

SYLLABUS

CREATING THE SHORT FILM

CTWR 505 Spring 2011

Section: 19282 (2 Units)

Wednesdays, 9:00 AM – 11:50 AM

SCA 316

Your point of view, which is your voice, your person, isn't something you have to get.
It's something you have to uncover.

- Hanif Kureishi

INSTRUCTOR:

Lecturer: Vincent Robert
Telephone: 310.994.4236
Email: vincentrobert29@hotmail.com
Office Hours: Wednesdays @ 1pm **BY APPOINTMENT ONLY.**

Please call or email to make an appointment no later than by the
Monday afternoon before class. If emailing, please indicate
"APPOINTMENT REQUEST" in the subject line.

Emails will be answered at earliest possible convenience whenever Instructor is in production.

REQUIRED TEXT:

- Dannenbaum, Hodge & Mayer, CREATIVE FILMMAKING FROM THE INSIDE OUT (Simon & Schuster, 2003)

Additional Required Reading:

- Frank Darabont, THE SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION: THE SHOOTING SCRIPT (Newmarket Shooting Script Series)

Additional Recommended Readings:

- Dara Marks, *INSIDE STORY* (Three Mountain Press)
- Margaret Mehring, *THE SCREENPLAY: a blending of film form and film content* (Focal Press).
- And as many professional screenplays as you can! (available at the cinema library)

COURSE GOALS:

- To strengthen & deepen your ability to conceive and develop ideas that will lead to compelling, authentic, and personally meaningful films.
- To facilitate the expression and development of your own unique artistic identity, cinematic voice, and point of view through the exploration of personal experience, interests, concerns, values and inherent taste.
- To motivate you to develop ideas for stories and characters through observation of, research into, and direct experience with real life.
- To introduce connections between cinematic creativity and liberal arts education, drawing from a broad range of cultural sources.
- To encourage awareness of the infinite possibilities for creative expression inherent in cinema, including documentary and alternative, experimental forms.
- To begin an exploration of the societal impact of motion picture media, and the extent to which awareness of your own point of view can strengthen your creative process.
- To enhance your collaborative skills through group discussion, giving and responding to feedback, and collective brainstorming.
- To enable you to create a diverse portfolio of project ideas, outlines and treatments that you can draw on in future production classes.
- To introduce basic screenwriting fundamentals.

- To explore the possible structures of the short film.
- The last six weeks of the course are devoted to conceiving, writing and planning a Semester II CTPR 508 project: two weeks of idea development, two weeks of writing, and two weeks of pre-production.

ONGOING ASSIGNMENTS:

Weekly Journal — Every Monday, you will e-mail to me a journal from the previous week. A lot of your most important learning will happen experientially outside of the classroom. Journals are a way to be more conscious of all aspects of the learning process, more observant and more self-aware. They should not be dry, factual reports but rather a chance to brainstorm, reflect, analyze, vent, take note of ideas, and track the creative development of your thoughts and work. They become a record of your creative ideas (one that can be valuable to refer back to) and what you have accomplished (it's easy to forget, once a film is finished, all the work that went into it, and all the problems — artistic, logistical and emotional — that were confronted and overcome).

Please note that this is a journal you are writing to yourself, and I see a copy. **Don't write them to me.** There is no "right" way to keep a journal - try out different approaches and find a way to make it meaningful and worthwhile to you. The journals are private, seen only by me (this restriction doesn't apply if there are safety or legal implications). You can discuss anything. I will only respond to something in a journal if you add a note addressing me and asking for a response (e.g., "Vincent, please help me with this problem"). Occasionally, if several students are encountering the same problem or concern, I might address the generic issue in class so long as it can be done in a way that is entirely anonymous.

Observational Notebook — Keep a small notebook (or sketchbook) with you at all times. Write down notes, and create word and/or image sketches of interesting things around you. Consider the following criteria when organizing your observations:

- Characters -- people you find intriguing or complex
- Locations -- places that are evocative
- Objects -- things that are suggestive of some deeper significance
- Situations -- revealing circumstances and incidents
- Acts -- behavior that is emblematic or provocative
- Themes -- beliefs, ideas and values that seem basic to your understanding of life
- Moods -- feelings or emotions
- Sounds -- immediate and distant sounds that evoke emotion

Clipping file — Read a daily newspaper, and at least one magazine that includes current events or human interest stories. Clip articles and photographs that intrigue you. You should try to let material surprise you, rather than look for predetermined subjects.

