# THE (ADVANCED) WRITERS ROOM: DEVELOPING THE HALF HOUR COMEDY
## (WINTER 2016)

DC 443-801
TV 302-801
WEDNESDAYS (5:45 – 9:00)
14 East Jackson  #211
Instructor: Christopher Parrish
Office Hours: Thursdays 10:00 – 5:30
Office: CDM465
Email: cparris6@cdm.depaul.edu
Office #: (312)362-5534

## TYPE OF INSTRUCTION:
A heavy emphasis on Writers Lab and collaboration in the classroom. Lectures, Powerpoint presentations and script readings are also included. However, this is largely peer to peer activity.

**SOFTWARE:** Final Draft strongly suggested (but not required).

## WITHDRAWAL DROP DATES:
January 17, 2016 – Last day to drop classes with no penalty.
February 21, 2016 – Last day to withdraw from Winter 2016 classes.

## COURSE DESCRIPTION:
DC 443 - This advanced course provides students the opportunity to develop a half-hour television comedy series bible, plus episode outlines in workshops modeled after a professional writers room.  From Show Runner to Writers' Assistant, we will examine the various roles that make the writers room a creative and dynamic environment and help you develop a sound blueprint for a full season of your original half-hour comedy series. Students must have a completed television pilot script before enrolling.

TV 302 – This is a creative and intense course that takes you from the germ of a story idea to a fully thought out half-hour comedy series.  In this class, you will work with your colleagues and the instructor to enhance your skills in storytelling and laying out a complete season of your show for cable, broadcast or digital distribution.  Additionally, you will develop a minimum of one outline of an episode in the season.

## COURSE OUTCOME:
DC 443 / TV 302 – Students will learn the hierarchy, protocols and daily workings of a primetime network television sitcom.

As "Showrunners" of their own series, they will gain first hand experience running a mock writer's room.

Students will craft a Development Bible of their own series and collaborate to create one for their joint class project for their "writing staff."

Collaborating together and writing alone, students will complete several abbreviated outlines for other classmates' shows.

As Showrunners, students will choose an outline for an episode of their series written by their "staff" and, based on that, write a revised / alternate pilot episode of their series.

**DC 443 PREREQUISITE:**
DC 406: Writing the Sitcom

**TV 302 PREREQUISITE**:
DC 272: Introduction to Television Writing
DC 306: Writing the Sitcom

The instructor will guide students on how to write a pilot expressing the students' own creative voices, point of view and style through theme, characters, structure, tone and dialogue.

The class will survey programs and scripts of various types, including single-camera sitcom, multi-camera sitcom and animation.  They will verbally pitch to their peers and instructor.  Like professional screenwriters working on an actual series, student writers will go through the entire sitcom writing process within our mock "Writer's Room" and take turns as the designated "Showrunner."  As the course progresses, students will engage in their own development and "punch-up" sessions.

Over the course, students will have their scripts read aloud in class by "casting" their classmates in the roles for a "Table Reading."  Constructive criticism and active participation is mandatory, as is assigned homework.

If time allows, students will also have the opportunity for a classroom Q&A (via Skype) with a Hollywood professional who have written for and/or been involved with primetime network sitcoms.


**REQUIREMENTS:**
No writer improves without receiving feedback on his or her work.  You and your classmates will engage in an unofficial and mutually beneficial contract with one another by reading each other's work and giving respectful and constructive criticism.  **Attendance and participation is mandatory.**

**ABSENCES AND LATE ARRIVALS:**
Three unexcused absences will result in one full lowered final grade for the course.  Arriving more than twenty minutes to class without a valid excuse will count as an unexcused absence.

Time management is a major challenge for this course in regards to giving all students time for their material to be read and workshopped.  Students who arrive more than twenty minutes automatically forfeit any priority or expectation to have their material workshopped for that evening's class.

**DEADLINES:**
Just as if you have been hired to write on assignment for a television series, **MEETING YOUR DEADLINE IS ABSOLUTELY VITAL**.  Without a documented medical excuse or legitimate family emergency, assignments must be turned in on time or no points will be awarded for your work.

**ASSIGNMENTS:**
**All written assignments must be typed in 12 pt. Courier font in a pdf file and posted on D2L.**  Scripts should also be free of spelling, grammatical and punctuation errors, unless the dialogue or storyline otherwise calls for it.  All scripts and scenes are to be done in proper screenwriting format.  Most professionals use Final Draft but it is not required for the course. **Please make certain all assignments include your name, the course title and number and the date of the assignment due.**

**EMAILS:**
Please sign your first and last name with every email you send.  I check my email every day and will have a response for you within 24 hours. **My email is cparris6@cdm.depaul.edu**

**THE NO, ZILCH AND ABSOLUTE ZERO TOLORANCE POLICY ABOUT NEGATIVE CRITICISM:**
When new and aspiring writers share their work with others, it can be an emotionally charged situation leaving the writer feeling very vulnerable.  Same goes for a professional Writers' Room.  Throughout your screenwriting careers, you will inevitably receive catty, insulting, idiotic and nonproductive criticism of your work.  However, in our classroom, absolutely none of it will be tolerated.  If and when there is something you dislike about a classmate's writing (and you will), it is your obligation to express it.  But more importantly, it is your responsibility to express why it is you think so respectfully, and ideally, suggest a way to fix it.  At the

same time, the person receiving constructive criticism from their peers will do so in a <u>polite, non-defensive and professional manner</u>.

