DEPAUL UNIVERSITY: SCHOOL OF CINEMATIC ARTS

SCWR 101-404: Screenwriting for Majors
Fall 2020
Thursday 1:30PM – 4:45PM
REMOTE

Instructor: Fatou Samba
Office Hours: Tuesdays 3:00-4:30pm, Wednesdays and Thursdays 11:45am-1:15pm (CST) or by appointment. Drop-ins won't be available. Please schedule a Zoom meeting with me in Blue Star or by email.
Email: fsamba@depaul.edu

Course Description:

This course introduces digital cinema majors to dramatic writing for motion pictures. The topics covered include theme, plot, story structure, character, and dialogue. Emphasis is placed on telling a story in visual terms.

Prerequisites: None

Course Outcomes:

In addition to completing several writing assignments students are expected to develop, outline, and write a short screenplay.

Learning Objectives:

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

- employ standard screenplay format
- identify elements of scene craft, character development, and narrative structure
- demonstrate expanded visual writing skills
- apply a work-flow process to their creative writing
- produce original writing projects on a deadline
- revise their writing based on feedback from the professor and their peers
- evaluate the work of their peers and formulate helpful feedback

Required Software

Final Draft is highly recommended. A student discount can be found here:
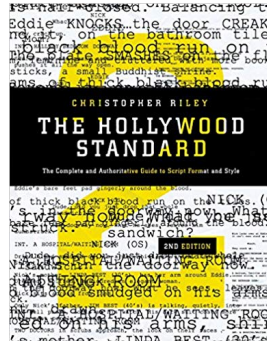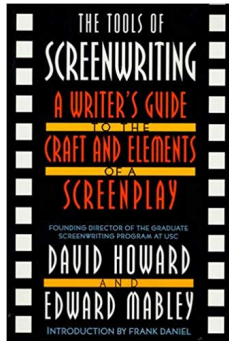https://store.finaldraft.com/final-draft-11-edu.html

Other comparable screenwriting software such as Fade In, Celtx, Highland (only for Mac), and Trelby (only for PC) is also acceptable. **All assignments are to be saved in PDF!**

Required Textbooks:

The Tools of Screenwriting by David Howard and Edward Mabley

The Hollywood Standard by Christopher Riley

Any additional readings will be provided by the instructor.

Short films and other clips will be screened in class, but students may be required to view additional films outside of class.

Previous Course Number: DC 101

COURSE MANAGEMENT

Asynchronous vs. Synchronous Online Learning:

This class will be run synchronously.

For the purposes of this class, that means that we'll be conducting weekly Zoom sessions during the allotted class time (Thursdays from 1:30pm-4:45pm CT). These meetings will consist of lectures, screenings, discussions, and workshops of your scenes/short films with live table reads.

In the event that technology fails us during any of our Zoom sessions, I will record my lectures instead and post them on D2L to ensure we don't miss any actual class time. I will also be sure to create a discussion board where you can post your work/feedback. If I find that the Zoom sessions aren't as effective, or we continue to experience technical difficulties, the class may become completely asynchronous. If that happens, we won't meet as a class. Instead, all lectures will be pre-recorded, screenings will be posted on D2L, and you will post your answers to the screening prompts on the discussion board. You will also have to read each other's work on your own time and provide written feedback before the given deadline.

Alternatively, a hybrid model is also an option, where we only meet to discuss screenings and conduct workshops but lectures will be recorded and watched asynchronously.

I will keep you appraised of any such changes in advance.

D2L:

You will be using D2L extensively in this course. To log on, go to:
https://d2l.depaul.edu/d2l/home and enter using your campus connect username and password. Once you are logged on, click on the course number link and you will find links to the syllabus, materials, weekly assignments, etc. This is also where you will upload all of your assignments.

Zoom:

We will also be using Zoom extensively in this course. You will not need to sign up for an account. I will post weekly links to our sessions on D2L, and you should be able to simply run it through your browser to attend the meetings. You can also download the Zoom app, if preferred.

You will need internet access, a camera and a microphone to fully participate with Zoom. It is possible to use a phone or a tablet, though a computer or laptop is preferable. In addition to communicating through video conference, Zoom will also allow you to share your screen and chat with me or with each other during our sessions. When the time comes for workshopping your short films, you'll be sent into breakout rooms where you can workshop in groups.

