DePaul University School of Cinematic Arts

SCWR 101-404: Screenwriting for Majors
Fall, 2023
Thursdays 1:30 – 4:45 PM, 14 East Jackson, Room 209
Professor Brad Riddell (he/him): brad.riddell@depaul.edu
[Zoom Office Hours](): Weds. 2-5PM, Thurs. 10AM-1PM and by appointment

Course Introduction:
When it comes to most narrative fiction filmmaking, everything begins with a script. Producers, directors, cinematographers, costume and production designers, sound people, and editors all encounter the screenplay at some point. My goal is that you come to understand the role of the screenwriter and the screenplay in the world of scripted narrative filmmaking, recognize the unique attributes of the screenplay that make it wholly unique in the world of creative writing, and develop beginning skills in screenwriting and story development. And, of course, I hope you have some fun!

Course Description:
SCWR 101 introduces digital cinema majors to dramatic writing for motion pictures. The topics covered include theme, plot, story structure, character, and dialogue. Emphasis is placed on telling a story in visual terms.

Course Prerequisites: None

Course Outcomes:

In addition to completing several scene writing assignments, students are expected to develop, outline, write, and revise a short screenplay.

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

- employ standard screenplay format
- identify elements of scene craft, character development, and narrative structure
- demonstrate expanded visual writing skills
- apply a deliberate process to their creative writing
- produce original writing on a deadline
- revise their writing based on feedback from the professor and their peers
- evaluate the work of their peers and formulate helpful feedback

Textbooks and Printed Resources
- "Tools of Screenwriting" by Howard & Mabley ISBN-10: 0312119089 (Required)
- "The Hollywood Standard" by Christopher Riley ISBN-10: 1932907637 (Required)
- Additional readings and films to screen will be provided by the instructor.

Screenwriting Software:
You will be required to use screenwriting software. FINAL DRAFT, FADE IN, HIGHLAND, WRITER'S DUET, and CELTX are options. Google Doc and Word templates exist, but they are terrible and will cause you more trouble than they are worth. WRITER'S DUET and HIGHLAND provide versions that are free for students. Screenwriting majors may be able to get a free copy of Final Draft from the school.

Course Management:
This course will be housed on **D2L**. I will be available on Zoom for office hours at the times listed above, and by special arrangement if needed, but all meetings are by appointment only. You can make an appointment by logging into Bluestar using the QuickLinks tab here. If my standard hours do not work for you, please send me an email to make arrangements.

Course meetings will involve lectures, class discussions, screenings and readings, and workshops. We will take one fifteen-minute break each session.

My goal is for you to receive feedback on your assignments and discussion posts before your next assignment is due – generally within six days. I try to respond to emails as soon as possible but am slower on nights and weekends.

Course Schedule:

Module 1, Sept. 7 – 14: All items due before class Sept. 14
- LECTURE: The Screenplay + Visual Storytelling + Scene Description
- READING:
  - *Tools of Screenwriting:* About Screenwriting and Basic Storytelling (3-40), Visuals (88-90),
  - *The Hollywood Standard:* Forward, Introduction, and Quick Start Guide (through page 27), Shot Headings (29-62), Direction (63-80)
  - History of the Screenplay
- ASSIGNMENTS:
  - Syllabus Quiz
  - Introduction Post
  - Discussion Post #1
  - Mood and Atmosphere Scenes

Module 2, Sept. 14 – 22: All items completed before class Sept. 21
- LECTURE: Inclusive Screenwriting + Character Development + Peer Review
- READING:
- *The Tools of Screenwriting*: Exposition (60-62), Characterization (63-65), Planting & Payoff (72-74), *Inclusive Screenwriting* (8-page PDF on D2L)
- ASSIGNMENTS:
  - Discussion Post #2
  - Preparation for a Date Scene

Module 3, Sept. 14 – 28: All items completed before class Sept. 28
- LECTURES: Assignment Review + Writing Scenes + Exposition
- READING:
  - *Tools of Screenwriting:* Dialogue (84-87), Protagonist, Conflict, Obstacles (43-49*),* Activity & Action (81-83), Dramatic Irony (68-70), Dramatic Scene (91-94)
  - *The Hollywood Standard:* Dialogue (81-102), Transitions, Punctuation (103-111) Special Pages (131-139)
- ASSIGNMENTS:
  - Discussion Post #3
  - Interrogation Scene

Module 4, Sept. 28 – Oct. 5: All items completed before class Oct. 5
- LECTURES: Dialogue + Special Formatting
- READING: Review the Hollywood Standard, Prepare for Midterm Quiz
- ASSIGNMENTS:
  - Midterm Quiz on *The Hollywood Standard* readings & discussion
  - Discussion Post #4
  - Seduction Scene

