

## **SCWR 401-802: Writing the Feature I**

Winter Quarter 2024

Wednesday 5:45PM-9:00PM

Location: 14 E. Jackson, Room 211

### **Instructor Information**

Jef Burnham

Pronouns: he/him

Email: [jburnha1@depaul.edu](mailto:jburnha1@depaul.edu)\*

Remote Office Hours: Monday 9:00AM-1:30PM

[For an appointment: schedule a Zoom meeting via email]

\*If you do not receive a response from me within 24 hours, assume I did not get your email.

### **Course Description**

This course focuses on creating a vetted concept and step outline for a feature length screenplay. Emphasis is put on idea origination and world building, forming engaging characters, and structuring an affecting plot with cause-and-effect storytelling.

Through script readings, weekly assignments, and in-class workshops, students will hone their unique voice to craft the dramatic template for a cinematically viable story.

**Prerequisite:** None

### **Objectives**

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

- apply established narrative techniques toward the development of a feature story with a well-structured plot and thoroughly developed characters
- utilize the sequence approach to create consistent tension and effective story organization
- create a complete, professional-quality step outline for a feature screenplay
- evaluate the work of their peers and formulate helpful feedback

**Course Outcomes:** Students will complete the feature length step outline for a feature-length screenplay.

### **Required Readings**

*Screenwriting: The Sequence Approach* by Paul Gulino, ISBN 13: 9780826415684

### **Course Management**

This course is housed and managed on D2L. All reading content, lecture slides, attendance records, grades, discussion boards, and submissions will be found there, as well as the assignment calendar and updates.

### Attendance

Students are expected to attend every class and arrive on time. Each unexcused absence beyond the first equates to a loss of ten points from the student's final grade.

### Excused Absences

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.

### Grading:

9 Writing Assignments	45 Points (5 Points each)
Final Revised Step Outline	25 Points
Participation (In-Class + Notes)	30 Points
	100 Totals

### Grading Scale:

A	93-100	C	73-76
A-	90-92	C-	70-72
B+	87-89	D+	67-69
B	83-86	D	60-66
B-	80-82	F	0-59
C+	77-79		

### **Participation (In-Class + Notes)**

You are expected to actively participate in the conversation every week as well as the workshops. For the workshops, you must thoroughly read all of your peers' submitted pages before class and formulate clear, supportive feedback that addresses:

- What worked for you/excited you in the submission
- Areas of potential concern you encountered
- Suggestions to address said concerns & any other story/character suggestions

You will not only to deliver your notes on pages in class, but also upload written notes as responses to your peers' pages for both posterity and to prove to me that you have read and considered the material.

### Notes on the Evaluation of Student Work

Rubrics according to which written assignments are assessed will be available on D2L under Content & Submissions. In order to obtain a desired grade on any assignment, students must review and adhere to these guidelines. Please allow up to 7-10 days for the return of graded materials.

## COURSE POLICIES

### Late Work Policy

Late work will not be accepted for full points without a valid excuse, and out of fairness to all, it cannot be workshopped in class. Keep in mind that your groupmates need time to read each of your submissions, so treat all deadlines as hard deadlines. Any work that is submitted late without a valid excuse will receive a 50% point deduction if submitted in the 24 hours following the deadline; after that the submission will receive a grade of zero, although students will still receive feedback from the instructor to facilitate the cumulative development of these assignments.

### Trigger 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/rape, sexism, racism, police brutality, transphobia, homophobia, abuse, suicide, blood, and body-shaming among other issues. I will note especially graphic/intense content that 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 more specific or personalized triggers identified throughout the course (especially ones not named above), e-mail me 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.

### In-Class Workshops

Feedback is essential to the writing process. As such, you will participate in weekly workshop sessions. Students will be divided into groups, which corresponds with due dates listed in the Course Schedule. In preparation for workshops, you must read and prepare written notes on all pages submitted each week, regardless of whether or not your group is submitting that week. Show your classmates the courtesy of reading their material as they should yours. Be truthful, but sensitive when giving notes. Be prepared to solve problems, not just point them out.

### Decorum and 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.

### **Creative Subject Matter**

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.

