

DePaul University School of Cinematic Arts

SCWR 500: MFA Thesis Development

Spring, 2019

Thursday, 5:45PM-9:00 PM, Online

Professor Brad Riddell: brad.riddell@depaul.edu

Office Hours: Via Zoom M/W/Th 11AM - 1PM, and by appointment.

Course Description:

Students will develop a feature-length thesis screenplay or television pilot in preparation for writing the first draft of their project in SCWR 501. The development process will include assignments designed to aid students in choosing their thesis project, fostering a strong personal connection to that project, creating compelling three-dimensional characters, and designing a clear, effective narrative structure for the screenplay or pilot. This course will culminate with a completed feature outline or treatment, or a bible and pilot beat sheet for TV.

Prerequisites:

SCWR 400 and SCWR 401 or 402

Course Outcomes:

- A personal statement of purpose for the thesis project.
- A logline
- A detailed outline or treatment for a feature screenplay, or a show bible and outline for a pilot.
- A professional-quality pitch of up to twelve minutes

Learning Objectives:

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

- evaluate the merits of multiple projects before making a selection as to what they will write.
- define their motivations and priorities in the stories they choose to tell.
- apply a repeatable process to story development.
- demonstrate the ability to maintain the creative environment of a professional writer's room.
- complete outstanding creative writing on a deadline.

Required Textbooks and Printed Resources:

The War of Art by Steven Pressfield **ISBN-10:** 1936891026

**Other readings are available under "Content" on D2L*

Course Management:

This course is managed on D2L. Additional reading content, lecture slides, attendance records, grades, discussion boards, and dropboxes can be found there as well. Weekly class meetings will be held via ZOOM at this link: <https://bit.ly/2WLggK8>

Screenwriting Software:

You will be required to use screenwriting software. Final Draft, Fade In, Writer's Duet, Highland, and Celtx are popular options. **All assignments are delivered in PDF.**

Course Schedule:

Each class may include a lecture, screening, or guest in addition to the workshop.

WEEK 1, April 2: Course Introduction. Syllabus review. Creative status report.

Due for next week:

- Watch *What to Write Next* Lecture on D2L
- Watch *Good Stories* Lecture on D2L
- Read *Film Crit Hulk: Part 1 – 3*
- Thesis Questionnaire
- Writing Assignment 1: Five to Ten Feature or Series Concepts

WEEK 2, April 9: Discussion of lectures, story concepts, and questionnaires.

Due for next week:

- Watch *Character* Lecture on D2L
- Read Schechter on Character
- Writing Assignment 2: Character Analysis Questions
- Character Status Quo Scene
- **One on one Meetings with Professor**

WEEK 3: April 16: Discussion of Lectures and Character Analysis.

Due for next week:

- Read Book 1 in *The War of Art*
- Personal Process and Resistance Lists
- Writing Assignment 3: Character Maps

WEEK 4 April 23: Discussion of Character Maps, *War of Art*, Resistance Lists

Due for next week:

- Watch *Breaking Story* Lecture on D2L
- Writing Assignment 4: World and Premise
- World and Premise Scene

WEEK 5 April 30: Discussion of World and Premise + Scenes

Due for next week:

- TV: Read Pitch Bible Guide
- Writing Assignment 5: Major Plot Points (TV adds Draft 1 of Bible)

WEEK 6, May 7: Discuss Lecture and Major Plot Points

Due for next week:

- Watch *Pitching Basics* and *Video Pitching* Lectures on D2L
- TV: Read Beletsky and CAA Pitch Template
- Project Statement of Purpose
- Writing Assignment 6: Pitch Treatment

WEEK 7, May 14: Discuss Lecture and Pitch Treatments

Due for next week:

- Watch *Feature Pitching* and *TV Pitching* Lectures on D2L
- Feature: Read Howard and Gulino on Sequences
- TV: Read Extant and Pitching Reverie
- Develop Pitch for Trial Run
- **Individual Pitches with Professor on Zoom**

WEEK 8, May 21: Pitch Trial Runs

Due for next week:

- Watch *Development Docs* Lecture on D2L
- Feature: Read Treatment Samples
- TV: Read Bible and Pilot Outline Samples
- Features: Sequence Breakdowns + D1 Outline / Treatment
- TV: Draft 2 of Bibles + D1 of Beat Sheet

WEEK 9, May 28: Pitch Debrief, discuss Bibles / Outlines / Treatments

Due for next week:

- Features: Draft 2 of Sequence Breakdown + Outline / Treatment
- TV: Draft 3 of Bibles + D2 Beat Sheet

WEEK 10, June 4: Discuss revised Bibles / Outlines / Treatments

FINAL: Revised Breakdowns / Outlines / Treatments / Bibles + Beat Sheets

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 score.

Assignments:

The class will break into groups to minimize the reading load for each student and to make sure everyone receives an equal amount of feedback. Assignments are to be submitted to D2L on Tuesdays by 6 PM. Students are expected to have read and annotated the work submitted by their classmates each week BEFORE class.

Late work will not be accepted without a valid excuse, and out of fairness to all, it cannot be workshopped in class.

Development Materials:	45 Points / 5 x 9
Participation:	10 Points
Pitch Treatment + Pitch	20 Points
Final Draft Treatment/Bible:	<u>25 Points</u>
	100 Total

Grading:

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 in some respect, F is substantially unsatisfactory work.

Screenwriting assignments must demonstrate professionalism and investment in the material, showcase techniques and ideas discussed in class, offer a unique take with a clear voice, and present a proper grasp of grammar, format and style.

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.

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

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.

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