**GRADE BREAKDOWN:**
Individual Development Bible: 10%
Group Show Bible: 10%

2 Pager Outlines (4-5): 20%
Group Show Outline: 10%

Group Pilot Script First Draft: 15%
Revised Individual Pilot Script: 25%

Peer Participation Evaluation: 10%

<u>Course Calendar:</u>

**1/6/ 2016 - Week #1**: Welcome to The Writers' Room: Introductions, Syllabus Overview

Lecture: Hierarchy of The Writers' Room, Different Rooms/Different Rules

**Classroom Activity #1**:
Class separated in Teams A, B and C
Teammates sign up for order to
    1.) Rotate Weekly Group Pilot Showrunner
    2.) Rotate Showrunner of Individual's Existing Pilot/Series

**Classroom Activity #2:**
Groups collaborate and choose to develop a sitcom based on any of the following:
1.)A current movie
2.) A sitcom "reboot"
3.) Vehicle for a celebrity to star in
4.) Based on existing source material

**Classroom Activity #3:**
Based on Activity #2, Groups will begin brainstorming concepts (format, tone, theme, characters, relationships & backstories, conflicts, possible episode loglines)

**Homework Assignment(s):**
Assignment #1 - Groups A, B and C – Each person prepares a separate 3-5 minute verbal pitch of the group's pilot/series project (WARNING: MAKE

IT GOOD BUT DON'T GET TOO ATTACHED TO IT.)  DUE: At beginning of next class.

Assignment #2 - Next Week's Individual Pilot Showrunners – Development Bible  DUE: At beginning of next class
**SEE RUBRIC FOR INSTRUCTIONS.**


**1/13/2016 - Week #2**: Pitching a Pilot vs. Pitching an Episode

Lecture: Pitching a Pilot vs. Pitching an Episode

**Classroom Activity #1:** (3-5 Minute) Verbal pitch of Group sitcom concepts to class

Group A pitches to Group B.  Group B chooses which of A's concepts to develop into a pilot.

Group B pitches to Group C.  Group C chooses which of B's concepts to develop into a pilot.

Group C pitches to Group A.  Group A chooses which of  C's concepts to develop into a pilot.

**Classroom Activity #2** – Individual Pilot Showrunners run tables "breaking" their series / pilot using Development Bible

**Homework Assignment: Individual Pilot Staff:** Each person writes a separate Outline based on this week's meeting.  DUE AT BEGINNING OF NEXT CLASS.  **SEE RUBRIC FOR INSTRUCTIONS.**

**Homework Assignment:** Next Week's Individual Pilot Showrunner – Create Development Bible.  DUE AT BEGINNING OF NEXT CLASS.  **SEE RUBRIC FOR INSTRUCTIONS.**


**1/20/2016 - Week #3:** Time for a Change… or Not – Facing Studio & Network Notes

Lecture: Dealing with Notes from the Studios & Networks

Classroom Activity #1 – Group Showrunners run tables "breaking" Group Show Bible (Part #1) emphasizing on Theme and Characters

Classroom Activity #2 – Individual Pilot Showrunners run tables "breaking" their series / pilot using Development Bible

**Homework Assignment: Individual Pilot Staff:** Write Outline based on this week's meeting.  DUE AT BEGINNING OF NEXT CLASS.  **SEE RUBRIC FOR INSTRUCTIONS.**

**Homework Assignment: Next Week's Individual Pilot Showrunner –** Create Development Bible for your staff.  DUE AT BEGINNING OF NEXT CLASS.  **SEE RUBRIC FOR INSTRUCTIONS.**


**1/27/2016 - Week #4**: Most Popular & Unpopular Do's & Don't in the Writers' Room

Lecture: Do's & Don't of the Writers' Room

Classroom Activity #1 – Group Showrunners run tables "breaking" Group Show Bible (Part #2) emphasizing on Conflicts/Stories and Settings.