Student Participation Guidelines

The DePaul Code of Student Responsibility applies to online behavior as well as in-person or classroom behavior. The following are policies for the course meetings with Zoom:

- General – Sign in with your preferred first name and last name. If you do not have access to a computer or smartphone with internet access, call into class. This is not optimal; try to locate an internet-enabled device to use for this course. Please stay engaged in class activities. Close any apps on your device that are not relevant and turn off notifications.

- Video – Turn on your video when possible. It is helpful to be able to see each other, just as in an in-person class. You may elect to turn off your video if you have limited internet bandwidth, no webcam or if you're unable to find an environment without a lot of visual distractions.

- Audio – Mute your microphone when you are not talking. Be in a quiet place when possible and turn off any music, videos, etc. in the background.

- Sharing the meeting link, ID number, or password with anyone outside of the class is prohibited.

- Sharing meeting recordings with anyone outside of the class is prohibited.

Technology Considerations
- If you need assistance during a video call, contact DePaul's Technology Support Center at 312.362.8765.
- If connectivity issues impact your audio/video quality, try turning off your camera.
- If you're experiencing issues with Zoom, you can use a site like speedtest.net to check your internet connection speed. A good minimum upload/download speed for video conferencing is at least 1.5Mbps.

Participation Expectations
- Treat video conferences as you would a regular class session on campus. Be prepared to be attentive and engaged during meetings.
- Be on time or notify your instructor if you will be late or unable to attend.
- Minimize distractions, such as televisions and cell phones, when possible.
- Don't engage in other activities during sessions (driving, cooking, cleaning, etc.)
- If you think you might have trouble actively participating in meetings, let your instructor know in advance, if possible.

If students would like pro accounts to host meetings of their own, they can follow these steps.

- Go to depaul.zoom.us and sign in with your Campus Connect credentials.
- Visit zoom.us/download to download the Zoom Client for Meetings. You can also download the mobile and desktop apps from this site.
- When using the app, log in using your new Username@depaul.edu email address and existing Campus Connect password. Choose the "Sign in with SSO" option and specify the "depaul.zoom.us" domain, if prompted.

If you have trouble with the link or app, you can also call a phone number to listen in on the meeting. Call one of these numbers:

+1 646 876 9923
+1 669 900 6833
+1 301 715 8592

Then, enter our Meeting ID.

Visit the link below for more information on how to use Zoom:

https://support.zoom.us/hc/en-us/articles/206175806-Top-Questions?flash_digest=0d96b1924dbc68c124d363d5d255d51fda1a78e2

Tech Support:

Students having any tech issues this quarter should email scaavsupport@depaul.edu.

This new resource is for general tech support and will serve as a unified point of contact for these issues. This email address will be monitored by during the following hours:

Monday through Friday: 8:30am – 8:30pm
Saturday: 10:00am – 6:00pm
Sunday: 12:00pm – 6:00pm

Attendance:

Attendance and participation are mandatory. An unexcused absence, which is defined as not showing up to Zoom sessions, constitutes a reduction in your participation grade. <u>Missing 3 or more sessions will result in an automatic failure in the class.</u>

If you have to miss a Zoom session or a deadline, make sure to plan ahead, and inform me in advance. Be sure to also let me know if you're having technical problems that are preventing you from joining the session on time. <u>Letting me know in advance does not automatically excuse an absence or a missed deadline,</u> 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.

In order to petition for an excused absence, students who miss sessions 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.

Participation:

Feedback is an essential part of the class, and it's the only way for you to learn and grow as a writer and storyteller. The only way to see this is through participation during our Zoom sessions, either asking questions, participating in class discussions, or adding constructive comments to other student's presentations and works. Students who don't provide feedback on their classmates' work can't expect to receive feedback on theirs. <u>Failure to participate will result in a reduction of your grade.</u>

Online activities:

For obvious reasons we will all be on our computers, tablets or phones during class sessions. That does not mean that you are free to browse online, be on social media or do other things not related to the task at hand. If I so much as suspect you of unrelated online activities, you will be asked to leave the session, which will result in a reduction of your participation grade.

Assignments:

All assignments for this course must be typed, submitted on D2L and saved as PDF. Assignments not saved as PDF will receive a reduction in points, and you will be asked to reupload it correctly.

Assignments will be treated like absences, meaning that without prior approval and a documented reason for missing the deadline, LATE WORK WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED.

Workshops:

By enrolling in this course, you agree to share your ideas and writings with the professor and other students in the class. You must acquire express written consent from any writer in the class should you wish to share his/her work with someone who is not enrolled in this course. Feedback is an essential part of the writing process. We must respect each other, our collaboration, and the work at hand. Be truthful, but sensitive when giving notes. Be prepared to solve problems instead of just pointing them out.

