# DePaul University School of Cinematic Arts

## SCWR 390/490: Topics in Screenwriting

**Independent Science Fiction**
Spring, 2022
Wednesday, 1:30-4:45 PM, 14 East Jackson LL 105
Professor Brad Riddell (he/him): brad.riddell@depaul.edu
Office Hours: Tues. 9-11:30 AM and Thurs. 9:00 AM – 1:00 PM or by appointment.
Office Hours Zoom link: https://depaul.zoom.us/my/riddell

### Description:
Advanced study in screenwriting focusing on a specific genre such as: Science Fiction, Film Noir, Comedy, Action-Adventure, Nonfiction, etc. May be repeated for credit.

### Prerequisites:
SCWR 101 or 100 (for undergraduates)

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

- discuss the constraints, choices, and aesthetics that make independent science fiction (sci-fi) distinct from studio films
- analyze sci-fi films to determine their roots in, and overlap with other genres
- examine how issues of race, gender, sexual orientation, and identity are, can, and should be included in sci-fi
- determine which sci-fi sub-genres and aesthetics most appeal to them
- apply a "Lo-Fi" aesthetic to the creation of original screenwriting project
- evaluate the writing of their peers and formulate helpful feedback

### Course Outcomes
- A low-budget sci-fi short script.
- A treatment for an indie sci-film.
  - Graduate students will also write the first ten pages of their script.

### Textbooks
Readings will be provided by the instructor.

### Screenwriting Software:
You will be required to use screenwriting software. Final Draft, Fade In, Writer's Duet, Highland, and Celtx are popular options. All assignments are to be delivered in PDF.

### Course Management:
This course is managed on D2L. There you will find course news, reading materials, grades, calendar, and submission and discussion boards for posting assignments.

## Course Schedule:

### Week 1: March  30 – April 6
- LECTURE:  Course introduction, What is Indie Sci-Fi?
- WATCH: *Primer* in class, *Safety Not Guaranteed* at home
- READ: Selections on D2L
- ASSIGNMENT: *Primer* + *Safety Not Guaranteed* paper

### Week 2: April 6 - 13
- LECTURE:  Into the Multi-Verse
- WATCH: *Coherence* in class, *Another Earth* at home
- READ: Selections on D2L
- ASSIGNMENT: *Coherence + Another Earth* paper

### Week 3: April 13 - 20
- LECTURE:  Big Brother Is Watching You
- WATCH: *Advantageous* in class, *Sorry to Bother You* at home
- READ: Selections on D2L
- ASSIGNMENT:
  - *Advantageous + Sorry to Bother You* paper.
  - Short Script + two-minute pitch with mini-deck

### Week 4: April 20 – 27
- LECTURE:  Shorts to Careers (or Not)
- WATCH: *Pumzi, Alive in Joberg, Premise* in class, *Minor Premise* at home.
- PITCHES: Short Scripts Due + Two-Minute Pitch Presentations
- READ: Selections on D2L
- ASSIGNMENT: *Premise + Minor Premise* paper.

### Week 5: April 27 – May 4
- LECTURE: TV and the Indie Aesthetic
- WATCH: *Black Mirror: San Junipero* and *Station Eleven* in class
- READING: Selections on D2L
- ASSIGNMENT:
  - Three to five Loglines for Lo-Fi Feature Scripts
  - *Black Mirror: San Junipero* and *Station Eleven* paper.
  - (*Filmmakers form production teams*)

### Week 6: May 4 – 11
- WATCH: Production Short Script Pitches
- WORKSHOP: Loglines
- ASSIGNMENT:
  - One Pager for selected feature project

  o *(Filmmaker Production teams choose script preferences)*

## Week 7: May 11 - 18
- LECTURE:  Fun with Clones
- WORKSHOP: Feature One Pager/Production meetings
- WATCH: *Swan Song* in class, *Moon* at home
- READ: Selections on D2L
- ASSIGNMENT:
  o *Moon + Swan Song* paper
  o Sequence Breakdown for feature project
  o *(Filmmaker Production teams create short film look books)*

