SCWR 442 Studio Development

When: Thursday · 1:30pm – 4:45pm
Where: CDM Building / RM 222 / Loop Campus

Instructor: Matt Quinn · mquinn@cdm.depaul.edu · 312-362-5807 · CDM 509
Office hours: Monday & Thursday · 11:30am – 12:45pm / Wednesday · 4:00pm – 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

Upon successful completion of this course students will be able to:

- Evaluate the current feature spec and pilot market.
- Identify classic Hollywood storytelling conventions.
- Explain how the development process works in the studio system.
- Analyze spec screenplays and teleplays with professional coverage assignments
- Write development notes with a focus on identifying concerns and providing viable solutions to improve the material.

Prerequisites

None

Grading

Class Attendance and Participation	10%
Coverage Assignments	50%
Development Notes	10%
Draft Comparison Project	20%
Development Team 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)
Additional readings provided by instructor

Attendance

Attendance and participation are 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 9th

Lecture: Course Intro, Business of Screenwriting, Coverage Overview
Assignment: Breakfast with Sharks (Chapter 4), Industry Update, Coverage 1

Week 2 – January 16th

Lecture: Screenwriting Conventions – Developing a Blockbuster
Assignment: Industry Update, Coverage 2, Coverage 3

Week 3 – January 23rd

Lecture: Screenwriting Conventions – Character Driven Writing Sample
Assignment: Industry Update, Coverage 4, Coverage 5

Week 4 – January 30th

Lecture: Production Companies & Producers
Assignments: Breakfast with Sharks (Chapters 10, 11 and 12), Industry Update, Coverage 6, Coverage 7

Week 5 – February 6th

Lecture: Movie Studios & Studio Execs
Assignments: Breakfast with Sharks (Chapters 8, 9, and 15), Industry Update, Coverage 8

Week 6 – February 13th

Lecture: Networks & Network Execs
Assignments: Industry Update, Coverage 9, Coverage 10

Week 7 – February 20th

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

Week 8 – February 27th

Lecture: Agents, and Managers
Assignments: Breakfast with Sharks (Chapter 1, 2, 3, 16, 17, 20 and 21), Industry updates, Draft Comparison

Week 9 – March 5th

Lecture: Pitching & Breaking In
Workshop: Development Team Pitch
Assignments: Breakfast with Sharks (Chapter 5, 6, 19), Industry Update, Draft Comparison

Week 10 – March 12th

Lecture: Draft Comparison Review, Development Team Pitch Presentations
Assignments: *Development Team Pitch Project*

Week 11 – March 19th

Development Team 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 Submission link before class on Thursday, February 27th – Late submissions will 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 it's absolutely brilliant - Like DARK PHOENIX 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 Submission link before class on Thursday, March 12th – Late submissions will 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 it's absolutely brilliant - Like THE FANATIC 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

Development Team Pitch Project (10% of final grade)

You will work with your assigned group members to present a 15-minute story pitch on an assigned screenplay. Each group member should focus on a certain aspect of the property (story, characters, casting, budget, marketing, etc.) to formulate a team pitch to present to the class on Thursday, March 12th or Thursday, March 19th. There are no rules or expected format for the pitch other than making a strong attempt as a team to "sell" your assigned script within the allotted time frame.

The Development Team 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

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.

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 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. Please see https://resources.depaul.edu/teaching-commons/teaching/Pages/online-teaching-evaluations.aspx for additional information.

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/.

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

Preferred Name & Gender Pronouns

Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender, gender variance, and nationalities. I will gladly honor your request to address you by an alternate name or gender pronoun. Please advise me of this preference early in the quarter so that I may make appropriate changes to my records. Please also note that students may choose to identify within the University community with a preferred first name that differs from their legal name and may also update their gender. The preferred first name will appear in University related systems and documents except where the use of the legal name is necessitated or required by University business or legal need. For more information and instructions on how to do so, please see the Student Preferred Name and Gender Policy at http://policies.depaul.edu/policy/policy.aspx?pid=332

Incomplete Grades

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. All incomplete requests must be approved by the instructor of the course and a CDM Associate Dean. Only exceptions cases will receive such approval. Information about the Incomplete Grades policy can be found at http://www.cdm.depaul.edu/Current%20Students/Pages/Grading-Policies.aspx

Students with Disabilities

DePaul 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.

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