Module 5, Oct. 5 – 12: All items completed before class Oct. 12
- LECTURES: Three Act Structure + Premise
- READING:
  - *Tools of Screenwriting:* Premise, Main Tension, Theme, Unity (49-59), Plausibility (76-80)
- ASSIGNMENTS:
  - Discussion Post #5
  - Loglines for Short Screenplays

Module 6, Oct. 12 – 19: All items completed before class Oct. 19
- LECTURE: Writing the Short Script
- READ:
  - *The Tools of Screenwriting*: Outlining (76-78)
- ASSIGNMENTS:
  - Watch Selected Short Films Part 1
  - Discussion Post #6
  - Step Outline for Short Screenplay

Module 7, Oct. 19 – 26: All items completed before class Oct. 26
- LECTURE: Process & Professionalism
- ASSIGNMENTS:
  - Watch Selected Short Films Part 2
  - Discussion Post #7
  - Revised Outline for Short Screenplay

Module 8, Oct. 26 – Nov. 2: All items completed before class Nov. 2
- LECTURE: The First Draft
- ASSIGNMENTS:
    - Watch Selected Short Films Part 3
    - Discussion Post #8
    - First Draft of Short Screenplay

Module 9, Nov. 2 – 9: All items completed before class Nov. 9
- LECTURE: Rewriting
- READING:
    - *The War of Art* on D2L
    - *Tools of Screenwriting:* Rewriting (95-97)
- ASSIGNMENTS:
    - Discussion Post #9
    - Revise Short Scripts

Module 10, Nov. 9 – 16: All items completed before class Nov. 16
LECTURE: Working as a Writer and With Writers
- ASSIGNMENTS:
    - Discussion Post #10
    - Deliver Final Short Script
    - Take Final Quiz on *The Tools of Screenwriting*

Assignments

Assignments will not be made available to you until you have submitted the previous assignment. For instance, Scene Assignment 2 won't be available until you have submitted Scene Assignment 1. This applies to quizzes and discussions as well.

Scene Assignments
You will write a total of four scene exercises. Specific guidelines for each exercise will be provided on D2L. Each scene assignment is 10% of your final grade (40% in total).

You are expected submit your scenes to the appropriate discussion board and submissions box. Please save files as a PDF, and use your last name and the name of the assignment: YourName.InterrogationScene.pdf

You will be graded on:

- Style and Format
- Creative execution of the assignment within the given parameters
- Use of writing techniques presented in class and the readings

There are rubrics on D2L associated with each scene assignment.

Quizzes
There is one syllabus quiz (5%) to ensure you are familiar with this document, then one quiz for the midterm and one as part of the final.

The midterm covers reading and discussion only from *The Hollywood Standard,* and the final covers only *The Tools of Screenwriting*. These will feature multiple choice, T/F, fill-in-the-blank, and short screenwriting tasks. Each is worth 10 points (or 10%).

Discussion Posts
Each week, I will post a discussion question or series of questions regarding topics from the lecture and/or the readings. Each of your response posts is worth two points (20% total). One point will be awarded for the thoroughness and thoughtfulness of your response, and one point will be awarded for creativity and originality.

There is a rubric on D2L associated with each discussion post.

Short Script

You will submit three loglines for potential short script projects, then two outline drafts for the project you select. The loglines and outlines will be ungraded but are required to progress in the course. I will provide feedback on the loglines and the revised outline, and your group will provide feedback on the first draft of the outline.

You will submit three drafts of your short script that is to be no longer than 12 pages. The first draft is worth five points (5%) and the final draft is worth ten points (10%).

 Here are some things to keep in mind:

- Show don't tell. Show don't tell. Show don't tell. Show don't tell.
- Spelling, grammar, and punctuation count - proofread your work, proofread it again, and then proofread it one more time just to be sure.
- Standard screenwriting formatting is required.
- You must include a properly formatted cover page.
- Re-read your narrative for clarity - it may be a good idea to have a friend look over the script as well.
- Action description should be lean - only revealing what can be heard/seen on screen.
- Develop a clear beginning, middle, and end.
- Avoid exposition-heavy dialogue - Always ask yourself, "Is there a way I can communicate this information visually?"
- Don't wait until the last minute. It takes time to develop a solid narrative - you won't be able to do it in one night and achieve the grade you want.

Short Script Second Draft
The final script is to be no longer than 12 pages. Points to consider:

- The second draft of your script should read as a marked improvement over your first effort. Correcting typos and making small tweaks is not a rewrite.
- Use notes you received from the instructor, classmates, and your own self-evaluation to craft your revised draft. Get outside opinions if you can.
- Characters, dialogue, structure, and scene work should be completely reevaluated and enhanced.
- Spelling, grammar, and punctuation count even more. Proofread again.

Short Script Final Draft
This draft should be 12 pages or less, error-free, and have addressed the feedback provided. It should represent your very best effort. Worth 10 points (10%).

There are rubrics on D2L associated with each script draft.