## Week 8: May 18 -25
- LECTURE:  Electric Sheep
- WORKSHOP: Sequence Breakdown/Production meetings
- WATCH: *Operator* in class, *Ex Machina* at home
- READ: Selections on D2L
- ASSIGNMENT:
  o First half of feature project treatment
  o *Operator + Ex Machina* paper
  o *(Filmmaker Production teams shoot films)*

## Week 9: May 25 – June 1
- LECTURE: Aliens on the Cheap
- WORKSHOP:  Feature Treatments 1/ Dailies Selection
- WATCH: *The Signal* in class, *Europa Report* at home
- READ: Selections on D2L
- ASSIGNMENT:
  o Second half of feature project treatment
  o *The Signal + Europa Report* paper
  o (*Filmmaker teams edit films*)

## Week 10: June 1 – June 8
- LECTURE:  Space Odd-yssey
- WORKSHOP: Feature Treatments 2 / Rough Cuts
- WATCH: *Aniara* in class, *High Life* at home
- READ: Selections on D2L
- ASSIGNMENT:
  o Revised feature project treatment (+pages for grad students)
  o *Aniara + High Life* paper
  o *(Filmmaker teams Sound and finish films)*

June 8

Writers deliver revised feature treatments (+ ten script pages for grads) in submissions.  Filmmakers present short films. **Attendance is required.**

## Assignments

### Papers

You will write a total of nine <u>short</u> papers throughout the quarter, reflecting on the films screened in and out of class, and the readings provided. Each week, a set of discussion questions will be posted under "Submissions" on D2L.  You will write a minimum 250-word response to those questions. Each paper represents 5% of your final grade (45% in total). Please save files as a PDF and use your last name and the name of the assignment: Ripley.AlienDiscussion.pdf

**C-** is the minimum passing grade for SCA majors and graduate students.

**A** level writing demonstrates thorough comprehension of the material but also provides a unique take and excellent point of view. It offers clear, creative thought.

**B** level writing demonstrates mostly thorough comprehension of the material and attempts to provide a creative take or point of view.

**C** level writing is lacking in depth on the topic and could be considered superficial. It does not present a notable creative approach to discussing the material.

**D** level writing may as well be an **F**. It indicates a serious lack of effort, a total failure to comprehend the material, and no effort toward an original point of view.

Work that contains grammatical errors, misspellings, or generally poor and unclear construction will rarely if ever achieve a grade of **A** or **B** no matter how good the actual thinking presented might be.

### Short Screenplay

As your midterm, you will submit a short screenplay and logline on April 20, then present a two-minute pitch (with a short deck). Your story mayeventually  be selected for production in class by filmmaking students. Here are some things to keep in mind about the script:

1.  This is a very low-budget project.
2.  No more than eight pages.
3.  No more than two locations.
4.  The short should not be a remake or spoof but should be inspired by the Lo-Fi aesthetic we've discussed in a way that you can clearly define for the class.

5. The pitch and deck should concisely (two minutes) establish characters, summarize the story, and reveal tone/style as well as influences/themes. This is hard to do. You can't tell the whole story beat by beat.
6. Submit your logline in the text  box of your submission, along with your script and deck PDF.

## Feature Treatment

For your final, you will deliver a feature film treatment that is six-to-eight pages long. For the short script and the feature treatment you will be graded on:

- Style, grammar, and format.
- Genre application and lo-fi sensibility.
- Originality, and the viability of the story concept.
- The execution of structure, theme, and character development.

Graduate students will also submit the first ten pages of their screenplay. The treatment and script should be combined into one PDF file.

## Grading

Short Papers (9):        45 points
Short Screenplay:       25 Points
Feature Treatment:     30 Points
                               100

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, F is substantially unsatisfactory. **Late work is rarely accepted.**

## Attendance:

Students who miss class without an excused absence forfeit their assignment grade for the first two classes they miss. Three absences will constitute course failure.

