enough to never make a critique unless it's also accompanied by a suggested fix.***

LASTLY:
By and large, you may say anything in this class, except one phrase. "You didn't get what I was going for." This phrase is the hallmark of young, defensive artists across all media and it's usually the first phrase they utter upon hearing criticism and suffering the pangs of an injured ego. However, it is a nonsense expression, demonstrating a lack of understanding of the relationship between writer and reader. If your work is muddled, vague or otherwise ineffective it is not the reader's responsibility to 'get it,' it is your responsibility to improve your writing. In writing, onus of clarity is on the creator, not the beholder. If I didn't get what you were going for it is because you did not take me there.

When feedback comes, don't get defensive. Let your ego go, listen to what's being said, consider new approaches and PLEASE feel free to tell us what you were trying to do, we're here to help. Just don't blame the audience for your inability to communicate properly. **The first step to improving your writing is to take ownership of its shortcomings.**

GRADING:
Pilot Breakdowns: 10%
Show Pitch: 10%
Character Biographies and Story Document: 20% (Midterm)
Outline: 15%
Final Script: 25% (Final)
Class Participation: 20% (Class participation encompasses not only attendance but also your active involvement in discussions and completion of weekly writing 'checkpoints' throughout the second half of the quarter).

THE SCHEDULE:

Week 1: January 9:
Introductions. Who are you and why are you here? What have you written? What TV Shows do you like to watch? Any idea what you might want to write for this course?

Why write a Pilot?

Breakdowns:
Pilot screenings and analysis. How do Pilots work?

Dallas: "Digger's Daughter"
Law & Order: SVU: "Payback"

HOMEWORK: Watch (or read) AT LEAST THREE different pilots, ideally similar to the show you're thinking about writing, and prepare a Breakdown of each as we learned in class. <u>DO NOT WATCH SIX FEET UNDER, we'll be covering it in next week's lecture.</u>

EMAIL ndewitt@cdm.depaul.edu by MONDAY, January 14 at 8:00pm with the names of the Pilots you broke down. (I don't need the Breakdowns yet, just what you're watching). Then come to class with your Three Completed Breakdowns. (or upload to ColWeb)

ONLINE STUDENTS: Email the names of shows you plan to watch by Monday night, and upload to ColWeb by the 6pm Wednesday.

Week 2: January 16:
The Television Industry: What shows have they done? Why the hell are there so many shows about cops, lawyers and doctors? What shows are they doing? How is the industry changing and what does that mean to me as a writer? (Spoiler Alert: it means you have to write a great pilot if you want to write for TV).

What's a TV idea and what's a Movie idea? How are they different? The same? What makes a good TV show? What makes a good pilot? We'll try to reach some consensus as to what tropes all good pilots share.

Screening and Discussion:
Six Feet Under "Pilot"

Group Assignments. You'll be divided up into TWO Groups. 407 Students will definitely be in Group 1; beyond that, groups will be assigned at random by the Professor.

HOMEWORK: Pitches. Group 1 will prepare Pitches for their shows. How you format this is up to you but your pitch must include: Title, Premise, Genre, Theme, Style/ Tone and Locale. You must include some information about the Principal Characters or Character and some idea of where you see the show going- as we'll discuss, you want to know there are 100 episodes in your idea. DO NOT WORRY about the plot of the Pilot right now. Think about the show as a concept first and foremost.

Your Pitch Document should not exceed 3 pages. If you have more information, great. Put it in a file somewhere. But keep the pitch document short. You don't sell the steak, you sell the sizzle.

In-Class Students: Upload your Pitch Documents to ColWeb on January 23 and **be prepared to pitch your show to the room in class!**

ONLINE STUDENTS: Upload to ColWeb. Pitches will be read aloud and discussed in class. WATCH THE LECTURE FOR FEEDBACK!

Week 3: January 23:
Show Pitches: Students in Group 1 will pitch their Show ideas and receive feedback from their fellow students and the instructor.

Online Students' Pitch Documents will be read aloud and feedback will be given.

PITCHERS: Be prepared to TAKE NOTES while we discuss your idea. You will not remember everything, so write it down. Basically, it's gonna work like this: you pitch your show then shut up and listen. This is why it's okay to give online students feedback even though they aren't in class: your primary job here is to hear.

NOTE TO ONLINE STUDENTS: If you have questions about in-class notes, email the instructor and we'll figure out how to get them answered.

HOMEWORK: Pitches. Groups 2 will prepare Pitches for their shows. How you format this is up to you but your pitch must include: Title, Premise, Genre, Theme, Style/ Tone and Locale. You must include some information about the Principal Characters or Character and some idea of where you see the show going- as we'll discuss, you want to know there are 100 episodes in your idea. DO NOT WORRY about the plot of the Pilot right now. Think about the show as a concept first and foremost.

