



## **SCWR 355**

901

### **The Writers Room**

Remote Learning

2019-20 Spring

Instruction: Online

Thursdays 5:45 – 9:00 pm

Course Management System: D2L

José A. Soto

Office Hours: Tuesdays from 10:30 am to 1 pm and Thursdays from 3:30 – 5:30 pm (Via Zoom)

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#### **Course Description:**

This course enables students to develop a television series in an advanced workshop setting modeled after a professional writers room. Emphasis will be placed on pitching ideas, breaking story, and examining the various roles that make the writers room a creative and dynamic environment.

#### **Course Objectives:**

- Students will recognize the structure and organization of the typical Writers Room of a television show.
- They will develop their own original series working either as Showrunners or as Executive Story Editors and Staff Writers.
- They will write Pitch Briefs, Season Beat Sheets and Outlines for two other showrunners in the group or for their own TV series, based on the development of the season.

Students should note that this course will be in a Workshop format. That means that you have to submit on time your assignments so showrunners may read and critique them. It also means that you have to participate in session discussions of your classmates' projects. We will function as closely to a Writers Room as we can, and that entails enthusiastic participation and offering constructive criticism, even if it's 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-coms, reality programming and other TV related subjects.



**Reading:**

Recommended: Landau, Neil (2014) **THE TV SHOWRUNNER’S ROADMAP**; Focal Press

You are also invited to examine *Variety* and *The Hollywood Reporter* trade magazines that account the newest developments in this thriving industry. Lectures will be supplemented with handouts and videos from the instructor over the course of the semester.

**Grading:**

Final grades will be based on the development of a Pitch Brief, a Season Beat Series and 2 Outlines with their rewrites. Meeting participation and attitude will be also considered in the final grade.

Because it 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 (0 points).

Outlines – 35% each.

Pitch Brief – 10%

Season Beat Sheet – 20%

All assignments must be typed and free of grammatical, spelling and punctuation errors. It's your work; you're responsible for its quality. All Briefs, Beat Sheets and Outlines must be in proper Screenwriting format. Use of screenwriting software such as Final Draft [www.finaldraft.com](http://www.finaldraft.com) or celtx [www.celtx.com](http://www.celtx.com) is HIGHLY recommended. Check the D2L site to find exclusive offers on these programs.

**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

**Course Policies:**

**1. Participation**



At this level, students should be interested in the subject of the class. The only way to see this is through participation in-class, either asking questions or adding constructive comments to other student's contributions. Particularly important will be the participation of each student in the development meetings of each project.

## **2. Attendance**

It does not constitute a specific part of your grade, but perfect attendance to meetings is required. The best space where you can present your comments or ideas is during the Development Meetings that we'll have during this term. Most of the information you need to complete your assignments will be discussed there; also, examples of what you have to do will be provided there. Any student who misses more than 2 meetings, will fail the class with an F (0%).

However, if you have to miss a meeting or a deadline, make sure to plan ahead, and inform the instructor 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 meeting to explain a missed deadline or meeting, they will not be excused.

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 excuse and/or academic accommodations for an excused meeting.

## **3. 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 meeting 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.

## **4. Missed Assignments**

Since screenwriting is a cumulative effort, if you fail to turn in any of the assignments (Pitch Brief, Series Beat Sheet or Outlines), you will fail the course with an F (0%). 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.

## **5. Attitude**

We are going to be spending a lot of time discussing how to produce the series. This will be made in an orderly fashion, no matter how vehemently 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.

There are very specific challenges when working remotely. I expect every student to behave respecting the rules of conduct enforced on most open online platforms. A student might be kicked out from a meeting by the instructor or the leading producing student if they engage in lude behavior or any activity that might offend or distract the participants.

## **6. Uncivilized Behavior**

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 (0%) if he/she engages in disruptive behavior, has a poor attitude, or in any other way is clearly not taking the class seriously.

## **7. Ethics**

Although your grade does not contain an ethics component like some other courses, I require complete honesty in producing your work. 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.

## **8. Plagiarism**



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 (0%) if he/she engages in any form of academic dishonesty. I further reserve the right to recommend other sanctions as may be appropriate.

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.

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

## **9. 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.

## **10. 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

## **11. 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

## **12. 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 <http://policies.depaul.edu/policy/policy.aspx?pid=332>

### **Course Organization and Schedule:**

#### **Week 1**

Students will introduce themselves and pitch a television series project that they want to develop in class. Each participant will create a small video, between 2 and 8 minutes in which they pitch their idea to the class. They will also create a Pitch Brief document.

By Tuesday, April 7<sup>th</sup> at 11.30 pm. each student will upload the video, using the Panopto app, and the Pitch Brief to the discussion board assigned by the instructor in D2L.

Everybody should see the videos and read the Pitch Briefs before the beginning of the second zoom meeting on April 9<sup>th</sup>, at 5.45 pm.

#### **Week 2**

During the second meeting, students will discuss the proposed shows and vote for 10 that will be developed in class.

Students whose shows are picked will serve as showrunners of their own writers room. They would have to pick amongst the rest of the group 5 story editors with whom they're going to develop their show.

The showrunners will select times for their first development meeting with the instructor. These meetings can be during the assigned-time period or outside of it, provided the instructor is available.

#### **Week 3 to 10**

Each writers room will have 3 development meetings. The first two will be with the instructor guiding the activities and they will have a third one on their own. The results of these meetings will be a 6 episode beat sheet. That they will submit on the date assigned by the professor.

Once the beat sheet is submitted each of the members of the writers room will develop one episode and write an outline. Showrunners will develop the pilot and have to decide who amongst their teams write the other ones.

The outlines should be submitted on the date established by the instructor, which should not be more than 2 weeks after the second development meeting. The Showrunner and the instructor will provide feedback to the outlines on an online meeting. A second draft of the outline should be written no later than a week after the notes were provided.

- Note: In order to comply with these exercises, each student should participate in 2 writers rooms.