## Excused Absence:

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.

## Students with Disabilities:

DePaul Students seeking disability-related accommodations are required to register with DePaul's Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) enabling them to access

accommodations and support services to assist with their success. There are two office locations:  Loop Campus (312) 362-8002 , Lincoln Park Campus (773) 325-1677 Email: csd@depaul.edu

Students who register with the Center for Students with Disabilities are also invited to contact Dr. Gregory Moorhead, Director of the Center, privately to discuss how he may assist in facilitating the accommodations to be used in a course. This is best done early in the term. The conversation will remain confidential to the extent possible.

Please see https://offices.depaul.edu/student-affairs/about/departments/Pages/csd.aspx for Services and Contact Information.

## Respecting Diversity and Inclusion:

At DePaul, our mission calls us to explore "what must be done" to respect the inherent dignity and identity of each human person. We value diversity because it is part of our history, our traditions, and our future. We see diversity as an asset and a strength that adds to the richness of classroom learning. In my course, I strive to include diverse creators, perspectives, and teaching pedagogies. I also encourage open dialogue and spaces for students to express their unique identities and perspectives. I am open to having difficult conversations and I will strive to create an inclusive classroom that values all perspectives. If at any time, the classroom experience does not live up to this expectation, please feel free to contact me via email or during office hours.

## 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

## Creative Subject Matter and Civil Discourse:

DePaul is a community that thrives on open discourse that challenges students, both intellectually and personally, to be socially responsible leaders. Controversial or sensitive subject matter may find its way into our conversations. Students have every right to express themselves and address challenging issues in their creative work, so long as that work does not glorify or advocate for hate, discrimination, or violence of any kind – or involve the professor or a member of the class without their permission.

Conversely, it is the right of class members to express how a student's statements or creative work make them feel, and to do so respectfully and constructively. If you become uncomfortable with a conversation for any reason, you may be excused from the remainder

of class without penalty. It is the expectation that all dialogue in this course will be civil and respectful of the dignity of each student. Any instances of disrespect or hostility will jeopardize a student's ability to be successful in the course. The professor will partner with the Dean of Students to assist in managing such issues.

## 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.

## 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.

## 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 students will be notified via email.

## Copyright Statement:
The materials provided by the instructor in this course are for the use of the students enrolled in the course. Copyrighted course materials may not be further disseminated.

## COVID 19 Policies:
The health and safety of everyone at DePaul depend on the cooperation of all who come to campus. By taking care of yourself, you protect the entire community. DePaul's COVID-19 response plans are based on the latest guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Chicago Department of Public Health and the university's medical advisor from AMITA Health.  The following mandatory protocols must be followed by DePaul students, faculty, and staff at all times on both campuses.

### COVID-19 Vaccine and Booster

- Students in all degree programs, as well as faculty and staff, are required to submit proof of a booster by Tuesday, March 1.
- To submit proof of vaccination, students, faculty and staff should follow the instructions detailed on the COVID-19 Vaccine webpage.

- Everyone at DePaul is encouraged to seek a booster as soon as they are eligible in the spirit of caring for each other and our surrounding community.

## Face Masks

- DePaul requires wearing a mask in classrooms and labs for the first two weeks of spring quarter March 28 to April 10.
- Outside of these spaces, masks are recommended, but not required.
- Starting April 11, masks will no longer be required in classrooms and labs.
- If you need one, KN95 masks are available at a limited number of first-floor desk areas near building entrances.

## Physical Distancing

- In keeping with City of Chicago guidance and good public health practice, maintain physical distancing to the extent possible.

## Personal Hygiene

- Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60 percent alcohol if soap and water are not available. Up to 700 sanitation stands are available throughout both campuses.

## Personal Care

- Monitor yourself for symptoms each time you plan to come to campus.
- Stay home if you are sick.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.

**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 work 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.

## 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

## 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.