

DC 309 Feature Development

When: Thursday · 5:45pm - 9:00pm
Where: 14 East Jackson Room 209 / Loop Campus

Instructor: Matt Quinn · mquinn@cdm.depaul.edu · 312-362-5807 · CDM 509
Office hours: Wednesdays 11:00am – 5:45pm / Thursdays 11:00am - 1:30pm & 4:45pm – 5:30pm

Summary of Course

This course offers a practical approach to the screenwriter's role in the development of a feature film. Emphasis will be placed on obtaining a greater understanding of narrative conventions, script analysis and the film market. From agents to studio executives, we will examine the varying points of view that comprise the development process. Constructive analysis will be used to break down feature length produced screenplays and student work. The assignments and class discussions are designed to expose the inner workings of Hollywood and provide a framework for what it takes to succeed in the entertainment industry.

Course Objectives

- Students will have an understanding of the current spec market.
- Students will learn how the development process works in the studio system.
- Students will learn how to analyze screenplays with professional coverage assignments and development notes.

Prerequisites

DC 101 or DC 201

Grading

Class Attendance and Participation	10%
Coverage Assignments	50%
Development Notes	10%
Draft Comparison Project	20%
Group Pitch Project	10%

A = 100-93, A- = 92-90, B+ = 89-88, B = 87-83, B- = 82-80, C+ = 79-78, C = 77-73, C- = 72-70, D+ = 69-68, D = 67-63, D- = 62-60, F = 59-0. A indicates excellence, B indicates good work, C indicates satisfactory work, D work is unsatisfactory in some respect, F is substantially unsatisfactory work.

Textbooks

"Breakfast with Sharks" by Michael Lent ISBN-10: 060981043X (Required)

"My Friend Dahmer" by Derf Backderf ISBN-10: 1419702173 (Required)

Additional readings provided by instructor

Attendance

Attendance and participation is mandatory. An absence, which is defined as not showing up to class or arriving more than 10 minutes late to class, constitutes a reduction in your overall grade.

D2L

You will be using D2L extensively in this course. To log on, go to:

<https://login.depaul.edu/ldap/login?service=https%3a%2f%2fd2l.depaul.edu%2fd2l%2fcustom%2fcas> and enter using your campus connect logon and password. Once you are logged on, click on the course number link and you will find links to the syllabus, course outline, video lectures, discussion forums, weekly assignments, etc.

Course Outline

Week 1 – January 5th

Lecture: Course Intro, Business of Screenwriting, Coverage Overview

Assignment: Breakfast with Sharks (Chapters 4 and 5), Industry Update, Coverage 1

Week 2 – January 12th

Lecture: Screenwriting Conventions – Developing a Blockbuster

Assignment: Industry Update, Coverage 2, Coverage 3

Week 3 – January 19th

Lecture: Screenwriting Conventions – Character Driven Writing Sample

Assignment: Industry Update, Coverage 4, Coverage 5

Week 4 – January 26th

Lecture: Production Companies

Assignments: Breakfast with Sharks (Chapters 6 and 7), Industry Update, Coverage 6, Coverage 7

Week 5 – February 2nd

Lecture: Movie Studios

Assignments: Breakfast with Sharks (Chapters 8, 9, and 15), Industry Update, Coverage 8

Week 6 – February 9th

Lecture: Networks

Assignments: Industry Update, Coverage 9, Coverage 10

Week 7 – February 16th

Lecture: Development Notes

Assignments: Breakfast with Sharks (Chapters 10, 11, and 12), Industry Update, Development Notes

Week 8 – February 23rd

Lecture: Assistants, Agents, and Managers

Assignments: Breakfast with Sharks (Chapter 1, 2, 3, 7, 13, 14, 16, 17, 20 and 21), Industry updates, Draft Comparison – Due on March 9th

Week 9 – March 2nd

Lecture: Pitching

Assignments: Breakfast with Sharks (Chapter 6), Industry Update, Draft Comparison

Week 10 – March 9th

Lecture: Draft Comparison Review, Group Pitch Workshop

Assignments: Group Pitch Project

Week 11 – March 16th

Group Pitch Project Presentations

Assignments**Coverage Assignments (50% of final grade)**

There are ten coverage assignments in this course – Due dates can be viewed in the Course Outline section of the syllabus. Your job in these assignments is to decide whether or not the script provides the template for a cinematically viable movie. Once you make that decision, your comments must back up this evaluation - without wavering. Your opinion is not wrong as long as you make a definitive argument to support your position.

The main tool for communicating your analysis is called "coverage". Coverage is generally a three-page analysis of a script, teleplay or manuscript, which breaks down as follows:

- One Page Summary - This includes a Logline (one sentence description of the project), Brief Synopsis (one paragraph description of the project) and Comment Summary (one paragraph description on your evaluation of the material)
- One Page Synopsis (two pages for manuscript) - One page (no more/no less). The

synopsis should be broken down into three paragraphs - One for each act of the screenplay.

- One Page Comments - One page (no more/no less).

Comments for scripts that are a PASS usually follow this structure:

- Paragraph 1 - Brief Summary
- Paragraph 2 - What Works
- Paragraph 3 - Primary Concern
- Paragraph 4 - Second Primary Concern
- Paragraph 5 - Summary

Comments for scripts that are a CONSIDER usually follow this structure:

- Paragraph 1 - Brief Summary
- Paragraph 2 - Best Attribute
- Paragraph 3 - Second Best Attribute
- Paragraph 4 - Concerns (must be minimal - if any)
- Paragraph 5 - Summary

As stated previously, the reader must have a definitive position on the screenplay and the writer, which must support one of the following ratings:

Recommend - Never use this rating as you are essentially telling an executive to drop everything they are doing and buy the script immediately.

