



DC 307-407

701

Writing the Episodic Drama

2014-2015 Autumn

Room: Lewis Center, Room 1512

Thursdays 5:45pm – 9:00pm

Course Management System: D2L

José A. Soto

Office Hours: Mondays 11:45 am – 1:30 pm and Thursdays 4 - 5:30 pm (Loop CDM 506)

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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 create an original one hour-long dramatic pilot.

Learning Outcomes:

- Students will recognize the structure and characterization of successful television dramatic pilots, both through reading and watching them.
- They will develop the initial documents for a pitch presentation, and will pitch their own show ideas to the group; out of this effort they will create a *Pitch Brief* and a *Pitch Bible*.
- Students will mature their main characters to a development-bible level; polishing them to become interestingly recurring *people* that will draw the audience weekly. Additionally they will develop *the rules of their world* to establish a basic writer's *Development Bible*.
- They will write an *Outline* (or Beat Sheet) and ultimately, a *First Draft* of the pilot for their dramatic TV show (55-65 pages).

Students should note that this course will be in a *Workshop* format. That means that you have to submit on time your assignments so others students may read and critique them in class. It also means that you have to participate in session discussions of your classmates' work. We will function as closely to a *writer's room* as we can, and that entails enthusiastic participation and offering constructive criticism, even if it's not your own work. If you are not willing to do this, you have to reconsider taking this course.



I encourage students to approach me about suggestions for more in-depth readings and/or discussions related to TV series, movies, sit-coms, reality programming and other TV related subjects.

Reading:

Recommended: Douglas, Pam (2011) WRITING THE TV DRAMA SERIES: HOW TO SUCCEED AS A PROFESSIONAL WRITER IN TV; Michael Wiese Productions. ISBN-10: 1615930582

You are also invited to examine the following magazines that report on the newest developments in this thriving industry:

VARIETY

THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER

These lectures will be supplemented with handouts from the instructor over the course of the semester.

Grading:

Final grades will be based on the development of a Pitch Brief and Bible, an Outline and a TV Pilot, as well as a Pilot Analysis, class participation and attitude. Because it is has to present shows on time every hour of every day, television is one of the most demanding industries, this charge carries over to those who are preparing for it, which is why missed deadlines will result in assignment failure.

Pilot Analysis: - 10%

Pitch Brief – 20%:

Pitch Bible – 15%:

Outline – 15%

Pilot's First Draft – 30%

Participation – 10%

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 or Celtx www.celtx.com is HIGHLY recommended.



Grading Standards:

| Letter Grade | Minimum % of Total Points | Letter Grade | Minimum % of Total Points |
|--------------|---------------------------|--------------|---------------------------|
| A | 92 | C+ | 78 |
| A- | 90 | C | 72 |
| B+ | 88 | C- | 70 |
| B | 82 | D+ | 68 |
| B- | 80 | D | 60 |
| | | F | 0 |

Course Policies:

1. Participation

At this level students should be interested in the subject of the class. The only way to see this is through participation in class, either asking questions or adding constructive comments to other student's presentations.

2. Attendance

It does not constitute a specific part of your grade, but perfect attendance is required. Most of the information you need to complete your assignments will be discussed in-class; also examples of what you have to do will be given there. Subjects and/or assignments will not be discussed outside of the programmed sessions. This makes attendance critical, and thus not an issue to be negotiated. However if you have to miss a class or a deadline, make sure to plan ahead, and inform the instructor in advance. Calling in advance does not automatically excuse an absence or a missed deadline, but it is the only way to present your case. If you fail to communicate before the next class period to explain an absence or a missed deadline, they will not be excused. Please note that work, non-emergency medical and dental appointments, hangovers, intramural games, visitors from out of town, fixing your roommate's computer, fraternity/sorority events, arguments with boyfriends or girlfriends and studying for other classes do not constitute excused absences or missed assignments.

In order 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.



3. Tardiness

One true thing in all professional fields is the lack of tolerance for tardiness. Employers do not generally tolerate such behavior, and employees who offer weak, irritating excuses frequently find themselves unemployed and unemployable. We will be working under the same rules.

Remember it is your responsibility to make the arrangements when a deadline or a class has to be missed. I will treat you professionally, expecting of you a responsible attitude. This means that it is you who must be worried about solving the problem, not me.