Your Pitch Document should not exceed 3 pages. If you have more information, great. Put it in a file somewhere. But keep the pitch document short. You don't sell the steak, you sell the sizzle.

In-Class Students: Upload your Pitch Documents to ColWeb on January 30 and **be prepared to pitch your show to the room in class!**

ONLINE STUDENTS: Upload to ColWeb. Pitches will be read aloud and discussed in class. WATCH THE LECTURE FOR FEEDBACK!

Week 4: January 30:
Show Pitches: Students in Group 2 will pitch their Show ideas and receive feedback from their fellow

students and the instructor.

Online Students' Pitch Documents will be read aloud and feedback will be given.

PITCHERS: Be prepared to TAKE NOTES while we discuss your idea. You will not remember everything, so write it down. Basically, it's gonna work like this: you pitch your show then shut up and listen. This is why it's okay to give online students feedback even though they aren't in class: your primary job here is to hear.

NOTE TO ONLINE STUDENTS: If you have questions about in-class notes, email the instructor and we'll figure out how to get them answered.

Expanding the Idea: Character Bios and Beat Sheets/ Pilot Story Summaries.

HOMEWORK: Group 1, now that you have gotten feedback from your peers, it's time to expand the idea. Create Character Biographies for your Principal Characters. These need not be elaborate, intensive psychological life studies but they need to be enough to give us the sense of the kind of person (or robot, or dog, or monster) your character is. (Re-examine the character bios you did for your Breakdowns, it should look like hat).
Furthermore, write up some version of the story you're considering for the Pilot episode. Again, formatting is up to you. You can write the pilot story in prose, you can write out a bulleted Beat Sheet or you could even just write out your Teaser Out and Act Breaks (we'll talk about Act Outs at length). The point is- from this document we need to have Character Biographies and a sense of what the first episode looks like in some detail. Again, this completed document should resemble your Breakdowns with character information at the top and story information to follow. **This Document should not exceed 5 pages. IT IS YOUR MIDTERM.**

ALL STUDENTS: Group 1, upload your Character Biographies and Story Document to Col Web by Sunday, February 3 at 5pm.

Monday morning, ALL STUDENTS will receive an email with your fellow students' Character Biographies and Story Document. READ THEM ALL and be prepared to discuss them in class on Thursday.

ONLINE STUDENTS: Read your classmates' Character Biographies and Story Documents and provide feedback via email, cc-ing the professor.

Week 5: February 6:
Character Biographies and Story Documents. Discuss Character Biographies and Story Documents from Group 1 in class. What's working? What needs work? Are these characters interesting, compelling and deep enough to be on TV? How can we make the story stronger, more character driven?

HOMEWORK: Group 2, now that you have gotten feedback from your peers, it's time to expand the idea. Create Character Biographies for your Principal Characters. These need not be elaborate, intensive psychological life studies but they need to be enough to give us the sense of the kind of person (or robot, or dog, or monster) your character is. (Re-examine the character bios you did for your Breakdowns, it should look like hat).
Furthermore, write up some version of the story you're considering for the Pilot episode. Again,

formatting is up to you. You can write the pilot story in prose, you can write out a bulleted Beat Sheet or you could even just write out your Teaser Out and Act Breaks (we'll talk about Act Outs at length). The point is- from this document we need to have Character Biographies and a sense of what the first episode looks like in some detail. Again, this completed document should resemble your Breakdowns with character information at the top and story information to follow. **This Document should not exceed 5 pages. IT IS YOUR MIDTERM.**

ALL STUDENTS: Group 2, upload your Character Biographies and Story Document to Col Web by Sunday, February 10 at 5pm.

Monday morning, ALL STUDENTS will receive an email with your fellow students' Character Biographies and Story Document. READ THEM ALL and be prepared to discuss them in class on Thursday.

ONLINE STUDENTS: Read your classmates' Character Biographies and Story Documents and provide feedback via email, cc-ing the professor.

Week 6: February 13:
Character Biographies and Story Documents. Discuss Character Biographies and Story Documents from Group 2 in class. What's working? What needs work? Are these characters interesting, compelling and deep enough to be on TV? How can we make the story stronger, more character driven?

Outlining. Formatting. The Importance of Act Outs- keeping asses in the seats.