Creative Subject Matter:

As this is a creative writing course, controversial subject matter may enter into the conversation. Students have the right to express themselves artistically in their writing and address challenging issues. If you become uncomfortable with a conversation for personal reasons, you may be excused for the remainder of that class without penalty. Inclusion of individuals from the class, or direct personal attacks on members of the class will not be tolerated in course material. If you feel you are being individually targeted by material written or discussed in class, please inform the instructor as soon as possible.

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.

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism

This course will be subject to the university's academic integrity policy. More information can be found at http://academicintegrity.depaul.edu/. If you have any questions be sure to consult with your professor. But know this: plagiarism will earn you an F in this course.

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.

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.

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: csd@depaul.edu.

Lewis Center 1420, 25 East Jackson Blvd.
Phone number: (312)362-8002
TTY: (773)325.7296

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
https://offices.depaul.edu/secretary/policies-procedures/Pages/default.aspx

Online Course Evaluations:

Evaluations are a way for students to provide valuable feedback regarding their instructor and the course. Detailed feedback will enable the instructor to continuously tailor teaching methods and course content to meet the learning goals of the course and the academic needs of the students. They are a requirement of the course and are key to continue to provide you with the highest quality of teaching. The evaluations are anonymous; the instructor and administration do not track who entered what responses. A program is used to check if the student completed the evaluations, but the evaluation is completely separate from the student's identity. Since 100% participation is our goal, students are sent periodic reminders over three weeks. Students do not receive reminders once they complete the evaluation. Students complete the evaluation online in CampusConnect.

Assignments

Scene Assignments:

You will write a total of five scene exercises throughout the quarter based on the topics we cover in class – specific guidelines for each exercise will be provided on D2L. You are expected to bring a printed or digital copy of the assignment to class for workshop and submit a copy to the corresponding Dropbox link on D2L AND to the proper discussion board when applicable. Each scene assignment is 5% of your final grade (25% in total). Please save files as a PDF, and use your last name and the name of the assignment: *YourNameInterrogationScene.pdf*

You will be graded on:

- Style and Format
- Creative execution of the assignment within the given parameters
- Use of dramatic techniques presented in class and the readings

Loglines, Treatments, and Step Outlines

You will come in with three story ideas that can be conveyed in a short film, and you will pitch them to the class. After a brief discussion, you will choose one to write for your 10- page script. Then you will develop a treatment or step outline for the short film, which will also be workshopped prior to the writing of short scripts.

Short Script Draft I

You will submit a first draft of a short script that is to be no longer than 10 pages. Here are some things to keep in mind:

- Show don't tell. Show don't tell. Show don't tell. Show don't tell.
- Spelling, grammar, and punctuation count - proofread your work, proofread it again, and then proofread it one more time just to be sure.
- Standard screenwriting formatting is required.
- You must include a properly-formatted cover page.
- Re-read your narrative for clarity - it may be a good idea to have a friend look over the script as well.
- Action description should be lean - only revealing what can be heard/seen on screen.
- Develop a clear beginning, middle, and end.
- Avoid exposition-heavy dialogue - Always ask yourself, "Is there a way I can communicate this information visually?"
- Don't wait until the last minute. It takes time to develop a solid narrative - you won't be able to do it in one night and achieve the grade you want.

Short Script Draft II

Points to consider:

- The second draft of your script should read as a marked improvement over your first effort.
- Correcting typos and making small tweaks is not a rewrite.
- Use notes you received from the instructor, workshops, and your own self- evaluation to craft your revised draft. Get outside opinions if you can.
- Characters, dialogue, structure and scene work should be completely reevaluated and enhanced.
- Spelling, grammar, and punctuation count even more. Proofread again.

You will be workshopping these scripts in class with your peers, not with me. I will not give you notes on your second drafts, only your first and third.

Short Script Draft III

This is your final writing assignment. The final script is to be no longer than 10 pages. Again, it should be a marked improvement over your second draft.

LATE WORK WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED! Any assignments submitted after the deadline without <u>prior</u> approval from me will be given a zero.

Grading Policy

Class attendance and participation: 15 points
Scene Assignments: 25 points
Loglines: 5 Points
Treatments/Outlines: 10 points
Short Script Draft: 15 points
Short Script Draft 2: 15 points
Final Draft Short Script: 15 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.