Consider - Encourages the executive to take a look at the material

Consider w/res - Do not use this rating because you are essentially saying, "The script is good, but I'm not sure". Remember, they are hiring you for your opinion - Give your opinion and don't waiver.

Track - This rating essentially says the script is flawed, but future efforts should be looked at closely because there is talent on the page. Track is only for new writers with no previous track record (use IMDB).

Pass - This rating essentially says there is not enough talent or intrigue in the concept/execution to warrant a closer look.

The templates for coverage can vary from company to company, but the content is essentially the same. You will find a zip file on the D2L Content page for the course, which contains coverage samples, coverage template, and ratings guides.

Development Notes (10% of final grade)

Using the Development Note template and script in the attached zip file found in the Content tab link on D2L, write development notes on an assigned screenplay. The ultimate goal of the notes is to convey what works and what does not work in the current draft and how to move forward.

This project is worth 10 points (10 percent of your final grade) and must be submitted to the corresponding D2L Dropbox link before class on Thursday, February 16th - Late

submissions will be not be accepted.

Keep in mind, development notes differ from coverages because you are not only identifying problems, you are offering solutions on how to fix them. It's also important to note that these projects have been purchased by the studio or production company that is paying you - Therefore, you do not want to trash the concept (in fact, you must think its absolutely brilliant - Like FAST & FURIOUS SIX kind of brilliant). The wrath of your critique should be reserved for the execution of the draft.

Your notes should break down as follows:

- One page for Act 1
- Two pages for Act 2
- One page for Act 3
- Two pages of Comments
- Total of six full pages
- Use 12 point Courier Font

Draft Comparison (20% of final grade)

Using the Development Note template and scripts in the attached zip file found in the Content tab link on D2L, write development notes on the second draft of an assigned screenplay. You must read both the first and second drafts of the assigned screenplay, using the first draft as a foundation for your comments on the second draft. The ultimate goal of the notes is to let the development team know what adjustments have been made and how to move forward from the current draft.

This project is worth 20 points (20 percent of your final grade) and must be submitted via the corresponding D2L Dropbox link before class on Thursday, March 9th – Late submissions will be not be accepted. I'm giving you two weeks to complete this project, so please make sure you give the time, effort, and attention to detail the assignment calls for.

Do not automatically assume that the second draft is a marked improvement over the first effort. In some instances, the second draft can be a dramatic step backward. Keep in mind, development notes differ from coverages because you are not only identifying problems, you are offering solutions on how to fix them. It's also important to note that these projects have been purchased by the studio or production company that is paying you - Therefore, you do not want to trash the concept (in fact, you must think its absolutely brilliant - Like FAST FIVE kind of brilliant). The wrath of your critique should be reserved for the execution of the draft.

Your notes should break down as follows:

- One page for Act 1
- Two pages for Act 2
- One page for Act 3
- One page for Draft Comparison
- Three pages of Comments
- Total of eight full pages
- Use 12 point Courier Font

Group Pitch Project (10% of final grade)

You will work with your assigned group members to present an assigned screenplay from the 2016 Blacklist for your 15-minute group pitch project. Each group member should focus on a certain aspect of the property (story, characters, casting, budget, marketing, etc.) to formulate a group pitch to present to the class on Thursday, March 16th. There are no rules or expected format for the pitch other than making a strong attempt as a group to "sell" your assigned script to the class within the allotted time frame.

The Group Pitch Project grade is worth a total of 10 points and is broken down into two categories:

- 5 Points Group Participation – This grade will be determined solely by the average sum of scorecards completed by the other students in your assigned group based on your participation.
- 5 Points Group Pitch – This grade will be determined solely by the average sum of scorecards completed by the class based on the pitch execution and commercial viability of your project.

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

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.

Changes to the 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

Instructor and course evaluations provide valuable feedback that can improve teaching and learning. The greater the level of participation, the more useful the results. As students, you are

in the unique position to view the instructor over time. Your comments about what works and what doesn't can help faculty build on the elements of the course that are strong and improve those that are weak. Isolated comments from students and instructors' peers may also be helpful, but evaluation results based on high response rates may be statistically reliable (believable). As you experience this course and material, think about how your learning is impacted. Your honest opinions about your experience in and commitment to the course and your learning may help improve some components of the course for the next group of students. Positive comments also show the department chairs and college deans the commitment of instructors to the university and teaching evaluation results are one component used in annual performance reviews (including salary raises and promotion/tenure). The evaluation of the instructor and course provides you an opportunity to make your voice heard on an important issue – the quality of teaching at DePaul.

Changes to the Syllabus

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Academic Integrity and Plagiarism

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

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.

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.

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

Excused Absence

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.

Incomplete

An incomplete grade is a special, temporary grade that may be assigned by an instructor when unforeseeable circumstances prevent a student from completing course requirements by the end of the term and when otherwise the student had a record of satisfactory progress in the course. CDM policy

requires the student to initiate the request for incomplete grade before the end of the term in which the course is taken. Prior to submitting the incomplete request, the student must discuss the circumstances with the instructor. Students may initiate the incomplete request process in [MyCDM](#).

- All incomplete requests must be approved by the instructor of the course and a CDM Associate Dean. Only exceptions cases will receive such approval.
- If approved, students are required to complete all remaining course requirement independently in consultation with the instructor by the deadline indicated on the incomplete request form.
- By default, an incomplete grade will automatically change to a grade of F after two quarters have elapsed (excluding summer) unless another grade is recorded by the instructor.
- An incomplete grade does NOT grant the student permission to attend the same course in a future quarter.

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:

Student Center, LPC, Suite #370

Phone number: (773)325.1677

Fax: (773)325.3720

TTY: (773)325.7296