

DePaul University School of Cinematic Arts

SCWR 501/551: MFA Thesis 1

Fall, 2020

Tuesday, 5:45PM-9:00 PM, Online: <https://bit.ly/329AtLX>

Professor Brad Riddell: brad.riddell@depaul.edu

Office Hours: M/Tu/W 3-5:00 PM, and by appointment: <https://bit.ly/3jqMSkD>

Course Description:

Students will write a draft of their thesis screenplay. The thesis project is to serve as the culminating piece in the student's MFA screenwriting portfolio and must be approved by a thesis committee in order for a student to graduate.

Prerequisites:

SCWR 500 or SCWR 550 is a prerequisite for this class.

Course Outcomes:

- The completion and polish of a complete feature screenplay, **or**
- The completion and polish of a complete TV pilot + pitch deck
- A teaching presentation

Learning Objectives:

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

- deliver finished longform work on deadline.
- maintain the creative environment of a professional writer's room.
- evaluate peer work and formulate constructive criticism.
- apply knowledge of genre and market expectations to their work.
- synthesize feedback on their work to develop a plan for revisions.

Course Management:

This course is managed on D2L. Additional reading content, lecture slides, attendance records, grades, discussion boards, and submission folders can be found there as well.

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 speaker in addition to workshop.

WEEK 1, September 15: Course Introduction. Syllabus review. Creative status report. Group and teaching assignments. Discuss writing sample and opening a story.

Due for next week:

- Group A: First Act of feature or first two acts of the pilot.

WEEK 2, September 22: Discuss act breaks, causality, and the new world.

Due for next week:

- Group B: First Act of feature or first two acts of the pilot.

WEEK 3, September 29: Discuss reversals, twists, and tightening the main tension.

Due for next week:

- Group A: to the midpoint of the feature or the next two acts/tag of the pilot.
- Members of Group B: Teaching Presentation.

WEEK 4, October 6: Discuss lag, bringing forward subplots, and internal conflict.

Due for next week:

- Group B: to the midpoint of the feature or the next two acts/tag of the pilot.
- Members of Group A: Teaching Presentation.

WEEK 5, October 13: Discuss immediacy and quantum entanglement.

Due for next week:

- Group A: to the End of Act 2 of the feature or finished pilot + pitch deck plan.
- Members of Group B: Teaching Presentation.

WEEK 6, October 20: Discuss satisfaction and loose ends.

Due for next week:

- Group B: to the End of Act 2 of the feature or finished pilot + pitch deck plan
- Members of Group A: Teaching Presentation

WEEK 7, November 3: Discuss polishing.

Due for next week:

- Group A: to the End of Act 3 or draft one of pitch deck
- Members of Group B: Teaching Presentation

WEEK 8, November 10: Discuss the truth about first drafts.

Due for next week:

- Group B: to the End of Act 3 or draft one of pitch deck
- Members of Group A: Teaching Presentation

WEEK 9, November 17: Discuss what you can control.

- Group A: select polished scenes / sequences / decks

WEEK 10, November 24: Discuss how to wait.

- Group B: select polished scenes / sequences /decks

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 weekly reading load for each student and to make sure everyone receives an equal amount of feedback. Assignments are to be submitted to D2L by 5PM each Tuesday. Students are expected to leave feedback for all projects in Discussions by the next class.

Each student will make a teaching presentation analyzing a project or projects similar to their own.

Late work will not be accepted without a valid excuse.

Bi-weekly pages/deck:	20 Points Each (80)
Teaching Presentation:	10 Points
Written Feedback on D2L:	<u>10 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.

Attendance:

Absent students forfeit their assignment grade for the first two classes they miss (10 points each). **Three unexcused absences will constitute course failure.**

Academic Support Resources

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

Zoom Policies:

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.

Creative Subject Matter:

Controversial or sensitive subject matter may find its way into our conversations. Students have every right to express themselves artistically in their writing and address challenging issues so long as the work itself 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 in student work will not be tolerated.

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