

DC 201-801 and 810

Introduction to Screenwriting
Winter Quarter 2014
Wednesday 6:00-9:15
Student Center 330

Instructor: Benjamin Kumming

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Office: CDM 930

Office Hours: Before and after class, and by appointment

You are invited to meet with me at any point in the quarter to discuss your work, although it isn't mandatory. For students in the online section of the class, a Skype meeting can be arranged if need be.

COLWeb: coltube.cdm.depaul.edu

D2L: <http://d2l.depaul.edu>

Required Resources

Screenplay for *Fargo*, by Joel and Ethan Coen
available online and via D2L

Celtx software, screenplay formatting software
available free at celtx.com

Your brain, available wherever you last remember seeing it

Supplemental readings, as assigned, available via D2L

Course Description

This course will introduce the student to the principles and practice of writing for cinema. Focus will be on elements of story and their particular application to visual media, and on understanding cinema as an avenue for personal expression and creative storytelling. This will be accomplished through lectures and discussions, the screening and analysis of short and feature-length films, and writing exercises leading up to the creation of a 10 to 15 page original screenplay.

Learning Objectives

- An understanding of the basic elements of story, such as plot, character, structure, theme, and setting.
- An understanding of the particular requirements of visual storytelling and the tools and techniques used in cinema to express ideas.
- An ability to apply those concepts to the development of personal creative work, meaning:
- The writing and revision of a short screenplay.

Important Dates

No-penalty drop deadline: January 17th 2014.

Withdraw with grade of "W" deadline: February 21st 2014.

Midterm Date: February 5th 2014.

Final Project Due Date: March 19th 2014, 6:00 PM.

Course Policies

Attendance: Much of the class will depend upon the presence and participation of all students. Therefore, a strict attendance policy will be maintained.

Attendance is mandatory, and I will take a quick count every class and after every break. Students arriving more than 10 minutes after the start of class, or after the end of a break, will be marked as late, without exception. Two lates will be considered one absence. Students who have more than one absence (meaning two lates or one full missed class), will receive a reduction in final their final grades.

If you are ill, please let me know ahead of time. If you do so, I will excuse one absence in the quarter. If you're seriously unwell for more than a week straight and must miss two classes, we'll handle that on a case-by-case basis.

Participation: You are also expected to chip in once in a while in class discussions. Your thoughts and opinions on the subjects being discussed and the films we watch are important, valid, and may be of help to other students.

We will be reading and commenting on the work of your fellow students (yes, sharing is required). It is vital that we create an affirmative and comfortable environment in which each of us can express ourselves honestly. If a student cannot manage to treat the others with personal respect and intellectual care, he or she will be asked to leave the class. I will provide specific guidelines for critiquing other students' work in class.

Laptops and Phones are prohibited. Please turn off your ringers and pack up your iPads. They are a distraction to you, others, me, everyone, and do more damage to our ability to function in the world than we think. Students with University-approved special need for such a device will be required to provide proper documentation.

Assignments: Assignments must be turned in on time. I won't accept late work. Online students must have electronic version of the assignments turned in to the drop box at the same time as the in class students.

It is better to come on time with something almost-complete than to be late. Some assignments will be workshopped in class. The student will be expected to bring the required number of copies of the work to class, on time.

D2L and COLweb: I will utilize these two course-management systems throughout the quarter. D2L will be used for assignment turn-in and hosting files for you to download. COLweb will be used to host films and clips we screen in class for online students and for anyone in class who would like to rewatch.

Email: In the event of any class location changes or cancellations due to an illness on my part, I will contact you via email. Please ensure that the email address you have supplied to the University is one that you do, in fact, check.

Content Changes

Depending upon time, the assignments projected for the quarter may require alteration. Any deviations from the syllabus will be addressed ahead of time in class or via email.

Grading

Class Attendance and Participation: 10%

Writing Assignments: 25%

Midterm Project: 20%

Screenplay Rough Draft: 15%

Screenplay Final Draft: 30%

A 100-90
B 89-80
C 79-70
D 69-60
F 59-0

In grading your written assignments and scripts as well as your midterm presentations, I will be looking for the amount of effort apparent in the work, the satisfaction of the specific criteria for each assignment, and basic written communication skills. I expect to receive proof-read work. I will mark off for repeated spelling mistakes or other copy errors.

Projected Class Schedule*

*Online students please note, all assignments are due via D2L inbox by the beginning of class (6:00PM) on the week the assignment is due.

Week One: January 8 2014

Introduction to the Course

Story and its History

Visual Storytelling and the Cinema

ASSIGNMENT 1: 3 potential story ideas, one to five sentences each, typed and brought to class.

ASSIGNMENT 2: Read a screenplay and watch its movie. Type up two or three paragraphs of your thoughts on the film's story.

Week Two: January 15 2014

Character and Character Arcs

Creating Compelling Characters

Character Driver Conflict

Due: Assignments 1 and 2, one copy each.

ASSIGNMENT 3: Write a character bio for an imagined character related to one of your story ideas, or for a real person in your life whom you know deeply. Two typed pages minimum, bring **two** copies.

Week Three: January 22 2014

Plot and Structure

Plot Diagrams

Dramatic Structure

Conflict Driven Drama, Character Driven Conflict

Due: Assignment 3, two copies.

ASSIGNMENT 4: Create a plot outline for your story (meaning, yes, you need to pick a story right about now)

Week Four: January 29 2014

Theme, Metaphor, and Making Choices

Loglines, Treatments, Pitches, Format, Agents and the Business

In-class feature screening, *North by Northwest*

Due: Assignment 4.

ASSIGNMENT (Midterm!): Logline and Treatment for your story, typed and **one** copy brought to class.

Week Five: February 5 2014

Pitches and Discussions
Due: Midterm! One copy
ASSIGNMENT: None.

Week Six: February 12 2014

Setting, Time, and Dialogue
In-class feature screening, *Slacker*
Writing the Short, Writing the Feature
Due: None, no copies.
ASSIGNMENT: Act I rough draft, typed in proper screenplay format. Bring **five** copies.

Week Seven: February 19 2014

Genres and Approaches
Workshop Act I.
Due: Act I rough draft, 5 copies.
ASSIGNMENT: Acts II and III rough draft, typed in proper screenplay format. Bring **five** copies.

Week Eight: February 26 2014

Rewriting, revising, and editing
Workshop Acts II and III.
Due: Acts II and III rough draft. Five copies.
ASSIGNMENT: Rewrite, revise, edit. Bring **one** copy of new version.

Week Nine: March 5 2014

Tools, Techniques, and Tips
Overcoming Writer's Block
Due: Revised draft, one copy.
ASSIGNMENT: Read screenplay for *Fargo*, by Joel and Ethan Coen.
ASSIGNMENT 5: Re-watch film you watched for Week 1 assignment. Type up 2 to 3 pages on the story, using what we've discussed throughout the course. Bring **one** copy to class.

Week Ten: March 12 2014

In-class feature screening: *Fargo*.
One on one discussions, questions.
Due: Assignment 5, one copy.
ASSIGNMENT: Full, revised, and final draft of your screenplay, **delivered via D2L inbox by 6:00 PM, March 19th 2014**. I will set the inbox to close at that time and, as stated at the outset, will not accept late work.

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. Students complete the evaluation online in CampusConnect.

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism

This course will be subject to the University's integrity policy. More information can be found at <http://academicintegrity.depaul.edu/> If you have any questions be sure to consult with your professor.

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.depaul.edu/Current%20Students/Pages/PoliciesandProcedures.aspx>

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 contact the Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) at:

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