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SCWR 301-402: STORY DEVELOPMENT
Fall Quarter 2023
Tuesdays 1:30pm – 4:45pm
14 East Jackson St., Room 207

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Instructor Information

Ilisa Aaron (she/her/hers)
Email: iaaron@depaul.edu
Office Hours: Thursdays 9:30am – 1:30pm, Zoom Link on D2L

Summary of Course:

This course is designed to help the emerging writer focus their creativity into a viable original project for a feature film. The lectures, workshops, and assignments are designed to enable the student to identify and develop material they have a strong personal connection to. Emphasis is placed on extensive research of the subject matter, creating memorable characters, and crafting a strong dramatic throughline.

Prerequisites:

SCWR 100 or SCWR 101

Learning Objective:

Upon successful completion of this course students will be able to:
- apply established narrative techniques toward the development of a feature story with thoroughly developed characters and plot
- utilize storytelling conventions to craft a unique voice for your feature
- create a complete, professional-quality step outline for a feature screenplay
- evaluate the work of their peers and formulate helpful feedback
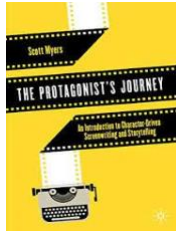- deliver assignments on deadline

Course Outcomes:

- Writer's statement of purpose
- Logline for a feature screenplay
- Character development materials
- Synopsis
- Sequence breakdown for a feature screenplay
- Treatment for a feature screenplay
- Scene-by-scene outline

Required Reading:

Provided by instructor and linked on the D2L course site.

Recommended Textbook:

There is no required textbook for this class, but *The Protagonist's Journey* by Scott Myers is recommended.

Required Viewing
There may be viewing assigned week-to-week and linked on the D2L course site. Students should come to class having viewed the required films and prepared to discuss.

Software:
You will be required to use screenwriting software in this course. FINAL DRAFT (student license available), FADE IN, HIGHLAND, WRITER'S DUET, and CELTX are options. WRITER'S DUET and HIGHLAND provide versions that are free for students.

Course Management:
This course is housed and managed on D2L. All reading content, lecture slides, viewing material, grades, discussion boards, submissions, and updates will be found there.

Attendance:
Attendance and participation are mandatory. An absence, which is defined as not showing up to class or arriving more than 15 minutes late to class, constitutes a reduction in your overall grade.

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.

Homework:
All assignments for this course must be typed and submitted on D2L. No late work is accepted. Homework is not accepted via email unless there is a malfunction with D2L. All written assignments must be typed with pages numbered.

Put your name, course number, date, and writing assignment title at the top of your assignment. Save your writing assignments as PDFs and with this file name (see example):

Name of Assignment Your Name

Writing assignments are due by **MIDNIGHT prior to the class when said assignment is due.** To be considered timely submitted, **you must upload your assignment to that week's Submissions forum and your group's Discussion forum on the D2L site**. Late posts will result in reduced credit.

If you are absent you are required to provide feedback to each of your group member's assignments on the discussion board, and group members are required to provide feedback to the absent student. Feedback should include:

- What do you like about the story / What works for you
- What concerns do you have in considering the story
- What suggestions do you have to resolve those concerns and make the story better

<u>**Group Workshops:**</u>
The class will be divided into four groups for workshop purposes: Group A, Group B, Group C and Group D. Each class session will involve a general discussion of that week's assignment, after which we will break into Groups to workshop each student's story.

Students should come to class ready to constructively discuss their groupmates' work each week.

<u>**Grading**</u>

Writer's Statement of Purpose	5 points
Loglines	5 points
Main Character Development Exercises	5 points
Supporting Character and Subplot Exercises	5 points
Plot Points	10 points
Treatment & Pitch	10 points
Beat Sheet	15 points
Step Outline	15 points
Final Step Outline	20 points
Attendance/Participation	10 points
TOTAL:	100 points

<u>**Grading Scale:**</u>
A=93-100%, A- =90-92%, B+ =87-89%, B =84-86%, B- =80-83%, C+ =77-79%,
C =74-76%, C- =70-73%, D+ =67-69, D =60-66%

<u>**Course Schedule:**</u>
WEEK 1 – 9/12
<u>Lecture/Discussion</u>: Introductions, Syllabus Review, Overview of Course Outcomes, Screenwriter as Auteur, Screenwriting Fundamentals
<u>For Next Week</u>: Read UP screenplay, Frank Daniel "Glossary," Film Crit Hulk (Part 1 – 3);
Writer's Statement of Purpose DUE 9/18 11:59pm

WEEK 2 – 9/19
<u>Workshop</u>: Writer's Statement
<u>Lecture/Discussion</u>: Process, Cinematic Storytelling, What Makes a Viable Concept? Assessing Your Story Concepts, Loglines, UP
<u>For Next Week</u>: Read GET OUT screenplay (content warnings: racism, violence, profanity, gore), Jeffrey Schechter "Character Development; **Five Loglines DUE 9/25 11:59pm**

WEEK 3 – 9/26
Workshop: Five Loglines
Lecture/Discussion: Main Characters, Theme, Brainstorming, GET OUT
For Next Week: Read BRIDESMAIDS screenplay (content warnings: sex, profanity, raunchy humor); **Main Character Development Exercises DUE 10/2 by 11:59pm**

NOTE: Schedule a one-on-one meeting with me over ZOOM to discuss your goals in this class and any issues you may be experiencing in generating and developing your story idea.

