

DePaul University School of Cinematic Arts

DC 304/405: Topics in Screenwriting: Science Fiction

Spring, 2019

Monday 1:30-4:45 PM, CDM 924

Instructor: Brad Riddell: brad.riddell@depaul.edu, 312-362-5212

Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday: 10AM-1PM, and by appointment.

Description:

Advanced study in screenwriting focusing on a specific genre each quarter such as: Science Fiction, Film Noir, Comedy, Action-Adventure, Nonfiction, etc.

Prerequisites:

DC 101 or DC 201

Course Outcomes:

Students will actively engage in leading group discussions, write one critical paper, and develop a treatment or bible for a feature or television science fiction project.

Learning Objectives:

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

- define the common themes and aesthetics present in Science Fiction film/TV
- analyze the narrative approaches used to develop Science Fiction film/TV
- apply these aesthetics and narrative conventions to the creation of an original Science Fiction feature film or TV writing project
- evaluate the writing of their peers and formulate helpful feedback

Textbooks

Readings are provided by the instructor.

Screenwriting Software:

You will be required to use screenwriting software. Final Draft is strongly recommended for those with a serious career focus on screenwriting, producing, and/or directing. The software is \$99 with a student discount at: <http://www.finaldraft.com/edu>.

You may also obtain a free download of the Celtx screenwriting program at:

<https://www.celtx.com/index.html>. Amazon Story Writer is available at:

<https://storywriter.amazon.com/>. **All assignments are to be delivered in PDF.**

Course Management:

This course is housed and managed on **D2L**. There you will find course news, reading materials, and discussion boards for posting assignments and holding conversations. The *Checklist* will be utilized in order to help you stay abreast with this syllabus.

Course Schedule:

All screenings, unless otherwise indicated, are to be completed **outside** of class, on your own time. The films are available on D2L.

Week 1: April 1

Course Introduction. Screen episode 1 and 2 of THE EXPANSE in class, then discuss.

For next class:

- Watch BATTLESTAR GALACTICA miniseries, then prep for discussion.
- Read *What is Science Fiction* by Keith M. Johnson.
- Write and submit your Letter of Creative Intent.

Week 2: April 8

Discuss BATTLESTAR GALACTICA. Present and discuss Letters of Creative Intent.

For next class:

- Watch ARRIVAL, then prep for discussion.
- Read *The Story of Your Life* by Ted Chiang.
- Write and submit your Statement of Issues and Concerns.

Week 3: April 15

Discuss ARRIVAL. Present Statements of Issues and Concerns.

For next class:

- Watch MOON, then prep for discussion.
- Read *Never Let Me Go* by Andrew Maynard.
- Write and submit five log-lines for potential creative projects.

Week 4: April 22

Discuss MOON. Present loglines.

For next class:

- Watch EX MACHINA, then prep for discussion.
- Read *AI and the Art of Manipulation* by Andrew Maynard.
- Write and submit a one-page treatment for your chosen project.

Week 5: April 29

Discuss EX MACHINA. Discuss one-page treatments.

For next class:

- Watch SUNSHINE, then prep for discussion.
- Write and submit a sequence breakdown for your project.
- Midterm Paper due by start of next class.

Week 6: May 6

Discuss SUNSHINE. Discuss sequence breakdowns.

For next class:

- Watch EUROPA REPORT, then prep for discussion.
- Write and submit the first act of your treatment.

Week 7: May 13

Discuss EUROPA REPORT. Discuss first acts.

For next class:

- Watch ALIEN, then prep for discussion.
- Write and submit the midpoint of your treatment.

Week 8: May 20

Discuss ALIEN. Discuss midpoints.

For next class:

- Watch CONTACT, then prep for discussion. Suggestion – watch SOLARIS
- Read *Alien Encounters* by Karl Wessel.
- Read *Living by More than Science Alone* by Andrew Maynard.
- Write and submit the end of act two of your treatment.

Week 9: May 27

Discuss CONTACT. Discuss end of act two.

For next class:

- Watch THE MARTIAN.
- Write and submit act three of your treatment.

Week 10: June 3

Screen MARS and FIRST MAN in class, discuss with THE MARTIAN. Discuss act threes.

- **Final, revised treatment (with change marks) due at 5PM on June 10th.**

AssignmentsWeekly Participation

Each week you will be assigned to lead the discussion of at least one aesthetic, thematic, or narrative element of films and shows screened for class. You should come to class prepared to teach each week – meaning, you’ve watched the material, you’ve studied the assigned readings, and you have spent time formulating your thoughts.

Paper

You will write one paper at the midterm based on the screened films, readings, discussion, and outside research. The paper will need to be a minimum of eight double-spaced pages. Please save files as PDF to the submission folder.

For Cinema majors and graduate students, C- is the minimum passing grade.

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.

Feature Treatment

For your final, you will deliver a feature film treatment that is six-to-eight pages long, and is in some clearly definable way inspired by the aesthetics and narrative conventions of our discussions in class. The story should not be a remake or spoof.

You will be graded on:

- Style, grammar, and format
- The viability of the story concept
- The execution of structure, theme, and character development

Grading Policy

Participation: 5 points each class x 8 = 40 Points

Paper: 30 Points

Feature Treatment: 30 Points

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:

One unexcused absence will be allowed without penalty. Every unexcused absence thereafter will result in a 10% deduction of your final grade. Absences may be excused with proper documentation.

Creative Subject Matter:

As this is a creative writing class, controversial subject matter may make its way into the conversation. Students have every right to express themselves artistically in their writing and address challenging issues so long as the work does not glorify hate or violence of any kind. If you become uncomfortable with a conversation for personal reasons, you may be excused from the remainder of that class without penalty. Inclusion of individuals from the class will not be tolerated in submitted material.

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.

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.

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.

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!

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.

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

Excused Absence:

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.

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.

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:

Student Center, LPC, Suite #370

Phone number: (773)325.1677