4. Missed Assignments

Since screenwriting is a cumulative effort, if you fail to turn in any of the assignments you will fail the course. There will be no exceptions. This is a zero-tolerance policy. I have no time or patience for those who are not going to take this class seriously. Many students have flunked my courses for this reason. If you cannot make it a priority to complete all assignments, you better consider not taking this course. One more thing, turning-in an assignment does not guarantee you will have a passing grade, although the opposite will be true. Not turning them in will fail you inevitably.

5. Attitude

We are going to be spending a lot of time discussing other student's or your own work. This will be made in an orderly fashion, no matter how vehemently or fervently we feel for an argument, we have to be able to provide it in a disciplined manner. It is better to wait and later speak than not speaking at all. My evaluation of your attitude and attention will be based on your participation during discussions as much as it will be based on your assertiveness when making a comment. Students who are not insightful enough to value the learning opportunities inherent to this class tend to do poorly.

6. Use of Technology

Cellular phones and other similar devices will not be tolerated. In my mind, they are a clear indication of a bad attitude. I recommend students to turn off or switch to silence mode such devices. If your other commitments are so pressing that they cannot wait until the end of the session, it may be in your best interest to reconsider the priority you place on being here. In any case, students whose phones and/or computers make noise during class will be asked to leave immediately.

7. Uncivilized Behavior



Even though you are students who must constantly thrive to grow, we need to start acting professionally. This is why there will be no tolerance for uncivilized behavior. I require an orderly ambiance to be able to make the most of each session.

By accepting this syllabus, you are indicating that you understand my expectations for students concerning attitude and work ethic.

I reserve the right to drop any student with an F if he/she has excessive absences, engages in disruptive behavior, has a poor attitude, or in any other way is clearly not taking the class seriously.

8. Ethics

Although your grade does not contain an ethics component like some other courses, I require complete honesty in producing your work. Plagiarism is useless to you anyway. By having someone else do the work for you, you are missing an opportunity to immerse yourself in the television industry. You are also waiving your right to learn. If you are willing to do that, then you have to evaluate if it's worth the aggravation and the time you invest in this course.

By accepting this syllabus, you are indicating that you understand the seriousness of academic dishonesty and realize I will impose the harshest sanctions possible if I can prove you have engaged in such behavior. You are also indicating that you understand what constitutes academic dishonesty; I will not tolerate an excuse that claims the student did not know he/she was engaging in academic dishonesty.

9. Plagiarism

Plagiarism, cheating and/or fabrication will not be tolerated. They are serious offenses – both in course and in media careers. Thus I reserve the right to drop any student with an F if he/she engages in any form of academic dishonesty. I further reserve the right to recommend other sanctions as may be appropriate.

More information can be found at <http://academicintegrity.depaul.edu/>.

10. Withdrawal

Students who withdraw from the course do so by using the Campus Connection system <http://campusconnect.depaul.edu>. 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.



11. 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

12. Special Accommodations:

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 the Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) at:

Student Center, LPC, Suite #370

Phone number: (773)325.1677

Fax: (773)325.3720

TTY: (773)325.7296

Course Organization and Schedule:

We will meet at The Lewis Center, Room 1512, Thursdays at 5:45 pm. I will give you some time to ask questions regarding the logistics of the assignments and their due dates and then we will immediately proceed to the workshop, reading and critiquing student's work. At 7:15 we will take a 15-minute break, and we will reconvene promptly at 7:30. We will leave a few minutes before the class ends to answer specific questions of the projects you will be handling.



This syllabus is subject to modification; there may be several circumstances that will most likely change it. I reserve the right to amend the class schedule, or the syllabus if circumstances make it necessary. You may receive at least one revised syllabus or schedule before the quarter is over. If assignments or deadline dates change, I will inform you well in advance. Constantly reviewing D2L announcements and emails is recommended for this purposes.

SESSION 1
SEP 11

Introduction. The importance of the Pilot in selling a project, and in introducing the series to the audience. Characteristics of an effective Pilot.

SCREENING & ANALYSIS: *Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip* (Aron Sorkin)

HOMEWORK: Select a successful *Pilot* for the kind of show you want to write, break it down, and analyze it in one page. Due via Dropbox at the beginning of Session 2.

