

WRITING THE SITCOM (Autumn 2015)

DC 306-401 / 406-401

Thursdays: 1:30 – 4:45 pm

Room: #209, 14 East Jackson Blvd.

Instructor: Christopher Parrish

Office Hours: Mondays 12:45 – 5:15pm

Office: CDM #465

Office Phone: (312)362-5815

Fax: (312)362-6116

Email: cparris6@cdm.depaul.edu

Course Description: In this course, students analyze half-hour situational comedy pilot teleplays. The course will feature a specific focus on story-telling styles and techniques of successful sitcom predecessors, various formats of sitcom teleplays and methods for pushing original projects out into the world. Students will create an original sitcom pilot.

Prerequisite: DC 400 Writing the Television Spec Script

Type of Instruction: Lecture, discussion, in-class activities, screenings

Content Changes: Depending on time factors, the lectures, assignments and guest speaker projected for the term may require alteration or rescheduling.

Please bring either your laptop or something to take notes with for each class. On occasion, instructor will require multiple hard copies of your work brought in to class.

Written assignments should be in 12-point font. **All assignments must be saved as a PDF and posted on D2L. Do not email me your assignments. Emailed assignments will not be graded.**

Course Management System: D2L

Readings: PDFs of pilot teleplays posted on D2L.

Software: Final Draft is **strongly recommended** for this course.

Withdrawal Drop Dates: September 15, 2015 – Last day to drop classes with no penalty. October 27, 2015 – Last day to withdraw from Autumn 2015 classes.

Course Objectives:

Students will learn to craft situation comedy spec pilot outlines, bibles and complete their own sitcom pilot spec.

Students will learn the craft of verbally pitching situation comedy spec pilots.

Students will develop and craft their own personal creative “voice” by identifying and exploring themes, personal experiences and their own unique perspectives.

Students will analyze sitcom comedy pilot scripts and compare to their produced episodes.

Students will interact with a Hollywood-based television writer with a track record of writing and selling situation comedy television pilots and gain up-to-date insight into the spec sitcom pilot business.

Learning Outcomes:

- Students will compare and contrast pilot teleplays with their corresponding produced television episodes.
- Students will execute verbal pitches of their television pilots according to current industry standards.
- Students will complete their own sitcom spec pilot teleplay, shaped by their own original voice and perspective, while adhering to current television industry writing standards.

Grading:

(5%) Theme Paper

(5%) Loglines / Verbal Presentation of Spec Pilot

(10%) Outline

(25%) Show Bible (Character Bios = 15%, Setting, Series Arc, Future Storylines = 10%)

(45%) Complete Spec Pilot (Cold Open, Act I, Act II, Act III, Tag)

(10%) Class Participation (includes pitching classmate’s project for 5%)

Attendance:

Each week’s class consists of lectures, discussions, in-class activities and/or screenings. Your attendance is mandatory. For the purposes of this class, an absence is defined as either not showing up for class or showing up 15 minutes after class has begun. All unexcused absences will result in a reduction of the class participation grade.

Assignments:

Homework assignments must be completed by the date to which they are assigned in the syllabus. Reasonable deadlines are given for completion for

each assignment. Consequently, late assignments will not be accepted. Incomplete work may receive partial credit on a case by case basis (Late assignment = F.)

Exceptions:

A.) Medical emergency. You must contact me within 24 hours of the assignment due date and submit support documents within 48 hours of the assignment due date.

B.) Personal emergency. If you miss an assignment deadline because of any other reason besides a medical one, you must submit compelling evidence supporting your excuse within 24 hours of the assignment due date.

Schedule: (Schedule may be subject to change. Instructor will announce any such changes in class and/or send email.)

Week 1: September 10, 2015

Introductions

Syllabus Review

Classroom Viewing: “Walk the Line” scene

Exploring Theme: What’s Your Sound? (Themes, Message to the World, What’s Your Passion? What Inspires You? What Enrages You?)

Lecture:

A Brief History of the Spec Pilot Business

Origin Story Pilots vs. Hit-the-Ground-Running Pilots (Pros & Cons)

Structure Recap

Classroom Activity #1:

Script Reading and Dissection of a Produced Network Sitcom Pilot

Homework Assignment: Theme Paper

Due Date: Week 2 (Post on D2L by 1:00 pm 09/17/2015)

Week 2: September 17, 2015

Classroom Activity #1: Theme Paper Presentation

Lecture:

Creating Sitcom Pilots with Sustainable Conflict

Loglines & Why You Should Never Go into a Meeting Without Them

Classroom Activity #1: Pairing Off and Pitching your Favorite Show

Classroom Activity #2: Guess That Sitcom Logline Game **(if time allows)**

Homework Assignment: 5 Original Loglines & Your 5 Minute Pilot Pitch. Choose 1 of your 5 loglines and present it in a 5 minute pitch. **(The pitch = 5% of your final grade.)**

Due Date: Week 3 (Post Loglines on D2L by 1:00 pm 09/24/2015.)