WEEK 4 – 10/3
Workshop: Main Character Development and Exercises
Lecture/Discussion: Character Archetypes & Transformation, Supporting Characters, BRIDESMAIDS
For Next Week: Read Stuart Voytilla "Myth and the Movies," Julia Blair re: The Heroine's Journey; **Supporting Character Exercises DUE 10/9 by 11:59pm**

WEEK 5 – 10/10
Workshop: Supporting Character Exercises
Lecture/Discussion: Story Structure, Plot Points, Main Tension, Synopsis
For Next Week: Read Joseph Gulino "Introduction to Sequences;" **Plot Point Worksheet DUE 10/16 by 11:59pm**

WEEK 6 – 10/17
Workshop: Plot Point Worksheet
Lecture/Discussion: Sequences, Treatment, Pitching
For Next Week: **Treatment & Pitch DUE 10/23 11:59pm**

WEEK 7 – 10/24
Workshop: Pitch Treatment to Class
Lecture/Discussion: Plotting, Cause & Effect Storytelling, Beat Sheets
For Next Week: Blake Snyder "Save the Cat;" Begin Beat Sheets

WEEK 8 – 10/31
Workshop: Pitch Treatment to Class
Lecture/Discussion: Subplots, Themelines, Beat Sheets, Save the Cat
For Next Week: **Beat Sheet DUE 11/6 by 11:59pm**

WEEK 9 – 11/7
Workshop: Beat Sheet
Lecture/Discussion: Step Outline
For Next Week: Read A QUIET PLACE screenplay (original draft), **Step Outline DUE 11/13 by 11:59pm (Ungraded)**

WEEK 10 – 11/14
Workshop: Step Outline

<u>Lecture/Discussion</u>: Refining the Step Outline, A Quiet Place (original draft)
<u>Assignment</u>: **Final Step Outline DUE 11/21 by 11:59pm**

** FINAL STEP OUTLINE DUE TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 21 BY 11:59PM**

<u>Class Workshops:</u>
By enrolling in this course, you agree to share your ideas and writings with the professor and other students in the class. You must acquire express written consent from any writer in the class should you wish to share their work with someone who is not enrolled in this course. Feedback is an essential part of the writing process. We must respect each other, our collaboration, and the work at hand. Be truthful, but sensitive when giving notes. Be prepared to solve problems instead of just pointing them out.

<u>Content Warning:</u>
This course recognizes that to engage with media is to engage with historic and ongoing problematic representation, as well as the ways that harmful representation impacts students in different ways. Please be aware you may encounter racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, and otherwise violent or socially violent material in the creative work, readings, and/or lectures presented in this course.

Content warnings will be provided prior to lecture and **writers will be expected to label potential triggers in their assignments submitted to D2L, and then again before their workshop session begins, so students may make decisions about their mental and emotional health and well-being.** Students may inform the professor of any material that they cannot engage with to find a suitable alternative.

<u>Creative Subject Matter:</u>
As this is a creative writing class, controversial subject matter may make its way into\ the conversation. Students have the right to express themselves artistically in their writing and address challenging issues. If you are uncomfortable with a conversation for personal reasons, you may be excused from the remainder of that class without penalty. Please follow up with the instructor immediately if such a situation arises. Stories developed in class may involve issues such as hate and violence but writing with a point of view that glorifies hate and violence will not be tolerated. Inclusion of individuals from the class in submitted creative materials will also not be tolerated.

<u>Decorum and Civil Discourse:</u>
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.

<u>Screenwriting Department Policy on the Use of AI</u>
The screenwriting program at DePaul 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 and only a tool. It does not create; it aggregates and repurposes previously published content.

As such, 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.

Laptops/Cell Phones:
I will trust that on your honor as a DePaul University student and as a creative individual who aspires to learn the writing craft, you will not stray into any form of social media during class – except for classroom breaks. Phones and laptops must be silenced and stowed unless needed for course work.

Covid-19 Health and Safety Precautions:
Keeping our DePaul community safe is of utmost importance. While DePaul no longer requires the vaccine, we recognize that COVID-19 persists and that we must continue to take measures to protect ourselves and our community.
COVID-19 vaccine and booster
- While no longer required, everyone at DePaul is encouraged to stay up-to-date with their COVID vaccinations.

Face masks
- Masks are not required in indoor spaces on campus.
- However, DePaul will continue to be a mask-friendly campus and wearing a mask will be highly recommended for all indoor spaces.
- If you are joining a meeting or gathering and a participant asks you to wear a mask, please do so.

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.

By doing these things, we are Taking Care of DePaul, Together. The recommendations may change as local, state, and federal guidelines evolve.

Respect for Diversity and Inclusion at DePaul University as aligned with our Vincentian Values:

At DePaul, our mission calls us to explore "what must be done" in order 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 authors, 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.

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. For additional information, please see http://wapp.is.depaul.edu/OnlineTeachEvalMobile/FAQ/studentfaqhome.aspx

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism:

This course will be subject to the university's academic integrity policy. More information can be found at https://offices.depaul.edu/academic-affairs/faculty-resources/academicintegrity/Pages/default.aspx.

If the instructor finds a student has violated the Academic Integrity Policy/plagiarized their work, the student will fail the course, receiving an automatic F grade. (Note: Turnitin is used to check the originality of submissions on D2L.) Actions taken by the instructor in this regard do not preclude the university from taking further action, including dismissal from the university.

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

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

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.

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
policies.depaul.edu/policy/policy.aspx?pid=332

Students with Disabilities:
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 – Lewis Center #1420 – (312) 362-8002
  • Lincoln Park Campus – Student Center #370 – (773) 325-1677

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.