HOMEWORK: We will divide the group in 2. All students will develop a Pitch Brief of the show they want to write. Follow the instructions given by the professor and refer to the document provided in class. Everybody should submit their Pitch Briefs by Thursday, September 18th at 3:00 pm.

Group A will pitch their shows on Session 2. Then we will critique them and work them out.

SESSION 2
SEP 18

Pitch Briefs: Group A will present their Pitch Briefs and the group will work them out. Each student is responsible to take notes and apply them to their Briefs.

HOMEWORK: Group A will rewrite their Pitch Briefs and submit their final version by the beginning of Session 3. Group B should prepare for Pitch Brief presentations on Session 3.

SESSION 3
SEP 25

PITCH BIBLE: With the Pitch Briefs ready, a screenwriter may further develop characters and the rules of the world in essence creating a Pitch Bible. Our efforts will concentrate on creating stronger, attractive characters and situations that will bring back the audiences every week.

PITCH BRIEFS: Group B will present their Pitch Briefs and the group will work them out. Each student is responsible to take notes and apply them to their Briefs.

HOMEWORK: All students will further develop their characters and bible elements as instructed in class and following the indications on the document labeled Pitch Bible. Pitch Bibles should be submitted at 3 pm on Nov 1st.



Group B will rewrite their Pitch Briefs and submit their final version by the beginning of Session 4. Group A should prepare for Pitch Bible presentations on Session 4.

SESSION 4
OCT 2

PITCH BIBLE: Group A will present the developed elements (characters and bible) and the group will work them out. Each student is responsible to take notes and apply them to their Bibles.

HOMEWORK: Group A will rewrite their Pitch Bibles and submit their final version by the beginning of Session 5. Group B should prepare for Pitch Bible presentations on Session 5.

SESSION 5
OCT 9

BEAT SHEET AND OUTLINE: Once all the elements are ready, the screenwriter may establish the structure for the Pilot. In order to do that is necessary to create a Beat Sheet or an Outline of the episode. It will be important to emphasize on interrupted climax construction and cliffhangers.

PITCH BIBLE: Group B will present the developed elements (characters and bible) and the group will work them out. Each student is responsible to take notes and apply them to their Bibles.

HOMEWORK: All students will write an Outline (Beat Sheet) for their Pilot. They are due by at 3:00 pm October the 15th. Group B will rewrite their Pitch Bibles and submit their final version by the beginning of Session 7. Group A should prepare for Outline presentations on Session 7.

SESSION 6
OCT 16

OUTLINE: Group A will present their Outlines, the group will work them out. Each student is responsible to take notes and apply them to their Bibles.

HOMEWORK: Group A will rewrite their Outlines and submit their final version by the beginning of Session 7. Group B should prepare for Outline presentations on Session 7.

SESSION 7
OCT 23

WRITING THE PILOT: Once an Outline is agreed upon, the screenwriter may start to work on writing the script. This is the final phase of the process (if you don't count the infinite rewrites).

OUTLINE: Group B will present their Outlines; the group will work them out. Each student is responsible to take notes and apply them to their Outlines.

HOMEWORK: All students will write at least the first 10 pages of their Pilot. They will submit them at 3:00 pm on October 30th. Group B will rewrite their Outlines and submit



their final version by the beginning of Session 8. Group A should prepare for First Pages presentation on Session 8.

SESSION 8

MAY 19

FIRST PAGES: Group A will present their First Pages, and the group will work them out. Each student is responsible to take notes and apply them to their First Draft.

HOMEWORK: Group A will rewrite their First Pages and continue to work on their First Draft. Group B should prepare for First Pages presentation on Session 9.

SESSION 9

NOV 6

FIRST PAGES: Group B will present their First Pages, and the group will work them out. Each student is responsible to take notes and apply them to their First Draft.

HOMEWORK: Group A will rewrite their First Pages and continue to work on their First Draft. All students should continue to work on their Pilot, and submit it by the beginning of session 10.

SESSION 10

NOV 13

All project not reviewed by this time will be read in class. There may even be some time for resubmissions.

FINAL ASSIGNMENT – THE PILOT

It should be submitted the day of the final exam, and it should not exceed 65 pages.

September 11, 2014