Dream Journal — Begin jotting down separate, private notes of dreams you have, for use in the Dream Sequence assignment due later in the semester.

Reading Assignments — There will be occasional assignments that will be required reading.

Written Assignments — All outside-of-class assignments must be computer-printed or typed, except as noted. In addition, come to class prepared for in-class written exercises.

GRADES:

Grading will evaluate creative content, professional presentation and growth through the semester, as well as the student's demonstration of his or her achievement of the course's objectives, as reflected in the following:

Assignments:	70%
Contribution to class:	30%

Class assignments will be evaluated on the creative explorations and challenges you undertake, the effort put into your work, and your ability to meet deadlines.

Class contribution includes full involvement in all class discussions, as well as reading (in advance at times, as scheduled) the assignments of the other students, and offering thoughtful, insightful, constructive comments.

Class attendance is mandatory, and includes being on time to class (otherwise, the students who present their material first are short-changed).

Illness or family / medical emergencies are the only possible excused absences. Do not ask for permission to miss class for any other reason. If you have to miss a class due to illness, please email me before class and be prepared to provide medical verification if asked.

Two times being late to class at the start or after break is equivalent to one unexcused absence.

Two unexcused absences result in a lower grade, and three are grounds for failing the course.

There will be no final exam. **If you turn in all your work, if that work is on time, if it is competent, if you read the other students' works and consistently add to our class discussions, then you will earn no less than a "C".** Please refer to the School's standardized definition of grades. In summary:

- A: Work of **outstanding** quality
- B: Work of **good** quality; above-average fulfillment of course requirements
- C: **Average** fulfillment of course requirement;
Work of fair quality for undergraduate credit;
Minimum passing for graduate credit or for BFA Writing Students for credit counting towards their degree
- C-: Failing grade for graduate credit
Failing grade for BFA Writing Students for courses required in major
- D-: Work of minimum passing quality for undergraduate, non-cinema major.
Not passing quality for undergrad cinema majors or for courses designated by the School or Dept. to have a higher minimum standard for passing)
- F: Failure to meet the minimum course requirements
- Incomplete: assigned only when work is not completed because of documented illness or other "emergency" **occurring after the 12th week** of the semester.

PRESENTATION:

As you are hoping to enter the film industry as professionals, I expect your work to be prepared in a professional manner. Screenplay formatting errors, typos, bad spelling or grammar and overall sloppiness are NOT ACCEPTABLE.

Name every document you email the group as follows:

YourFirstName_Assignment.Format

Ex: Vincent_ScBreakdown.doc, or Vincent_ScriptDraft1.fdt

Also:

Put your **name**, **title** and **page number** on the Header of **EACH PAGE** of your material.

Refer to the SCHEDULE for due dates of specific assignments.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure this letter is delivered to the Professor as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. The telephone number for DSP is 213.740.0776.

Should you have any questions, you may contact your Writing Advisor in the Writing Division office in LUC301.

LAPTOP POLICY

The use of laptop computers to take notes or read each other's work is permitted in this class. Any use of a laptop that detracts from the class (such as surfing the Web for non class-related purposes, IM-ing other students, or doing work for other classes) will result in the loss of laptop privileges for the student.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. Likewise, the School of Cinematic Arts expects the highest standards of academic excellence and ethical performance from its students.

General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that only individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by the instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own.

It is particularly important that you are aware of and avoid plagiarism, cheating on assignments, submitting a paper to more than one instructor, or submitting a work authored by anyone other than yourself.

All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. Scampus, the Student Guidebook, contains the Student Conduct Code in Section 11.00, while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A: <http://www.usc.edu/dept/publications/SCAMPUS/gov>.

Should there be any suspicion of academic dishonesty, students will be referred to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards for further review. The Review process can be found at <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/SJACS/>.