HOMEWORK: Story Outlines, Group 1. Using the Character Biography and Story Document feedback, students will expand their Pilot Narrative and complete their STORY OUTLINES. (Formatting will be discussed). Outlines are to be uploaded to ColWeb by SATURDAY, February 16 at 8pm. NOTE: **This document is not to exceed 12 pages.**

You will then receive an email with your fellow students' Outlines. READ THEM ALL and be prepared to discuss them in class on Thursday.

ONLINE STUDENTS: Read your classmates' Outlines and provide feedback via email, cc-ing the professor.

Week 7: February 20:
Story Outlines. Discussion and feedback of Story Outlines from Group 1.

HOMEWORK: Story Outlines, Group 2. Using the Character Biography and Story Document feedback, students will expand their Pilot Narrative and complete their STORY OUTLINES. (Formatting will be discussed). Outlines are to be uploaded to ColWeb by SATURDAY, February 23 at 8pm. NOTE: **This document is not to exceed 12 pages.**

You will then receive an email with your fellow students' Outlines. READ THEM ALL and be prepared to discuss them in class on Thursday.

ONLINE STUDENTS: Read your classmates' Outlines and provide feedback via email, cc-ing the professor.

Week 8: February 27:
Story Outlines. Discussion and feedback of Story Outlines from Group 2.

After all the outlines have been read, some people will be in different phases of the writing process. Some of you are going to need to make another Outline, some of your are going to be sent directly to Script. In the last few weeks of class, what you write will be determined by where you are.

HOMEWORK: Group 1. Depending on where you are in the process, your homework will either be to complete the first 10 pages of your script OR a second draft of your Outline.

IF YOU ARE DOING ANOTHER OUTLINE: Upload your Revised Outline to ColWeb by Sunday, March 3 at 9pm.

IF YOU ARE GOING TO SCRIPT: Upload your first 10 pages to ColWeb by 3pm on Wednesday, March 6.

ALL STUDENTS: You will receive an email with any Revised Outlines. Read them and be prepared to discuss in class.

ONLINE STUDENTS: Read your classmates' Revised Outlines and provide feedback via email, cc-ing the professor.

Week 9: March 6:
Outlines and Teasers. Group 1.
If you wrote an Outline, we will discuss it in class.
If you wrote script pages, we will read them aloud in class and discuss.
ONLINE STUDENTS: watch the lecture and email notes to those students whose work we read in class, making sure to cc the professor.

HOMEWORK: Group 2. Depending on where you are in the process, your homework will either be to complete the first 10 pages of your script OR a second draft of your Outline.

IF YOU ARE DOING ANOTHER OUTLINE: Upload your Revised Outline to ColWeb by Sunday, March 10 at 9pm.

IF YOU ARE GOING TO SCRIPT: Upload your first 10 pages to ColWeb by 3pm on Wednesday, March 13.

ALL STUDENTS: You will receive an email with any Revised Outlines. Read them and be prepared to discuss in class.

ONLINE STUDENTS: Read your classmates' Revised Outlines and provide feedback via email, cc-ing the professor.

Week 10: March 13:
Outlines and Teasers. Group 2.
If you wrote an Outline, we will discuss it in class.

If you wrote script pages, we will read them aloud in class and discuss.
ONLINE STUDENTS: watch the lecture and email notes to those students whose work we read in class, making sure to cc the professor.

FINAL EXAM:
Your completed PILOT SCRIPT (up to 65 pages, NO LONGER). You will be expected to incorporate the feedback and notes given by the instructor and class into your Pilot Script. This feedback may change your show dramatically.

DUE ONE COLWEB: 6:00pm SHARP on March 20, 2013.

SCHOOL POLICIES:

Online Instructor Evaluation
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 two weeks. Students do not receive reminders once they complete the evaluation. Students complete the evaluation online at https://mycti.cti.depaul.edu/mycti

Email
Email is the primary means of communication between faculty and students enrolled in this course outside of class time. Students should be sure their email listed under "demographic information" at CampusConnect is correct.

Academic Integrity Policy
This course will be subject to the academic integrity policy passed by faculty. More information can be found at http://academicintegrity.depaul.edu/

Plagiarism
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.

Incomplete
An incomplete grade is given only for an exceptional reason such as a death in the family, a serious illness, etc. Any such reason must be documented. Any incomplete request must be made at least two weeks before the final, and approved by the Dean of the College of Computing and Digital Media. Any consequences resulting from a poor grade for the course will not be considered as valid reasons for such a request.

Resources for 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 eithereither the PLuS Program (for LD, AD/HD) or The Office for Students with Disabilities (for all other disabilities) at:

Student Center, LPC, Suite #370 Phone number: (773)325.1677 Fax: (773)325.3720 TTY: (773)325.7296