### **Screenwriting Policy on the Use of AI**

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.

### **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. (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. 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.

### **Copyright/Rights Notice**

All materials provided to students are provided solely for educational purposes associated with the course. The rights to these materials remain with their respective

rights holders, including course content developed by the department or instructor. These materials therefore may not be distributed outside of this course.

### **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.

### **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.

### **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 [cdm.depaul.edu/Current%20Students/Pages/Grading-Policies.aspx](http://cdm.depaul.edu/Current%20Students/Pages/Grading-Policies.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 [policies.depaul.edu/policy/policy.aspx?pid=332](http://policies.depaul.edu/policy/policy.aspx?pid=332)

### **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. Don't miss this opportunity to provide feedback!

### **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:

- Loop Campus – Lewis Center #1420 – (312) 362-8002
  - Lincoln Park Campus – Student Center #370 – (773) 325-1677
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## COURSE SCHEDULE

[Classes may include lectures (*film screenings & any pre-recorded lecture viewings (TBD) due before class*), and discussions, as well as a workshop every week after the first.]

### **Week 1 (1/10)**

Course Introduction

Lecture: Effective Drama, Viable Concepts, & The Sequence Approach

Assign WA1: 5 Concepts

### **Week 2 (1/17)**

**WA1 Due:** 5 Concepts due Mon., 1/15 at 11:59PM (D2L Submissions & Discussions)

**Reading Due:** Gulino, "1. An Introduction to Sequences"

Workshop WA1

Lecture: Main Characters, Main Tension & Loglines

Assign WA2: Brainstorming + Logline

### **Week 3 (1/24)**

**WA2 Due:** Brainstorming + Logline due Mon., 1/22 at 11:59PM (D2L Submissions & Discussions)

**Reading Due:** *Toy Story* Screenplay

Workshop WA2 in Discussion Boards

Lecture: Character Development & Worldbuilding

Assign WA3: Development Questionnaire

### **Week 4 (1/31)**

**WA3 Due:** Development Questionnaire due Mon., 1/29 at 11:59PM (D2L Submissions & Discussions)

**Reading Due:** Gulino, "2. *Toy Story*: Firing on All Eight"

Workshop WA3

Lecture: Character Archetypes & Transformation; Intro to Structure

Assign WA4: Character Map

### Week 5 (2/7)

**WA4 Due:** Character Map due Mon., 2/5 at 11:59PM (D2L Submissions & Discussions)

**Reading Due:** *Being John Malkovich* Screenplay

Workshop WA4

Lecture: Plot Points & Synopsis

Assign WA5: Plot Points + Synopsis

### Week 6 (2/14)

**WA5 Due:** Plot Points + Synopsis due Mon., 2/12 at 11:59PM (D2L Submissions & Discussions)

**Reading Due:** Gulino, "11. *Being John Malkovich*: The Disappearing Lead Actor"

Workshop WA5

Lecture: Sequences

Assign WA6: Sequence Breakdown

### Week 7 (2/21)

**WA6 Due:** Sequence Breakdown due Mon., 2/19 at 11:59PM (D2L Submissions & Discussions)

Workshop WA6

Lecture: Beat Sheets & Subplots

Assign WA7: Beat Sheet

### CLASS 8 (2/28)

**WA7 Due:** Beat Sheet due Mon., 2/26 at 11:59PM (D2L Submissions & Discussions)

**Reading Due:** *Get Out* Screenplay

Workshop WA7

Lecture: Step Outlines & Organization

Assign WA8: Step Outline (First Half)

### Week 9 (3/6)

**WA8 Due:** Step Outline (First Half) due Mon., 3/4 at 11:59PM (D2L Submissions & Discussions)

Workshop WA9

Assign WA9: Step Outline (Second Half)



**Week 10 (3/13)**

**WA9 Due:** Step Outline (Second Half) due Mon., 3/11 at 11:59PM (D2L Submissions & Discussions)

In-Class Activity: Course Evaluations

Workshop WA9

Lecture: Refining the Step Outline

Assign Final Revised Step Outline

**FINAL REVISED STEP OUTLINE DUE**

Wednesday, March 20, submitted to D2L by 11:59PM