



DC 307 – 407
801-810

Writing the Episodic Drama

2013-2014 Winter

Room: Lewis Center, Room 1111

Wednesdays 5:45pm – 9:00pm

José A. Soto

Office Hours: Mondays & Wednesdays
2:30 – 4:00 pm (CDM 521)

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Course Description:

This course examines the storytelling techniques necessary to write an hour-long television dramatic series with an emphasis on characterization and structure. Students will create an original one hour-long dramatic pilot.

Course Objectives:

- Students will recognize the structure and characterization of successful television dramatic pilots, both through reading and watching them.
- They will develop the initial documents for a pitch presentation, and will pitch their own show ideas to the group; out of this effort they will create a “pitch brief” and a “pitch bible”.
- Students will mature their main characters to a development-bible level; polishing them to become interestingly recurring “people” that will draw the audience weekly. Additionally they will develop “the rules of their world” to establish a basic writer’s “development bible”.
- Finally they will write a Beat Sheet, Outline and ultimately, a First Draft of the pilot for their dramatic TV show (55-65 pages).

Students should note that most of this course will be in a Workshop format. That means that you have to submit on time your assignments so others students may read and critique them in class. It also means that you have to participate in session discussions of your classmates’ work. We will function as closely to a “writer’s room” as we can, and that entails enthusiastic participation and offering constructive criticism, even if is not your own work. If you are not willing to do this, you have to reconsider taking this course.

I encourage students to approach me about suggestions for more in-depth readings and/or projects related to television series, movies for television, sit-com, reality programming and other TV related subjects.



Reading:

Recommended: Douglas, Pam (2011) WRITING THE TV DRAMA SERIES: HOW TO SUCCEED AS A PROFESSIONAL WRITER IN TV; Michael Wiese Productions

You are also invited to examine the following magazines that report on the newest developments in this thriving industry:

VARIETY

THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER

These lectures will be supplemented with handouts from the instructor over the course of the semester.

Grading:

Final grades will be based on the development of a Pitch Brief and Bible, an Outline and a TV Pilot, as well as class participation and attitude. Because it is has to present shows on time every hour of every day, television is one of the most demanding industries, this charge carries over to those who are preparing for it, which is why missed deadlines will result in assignment failure. Details on all assignments will be given as the semester progresses.

Pitch Brief – 20%:

Pitch Bible – 20%:

Beat Sheet & Outline – 15%

Pilot's First Draft – 30%

Participation – 15%

All assignments must be typed and free of grammatical, spelling and punctuation errors. It's your work; you're responsible for its quality. All Scenes and Scripts must be in proper Screenwriting format. (Use of screenwriting software such as Final Draft or Celtx www.celtx.com is HIGHLY recommended.



Grading Standards:

Letter Grade	Minimum % of Total Points	Letter Grade	Minimum % of Total Points
A	92	C+	78
A-	90	C	72
B+	88	C-	70
B	82	D+	68
B-	80	D	60
		F	0

Participation: At this level I expect students to be interested in the subject of the class. The only way I can see it is through participation in class, either asking questions or adding constructive comments to other student's presentations.

Attendance: It does not constitute a specific part of your grade, but perfect attendance is required. Most of the information you need to complete your assignments will be discussed in-class; also there I will be giving examples of what you have to do. I have no plans to be repeating myself outside of the programmed sessions. This makes attendance critical, and thus not an issue to be negotiated. However if you have to miss a class or a deadline, make sure to plan ahead, and let me know in advance. Calling in advance does not automatically excuse an absence or a missed deadline, but it is the only way to present your case. If you fail to communicate before the next class period to explain an absence or a missed deadline, they will not be excused. Please note that work, non-emergency medical and dental appointments, hangovers, intramural games, visitors from out of town, fixing your roommate's computer, fraternity/sorority events, arguments with boyfriends or girlfriends and studying for other classes do not constitute excused absences or missed assignments.

If you have to miss class due to religious holiday, please see me as far in advance as possible.

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.

Tardiness: One true thing in all professional fields is the lack of tolerance for tardiness. Employers do not generally tolerate such behavior, and employees who offer weak, irritating excuses frequently find themselves unemployed and unemployable. We will be working under the same rules.



Remember it is your responsibility to make the arrangements when a deadline or a class has to be missed. I will treat you professionally, expecting of you a responsible attitude. This means that it is you who must be worried about solving the problem, not me.