Prepare to give your verbal pitch in Week 3's class.

Week 3: September 24, 2015

Classroom Activity #1: Pitching Assembly Line

Classroom Activity #2: Present 5 minute sitcom pilot pitch. Give and receive constructive verbal feedback.

Lecture:

Creating Compelling Characters (different types and their psych profiles)

Homework Assignment: Character bios for 2 - 4 main characters of show

Due Date: Week 4 (Post on D2L by 1:00 pm 10/01/2015.)

Week 4: October 1, 2015

Classroom Activity #1: Present characters. Give and receive constructive verbal feedback.

Lecture:

The Story Stew

Balancing Pilot Story Structure & Exposition

Location, Location, Location: A Brief Discussion on Popular Settings and Sets

The S.A.E.

Homework Assignment: S.A.E. (Setting/Arc for Series/Future Episode “A” Stories)

Due Date: Week 5 (Post on D2L by 1:00 pm 10/08/2015.)

Week 5: October 8, 2015

Classroom Activity #1: Presenting your SAE (Setting/Arc for Series/Future Episode “A” Stories) Give and receive constructive verbal feedback.

Lecture:
Dialogue

Homework Assignment: Pilot Outline

Due Date: Week 6 (Post on D2L by 1:00 pm 10/15/2015.)

Week 6: October 15, 2015

Classroom Activity #1: Presenting Outlines. Give and receive constructive verbal feedback.

Lecture:
The All Important Elements of Your Cold Open and Act One

Homework Assignment: Write Cold Open/Teaser and Act One

Due Date: Week 7 (Post on D2L by 1:00 pm 10/22/2015)

Week 7: October 22, 2015

Classroom Activity #1: Presenting Cold Open/Teaser and Act One in Table Read. Give and receive constructive verbal feedback.

Homework Assignment: Write Act Two

Due Date: Week 8 (Post on D2L by 1:00 pm 10/29/2015)

Week 8: October 29, 2015

Classroom Activity #1: Presenting Act Two. Give and receive constructive verbal feedback.

Homework Assignment #1: Write Act Three and Tag

Due Date: Week 9 (Post Act Three and Tag on D2L by 1:00 pm 11/05/2015)

Week 9: November 5, 2015

Classroom Activity #1: Presenting Act Three and Tag. Give and receive constructive verbal feedback.

Homework Assignment #1: Prepare 2 minute verbal pitch of a classmate's show **(Counts as 5% of Class Participation)**

Homework Assignment #2: Bring (1 - 2) "problem scenes" to workshop.

Due Date: Week 10 (Post on D2L by 1:00pm 11/12/2015)

Week 10: November 12, 2015

Classroom Activity #1: Workshop "problem scenes"

Homework Assignment: REVISE AND COMPLETE TELEVISION PILOT

DO NOT TURN IN HARD COPIES. DO NOT EMAIL ME YOUR FINAL. LATE SUBMISSIONS WILL NOT RECEIVE CREDIT.

ALL SCRIPTS MUST BE POSTED ON D2L BY THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 19TH NO LATER THAN 11:59 PM (CST) NO EXCEPTIONS.

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 sent via email.

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism:

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

College Policies:

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 Campus Connect.

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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 the Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) at: csd@depaul.edu.

Lewis Center #1420, 25 East Jackson Blvd.
Phone number: (312)362-8002

Fax: (312)362-6544
TTY: (773)325-7296

Attendance: Students are expected to attend each class and to remain for the duration. Coming 15 minutes late or leaving 15 minutes early constitutes an absence for the student. The overall grade for participation drops one-third after any absence. Three absences for any reason, whether excused or not, may constitute failure for the course.

Class Discussion: Student participation in class discussions will be measured in two ways. First, students are highly encouraged to ask questions and offer comments relevant to the day's topic. Participation allows the instructor to "hear" the student's voice when grading papers. Secondly, students will be called upon by the instructor to offer comments related to the reading assignments. Students must keep up with the reading to participate in class discussion.

Attitude: A professional and academic attitude is expected throughout this course. Measurable examples of non-academic or unprofessional attitude include but are not limited to: talking to others when the instructor is speaking, mocking another's opinion, cell phones ringing, emailing, texting or using the internet whether on a phone or computer. If any issues arise a student may be asked to leave the classroom. The professor will work with the Dean of Students Office to navigate such student issues.

Civil Discourse: DePaul University is a community that thrives on open discourse that challenges students, both intellectually and personally, to be [Socially Responsible Leaders](#). It is the expectation that all dialogue in this course is civil and respectful of the dignity of each student. Any instances of disrespect or hostility can jeopardize a student's ability to be successful in the course. The professor will partner with the Dean of Students Office to assist in managing such issues.

Cell Phones/On Call: If you bring a cell phone to class, it must be off or set to a silent mode. Should you need to answer a call during class, students must leave the room in an undistruptive manner. Out of respect to fellow students and the professor, texting is never allowable in class. If you are required to be on call as part of your job, please advise me at the start of the course.