Students in all undergraduate classes, with the exception of those in CEO cohort programs, may opt to change the grading basis for any or all of their courses to Pass/D/Fail. A grade of Pass (P) will indicate that the student's work met expectations for a grade of at least C-. Work that would merit a grade of D+ or D in the traditional grading basis would still earn a D+ or D. Work that

does not merit a passing grade will earn a Fail (F). The Pass/D/Fail grading option may apply to any graduation requirement, including courses in the major, minor, Liberal Studies Program or open electives.

https://resources.depaul.edu/coronavirus/faqs/Pages/classes-academics-students.aspx

Alterations:

The professor reserves the right to alter the syllabus at any time. Students will be apprised of any and all changes with clear instructions should they occur.

Time Zones:

Some of us will be in different time zones for the duration of the quarter. All times provided by me, including Zoom sessions and due dates/times will be in Central Standard Time. It is your responsibility to ensure you are present and on time for the meetings and that you turn in your work on time no matter what time zone you're in.

Course Outline

Week 1 – Thursday 9/10

Lecture: Course introduction, what is a story? What is a screenplay? Introduction to visual storytelling. Screenplay formatting. Final Draft tutorial.

Reading: *The Tools of Screenwriting:* About Screenwriting and Basic Storytelling (3-40), Visuals (88-90)

The Hollywood Standard: Foreword, Introduction, and Quick Start Guide (through page 27), Shot Headings (29-62), Direction (63-80)

Assignment 1: *Roommates*

DUE: Tuesday 9/15 at 1:30pm (CST).

Week 2 – Thursday 9/17

Workshop: Roommates

Lecture: Character

Reading: *The Tools of Screenwriting*: Protagonist, Conflict, Obstacles (43-49), Characterization (63-65), Planting and Payoff, Elements of the Future (pages 72-76).

The Hollywood Standard: Dialogue (81-102), Transitions, Punctuation (103-111)

Assignment 2: *Preparation for a Date*

DUE: Tuesday 9/22 at 1:30pm (CST)

Week 3 – Thursday 9/24

Workshop: Preparation for a Date

Lecture: The Scene: Conflict & Goals, Stakes and Urgency

Reading: *The Tools of Screenwriting:* Activity and Action (81-83), The Dramatic Scene (91-94)

Assignment 3: *Interrogation*

DUE: Tuesday 9/29 at 1:30pm (CST)

Week 4 – Thursday 10/1

Workshop: Interrogation

Lecture: Exposition

Reading: *The Tools of Screenwriting:* Exposition (60-62),

Assignment 4: *Seduction*

DUE: Tuesday 10/6 at 1:30pm (CST)

Week 5 – Thursday 10/8

Workshop: Seduction

Lecture: Dialogue and Dramatic Irony

Reading: *The Tools of Screenwriting*: Dramatic Irony (68-70), Dialogue (84-87)

The Hollywood Standard: Special Pages (131-139)

Assignment 5: *Wrongest Person*

DUE: Tuesday 10/13 at 1:30pm (CST)

Week 6 – Thursday 10/15

Workshop: Wrongest Person

Lecture: Writing the Short Script Part I

Reading: *The Tools of Screenwriting:* Premise, Main Tension, Theme, Unity (49-59), Outlining, Plausibility (76-80)

Assignment: *Three loglines for short scripts*

DUE: Tuesday 10/20 at 1:30pm (CST)

Week 7 – Thursday 10/22

Workshop: Pitch Three Loglines for Short Scripts

Lecture: Writing the Short Script Part II

Assignment: *Treatment or Step Outline*

DUE: Tuesday 10/27 at 1:30pm (CST)

Week 8 – Thursday 10/29

Workshop: Treatment/Outline (one-on-one)

INDIVIDUAL MEETINGS WITH ME

Assignment: *First Draft of Short Script*

DUE: Tuesday 11/3 at 1:30pm (CST)

Week 9 – Thursday 11/5

Workshop: First Draft of Short Scripts

Lecture: Rewriting

Reading: *The Tools of Screenwriting*: Rewriting (95-97)

Assignment: *Short Script Draft II*

DUE: Tuesday 11/10 at 1:30pm (CST)

Week 10 – Thursday 11/12

Workshop: Second Draft of Short Scripts

Assignment: *Short Script Draft III*

DUE: Thursday 11//19 at 1:30pm (CST)

Week 11 – Thursday 11/19

NO CLASS!

Third and FINAL draft of scripts due at 1:30pm (CST)