Missed Assignments Policy: Since screenwriting is a cumulative effort, if you fail to turn in any of the assignments you will fail the course. There will be no exceptions. This is a zero-tolerance policy. I have no time or patience for those who are not going to take this class seriously. Many students have flunked my courses for this reason. If you cannot make it a priority to complete all assignments, you better consider not taking this course. One more thing, turning-in an assignment does not guarantee you will have a passing grade, although the opposite will be true. Not turning them in will fail you inevitably.

Attitude: We are going to be spending a lot of time discussing other student's or your own work. This will be made in an orderly fashion, no matter how vehemently or fervently we feel for an argument, we have to be able to provide it in a disciplined manner. It is better to wait and later speak than not speaking at all. My evaluation of your attitude and attention will be based on your participation during discussion as much as it will be based on your assertiveness when making a comment. Students who are not insightful enough to value the learning opportunities inherent to this class tend to do poorly.

Cellular phones and other similar devices will not be tolerated. In my mind, they are a clear indication of a bad attitude. I recommend students to turn off or switch to silence mode such devices. If your other commitments are so pressing that they cannot wait until the end of the session, it may be in your best interest to reconsider the priority you place on being here. In any case, students whose phones and/or computers make noise during class will be asked to leave immediately.

Even though you are students who must constantly thrive to grow, we need to start acting professionally. This is why there will be no tolerance for uncivilized behavior. I require an orderly ambiance to be able to make the most of each session.

By accepting this syllabus, you are indicating that you understand my expectations for students concerning attitude and work ethic.

I reserve the right to drop any student with an F if he/she has excessive absences, engages in disruptive behavior, has a poor attitude, or in any other way is clearly not taking the class seriously.

Ethics

Although your grade does not contain an ethics component like some other courses, I require complete honesty in producing your work. Working as a group does not mean that the rest of the participants should do all the work for you. Non-Participation will be considered plagiarism. Plagiarism is useless to you anyway. By having someone else do the work for you, you are missing an opportunity to immerse yourself in the television industry. You are also waiving your right to learn. If you are willing to do that, then you have to evaluate if it's worth the aggravation and the time you invest in this course.



By accepting this syllabus, you are indicating that you understand the seriousness of academic dishonesty and realize I will impose the harshest sanctions possible if I can prove you have engaged in such behavior. You are also indicating that you understand what constitutes academic dishonesty; I will not tolerate an excuse that claims the student did not know he/she was engaging in academic dishonesty.

Plagiarism, cheating and/or fabrication will not be tolerated. They are serious offenses – both in course and in media careers. Thus I reserve the right to drop any student with an F if he/she engages in any form of academic dishonesty. I further reserve the right to recommend other sanctions as may be appropriate.

More information can be found at <http://academicintegrity.depaul.edu/>.

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

Special Accommodations:

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:

Student Center, LPC, Suite #370

Phone number: (773)325.1677

Fax: (773)325.3720

TTY: (773)325.7296

Course Organization and Schedule:

We will meet at The Lewis Center, Room 1111 Wednesdays at 5:45 pm. I will give you some time to ask questions regarding the logistics of the assignments and their due dates and then we will immediately proceed to the workshop, reading and critiquing student's work. We will leave few minutes before the class ends to answer specific questions of the projects you will be handling.

This is a tentative course schedule. There may be several circumstances, including my frequent inability to stick to the agenda, which will most likely change it. I reserve the right to change the class schedule if circumstances make it necessary. You may receive at least one revised schedule before the semester is over. If deadline or assignment dates change, I will tell you well in advance.

SESSION 1 **JAN 8**

Introduction. The importance of the Pilot in selling a project, and in introducing the series to the audience. Characteristics of an effective Pilot.

SCREENING & ANALYSIS: *Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip* (Aron Sorkin)

HOMEWORK: Select a successful "Pilot" for the kind of show you want to write, break it down, and analyze it in one page. Due via email at the beginning of Session 2.

HOMEWORK: We will divide the group in 2. Grad students should concentrate in one group (whether online or in-class). All students will write a Pitch Brief of the show they want to write. Follow the instructions given in class and use the document provided at COL. All should submit their Pitch Briefs by Monday, January 13th at 3:00 pm.

Group A will pitch their shows on Session 2. There we will critique them and work them out. On-line student's Pitch Briefs will be read and critique as well. Any On-line questions should be addressed via email with the instructor.



SESSION 2
JAN 15

Pitch Briefs: Group A will present their Pitch Briefs and the group will work them out. Each student is responsible to take notes and apply them to their Briefs. On-line student's Pitch Briefs will be read and critique as well. Any On-line questions should be addressed via email with the instructor.