Grading

Syllabus Quiz: 5 Points
Discussion Posts: 20 points
Two Quizzes: 20 Points
Scene Assignments: 40 Points
Short Script Draft 1: 5 points
Final Script Draft: <u>10 Points</u>
                                100 total

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. <u>Late work will be penalized by half unless we have made special arrangements.</u>

Attendance:
Students are expected to attend every class and arrive on time. <u>Each unexcused absence beyond the first equates to a loss of ten points from the student's final score.</u>

Screenwriting Policy on the Use of AI
The screenwriting program is committed to fostering the unique voices and perspectives of up-and-coming screenwriters as evidenced by our motto: "learn your craft, find your voice, make your mark." Writers should be aware that AI (generative artificial intelligence) is a tool. It does not create; it aggregates and repurposes existing content created by humans. AI may facilitate the story development process but cannot replace what each individual writer brings to a story: their distinctive point of view and voice. We understand that students may wish to use AI tools to aid

in the development and early drafts of screenplays and screenwriting assignments. To do so with academic integrity students must understand and adhere to the following:

> • Developing ideas, creative problem-solving, honing one's voice, and engaging in rewriting are at the core of the writing process, and the use of AI is not a replacement for enhancing these fundamental skills.
>
> • Acknowledge your use of AI. For any assignment that you complete using AI, you must include a paragraph that explains 1) what AI tool you used, 2) what prompts you used, and 3) a clear explanation of how it helped you engage in the writing process.
>
> • AI-assisted work may be accepted as part of the development of any project (including story ideation, character development, world-building, basic outlining,etc.), but the entirety of your screenplay/writing assignment must be authored by you.
>
> • AI makes mistakes. You are responsible for any errors or omissions made by the AI tool.
>
> • Failure to adhere to these guidelines will be considered a violation of DePaul's Academic Integrity Policy.

Content Warnings

The films, shows, clips, readings, lectures, student work, and class discussions in this course may engage deeply with potentially sensitive or traumatizing material such as: violence, sexual assault/r*pe, sexism, racism, police brutality, transphobia, homophobia, abuse, suicide, blood, and body-shaming among others.

I will note especially graphic/intense content that I intend to present and will do my best to foster a classroom environment in which we can relate safely, courageously, compassionately, and contemplatively with difficult and important content each week.

In that spirit, I ask that you label potential triggers in your written work submitted on D2L, and then again before we read aloud or discuss that work in class.

If you would like to make me aware of other triggers (especially ones not named above), let me know and I will do my best to flag them for you.

If you believe any piece of course content may be potentially triggering to you, I will happily search for replacement material that you may view or read instead.

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 CSD are 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 click here for Services and Contact Information.

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 a request to address you by a specific 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 note that students may make name and pronouns revisions within university systems. 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.

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 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.

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 work so long as that work does not seek to glorify or advocate for hate, violence, or discrimination, or involve the professor or a member of the class without their permission.

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

DePaul University's Land Acknowledgement

At DePaul University, we acknowledge that we live and work on traditional Native lands that are home to well over one hundred different tribal nations. We extend our respect to all of them, including the Potawatomi, Ojibwe, and Odawa nations, who signed the Treaty of Chicago in 1821 and 1833. We also recognize the Ho-Chunk, Myaamia, Menominee, Illinois Confederacy, and Peoria people who also maintained relationships with this land.

We acknowledge that these sacred homelands were ruptured by the European invasion of the Americas. In 1493, Pope Alexander VI promulgated the Doctrine of Discovery, which seized Native lands and resources with impunity. This doctrine has been used by countries throughout the Americas, including the U.S., to legitimize colonial policies of displacement and genocide toward Native peoples and to justify colonial legacies of white superiority and global capitalism.

We appreciate that today Chicago is home to the sixth-largest urban Native population in the United States. We further recognize and support the enduring presence of Native peoples among our faculty, staff, and student body. And in the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul, we reaffirm our commitment, both as an institution and as individuals, to help make our community and our society a more equitable, welcoming, and just place for all.

Emergency Plan

An emergency can occur at any time, suddenly and without warning. Proper planning is essential to minimize the impact of any emergency on the university community, operations, and facilities. This link provides detailed information on Emergency Evacuation and Fire Alarm safety. The University will use the DPU Alert to announce school closing or other emergencies. In the event of an emergency evacuation, the primary outdoor assembly area for CDM will be Grant Park (Southeast corner of Jackson and Michigan Ave).

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 here.

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism:

This course will be subject to the academic integrity policy passed by faculty. More information can be found here. 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.

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 your instructor to teaching, and these evaluation results are one component used in performance reviews (including salary raises and promotion/tenure). The evaluation of the instructor and course provides you an opportunity to make your voice heard regarding the quality of teaching at DePaul.

Withdrawal:
Students who withdraw from the course do so by using the Campus Connection system. 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.