Classroom Activity #2 – Individual Pilot Showrunners run tables "breaking" their series / pilot using Development Bible

**Homework Assignment #1: Bible Weeks' Group Showrunners (ONLY)** – Collaborate together (not ABC combined) to write up your show's Bible.  DUE AT BEGINNING OF NEXT CLASS.  **SEE RUBRIC FOR INSTRUCTIONS.**

**Homework Assignment #2: Individual Pilot Staff:** Write Outline based on this week's meeting.  DUE AT BEGINNING OF NEXT CLASS.  **SEE RUBRIC FOR INSTRUCTIONS.**

**Homework Assignment: Next Week's Individual Pilot Showrunner –** Create Development Bible for your staff.  DUE AT BEGINNING OF NEXT CLASS.  **SEE RUBRIC FOR INSTRUCTIONS.**


**2/3/2016 - Week #5**: Making the Rounds

Lecture: Meeting on Shows

Classroom Activity #1 – Group Showrunners run tables "breaking" Outlines (Part One) based on Bibles and Writing Staff Input.

Classroom Activity #2 – Individual Pilot Showrunners run tables "breaking" their series / pilot using Development Bible

**Homework Assignment: Individual Pilot Staff:** Write Outline based on this week's meeting.  DUE AT BEGINNING OF NEXT CLASS.  **SEE RUBRIC FOR INSTRUCTIONS.**

**Homework Assignment: Next Week's Individual Pilot Showrunner** – Create Development Bible for your staff using Development Bible.  DUE AT BEGINNING OF NEXT CLASS.  **SEE RUBRIC FOR INSTRUCTIONS.**

**2/10/2016 - Week #6**: Don't Text Us, We'll Text You

Lecture: Getting an Agent, Manager and Entertainment Attorney

Classroom Activity #1 – Group Showrunners run tables "breaking" Outlines (Part Two) based on Bibles and Writing Staff Input.

Classroom Activity #2 – Individual Pilot Showrunners run tables "breaking" their series / pilot using Development Bible

**Homework Assignment #1: Outline Weeks' Group Showrunners (ONLY)** – Collaborate together (not ABC combined) to write up your show's Outline.  DUE AT BEGINNING OF NEXT CLASS.  SEE RUBRIC FOR INSTRUCTIONS.

**Homework Assignment: Individual Pilot Staff:** Write Outline based on this week's meeting.  DUE AT BEGINNING OF NEXT CLASS.  **SEE RUBRIC FOR INSTRUCTIONS.**

**2/17/2016 - Week #7**: Deal with It

Lecture: Types of Pilot Deals

Classroom Activity #1 – Based on outline, Group Showrunners run tables "breaking" their pilot episode's Cold Open and Act One.

Classroom Activity #2 – Workshop Individual Outline

**Homework Assignment #1: Group Showrunner:** This week's Showrunner, based on collaborating with staff, Write Cold Open and Act

One.  DUE AT THE BEGINNING OF NEXT CLASS.  **SEE RUBRIC FOR INSTRUCTIONS.**

**Homework Assignment #2: Individual** – Write Cold Open and Act One. DUE AT THE BEGINNING OF NEXT CLASS.  **SEE RUBRIC FOR INSTRUCTIONS.**

**2/24/2016 - Week #8**: Whose Who & Where to Find Them

Lecture: Strategies for Landing Writing Gigs

Classroom Activity #1 – Group Showrunners run tables "breaking" their pilot episode's Act Two.

Classroom Activity #2 – Table Read Individual Cold Open and Act One.

**Homework Assignment #1: Group Showrunner:** This week's Showrunner, based on collaboration with staff, Write Act Two. DUE AT THE BEGINNING OF NEXT CLASS.  **SEE RUBRIC FOR INSTRUCTIONS.**

**Homework Assignment #2: Individual –** Write Act Two. DUE AT THE BEGINNING OF NEXT CLASS.  **SEE RUBRIC FOR INSTRUCTIONS.**

**3/2/2016 - Week #9**: No Thanks
Lecture: Getting Fired, When to Quit and When to Just Say No

Classroom Activity #1 – Group Showrunners run tables "breaking" their pilot episode's Act Three.

Classroom Activity #2 – Table Read Individual Act Two.

**Homework Assignment #1: Group Showrunner:** This week's Showrunner, based on collaboration with staff, Write Act Three. DUE AT THE BEGINNING OF NEXT CLASS.  **SEE RUBRIC FOR INSTRUCTIONS**

**Homework Assignment #2: Individual** - Write Act Three.  DUE AT THE BEGINNING OF NEXT CLASS.  **SEE RUBRIC FOR INSTRUCTIONS.**

**3/9/2016 - Week #10**: In the Pilot's Seat
Lecture: What to Expect When You Make Your First Pilot

Classroom Activity #1 – TABLE READINGS OF COMPLETE GROUP PILOT SCRIPT FIRST DRAFTS

Classroom Activity #2 – Table Read Individual Act Three.

**Homework Assignment: Individual** - **Complete script with revised pages.  NO EXCEPTIONS.  LATE WORK WILL NOT BE GRADED OR ACCEPTED.**  ALL ARE DUE: March 16th by 5:00 pm. **SEE RUBRIC FOR INSTRUCTIONS**.

Homework Assignment #2: Fill out Peer Participation Evaluations.  ALSO DUE: March 16th by 5:00 pm.

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.

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 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.

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.
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