HOMEWORK: Group A will rewrite their Pitch Briefs and submit their final version by the beginning of Session 3. Group B should prepare for Pitch Brief presentations on Session 3.

SESSION 3
JAN 22

Pitch Bible. With the Pitch Briefs ready, a screenwriter may further develop characters and the rules of the world in essence creating a Pitch Bible. Our efforts will concentrate on creating stronger, attractive characters and situations that will bring back the audiences every week.

PITCH BRIEFS: Group B will present their Pitch Briefs and the group will work them out. Each student is responsible to take notes and apply them to their Briefs. On-line student's Pitch Briefs will be read and critique as well. Any On-line questions should be addressed via email with the instructor.

HOMEWORK: All students will further develop their characters and bible elements as instructed in class and following the indications on the document labeled Pitch Bible. Pitch Bibles should be submitted on Monday, February 3rd at 3:00 pm.

Group B will rewrite their Pitch Briefs and submit their final version by the beginning of Session 5. Group A should prepare for Pitch Bible presentations on Session 5.

SESSION 4
JAN 29

There will be no class this day.

SESSION 5
FEB 05

PITCH BIBLE: Group A will present the developed elements (characters and bible) and the group will work them out. Each student is responsible to take notes and apply them to their Bibles. On-line student's Pitch Bibles will be read and critique as well. Any On-line questions should be addressed via email with the instructor.

HOMEWORK: Group A will rewrite their Pitch Bibles and submit their final version by the beginning of Session 6. Group B should prepare for Pitch Bible presentations on Session 6.



SESSION 6
FEB 12

Beat sheet and Outline. Once all the elements are ready, the screenwriter may establish the structure for the Pilot. In order to do that is necessary to create a Beat Sheet and an Outline of the episode. It will be important to emphasize on interrupted climax construction and cliffhangers.

PITCH BIBLE: Group B will present the developed elements (characters and bible) and the group will work them out. Each student is responsible to take notes and apply them to their Bibles. On-line student's Pitch Bibles will be read and critique as well. Any On-line questions should be addressed via email with the instructor.

HOMEWORK: All students will write a Beat Sheet and an Outline for their Pilot. They are due by Monday, February 17th at 3:00 pm. Group B will rewrite their Pitch Bibles and submit their final version by the beginning of Session 7. Group A should prepare for Outline presentations on Session 7.

SESSION 7
FEB 19

BEAT SHEET AND OUTLINE: Group A will present their Beat Sheets and Outlines, the group will work them out. Each student is responsible to take notes and apply them to their Bibles. On-line student's Beat Sheets and Outlines will be read and critique as well. Any On-line questions should be addressed via email with the instructor.

HOMEWORK: Group A will rewrite their Beat Sheets and Outlines and submit their final version by the beginning of Session 8. Group B should prepare for Outline presentations on Session 8.

SESSION 8
FEB 26

Writing the Pilot. Once a Beat Sheet and an Outline is agreed upon, the screenwriter may start to work on writing the script. This is the final phase of the process (if you don't count the infinite rewrites).

BEAT SHEET AND OUTLINE: Group B will present their Beat Sheets and Outlines; the group will work them out. Each student is responsible to take notes and apply them to their Outlines. On-line student's Beat Sheets and Outlines will be read and critique as well. Any On-line questions should be addressed via email with the instructor.

HOMEWORK: All students will write at least the first 10 pages of their Pilot. They will submit them on Monday, March the 3rd at 3:00 pm via email. Group B will rewrite their Beat Sheets and Outlines and submit their final version by the beginning of Session 9. Group A should prepare for First Pages presentation on Session 9.



SESSION 9
MAR 05

FIRST PAGES: Group A will present their First Pages, and the group will work them out. Each student is responsible to take notes and apply them to their First Draft. On-line student's First Pages will be read and critique as well. Any On-line questions should be addressed via email with the instructor.

HOMEWORK: Group A will rewrite their First Pages and continue to work on their First Draft. Group B should prepare for First Pages presentation on Session 10.

SESSION 10
MAR 05

FIRST PAGES: Group B will present their First Pages, and the group will work them out. Each student is responsible to take notes and apply them to their First Draft. On-line student's First Pages will be read and critique as well. Any On-line questions should be addressed via email with the instructor.

HOMEWORK: Group A will rewrite their First Pages and continue to work on their First Draft. All students should continue to work on their Pilot, and submit it by Wednesday March 14th at midnight.

FINAL ASSIGNMENT – THE PILOT

It should be submitted by Wednesday March 14th at midnight, and it should not exceed 65 pages.