COURSE OUTLINE:

All the following assignments are DUE on the week indicated. **BE AWARE THAT SOME ASSIGNMENTS ARE DUE THE MONDAY BEFORE CLASS.** You are encouraged to check this schedule often to stay on track for all your assignments.

IMPORTANT NOTE: always bring your printed copies of everyone's work to class, as you may be called upon to participate in a cold reading of certain passages. Nothing drives a point home to a writer like hearing his / her words read back aloud!

WEEKLY SCHEDULE:**SESSION #1:**

DATE: 1/12

TOPIC: IDEATION 1 of 5 "THE CREATIVE PROCESS"

CONTENT: Brief overview of 505, nurturing your creative process, identity / writing exercises, developing cinematic ideas, observation exercises, view clips based on observation, class discussion. Review of Syllabus.

EXERCISE: 5 Minute Autobiography. Feedback.

SCREEN: Rain or other short.

ASSIGNMENT: CHOOSE EITHER 1 or 2:

1. Bring in a small object and 3-5 (copies) of photos that represent aspects of your childhood / family / identity. Write a paragraph about each that details their meaning & importance to you.
2. Find an evocative location that has story potential and take 8 photographs of it in ways that reflect the emotional tone & "character" of the place. Write a paragraph that details the meaning of this location for you.

JOURNALS: Start clipping file, observations, and dream journals.

(Use your weekly journal to respond to ideas in the weekly reading assignments as well as your experiences in and outside of class.)

READ: Creative Filmmaking From the Inside Out, pp 1-46.

SESSION #2:

DATE: 1/19

TOPIC: IDEATION 2 OF 5 "WRITING FROM YOUR LIFE"

CONTENT: Present PHOTO and paragraph about it. Discuss memories evoked, visual cues, body language, individual characteristics, thematic possibilities.

Present personal OBJECT and paragraph about it. Discuss memories evoked and story potential of objects.

EXERCISE: TURNING POINTS as sources of story and character.

SCREEN: Autobiographical film; class discussion.

ASSIGNMENT: Prepare to pitch three ideas for short documentaries; a portrait of a place, a portrait of a person, and a portrait of a process.

Bring in 3 newspaper articles you used to research doc ideas. (Web page downloads okay.)

JOURNALS: Continue clipping file, observations, and dream journals.

READ: Creative Filmmaking From the Inside Out, pp 47-70.

SESSION #3:

DATE: 1/26

TOPIC: IDEATION 3 of 5 "DOCUMENTARY"

CONTENT: Hear documentary pitches; screening and discussion.

ASSIGNMENT: Write a treatment for an expressive, poetic short film based on your dreams (1 page).

JOURNALS: Continue clipping file, observations, and dream journals.

READ: Creative Filmmaking From the Inside Out, pp 71-92.

SESSION #4:

- DATE: 2/2
- TOPIC: IDEATION 4 of 5 "DREAMS AND ALTERED STATES"
- CONTENT: Feedback on dream treatments.
Film as a mirror of reality or an uninterrupted dream.
- SCREEN: Clips of films focusing on dreams.
- ASSIGNMENT: Adapt a pre-existing work: poem, short story, or painting into a 1 page treatment for a short film.
- JOURNALS: Continue clipping file, observations, and dream journals.
- READ: Creative Filmmaking From the Inside Out, pp 93-116.
Stephen King's short story "Rita Hayworth and the Shawshank Redemption"

SESSION #5:

- DATE: 2/9
- TOPIC: IDEATION 5 of 5 "ADAPTATION"
- CONTENT: Feedback on treatments.
Discuss differences between literature, theater and film.
- SCREEN: Clips of "Shawshank Redemption"; discussion.
- ASSIGNMENT: "Roommates"- create a character without dialogue by describing a room 3 times (harmony prevails, previous fight scene, one person has moved out).
Review ideas in your portfolio and write a paragraph about two ideas you would like to present in Week 6 as options for your Project 1 in 507. Be ready to pitch them to the group.
- JOURNALS: Continue clipping file, observations, and dream journals.

READ: Creative Filmmaking From the Inside Out, pp 117-166.

SESSION #6:

DATE: 2/16

TOPIC: SCREENWRITING FUNDAMENTALS 1 of 4: "CHARACTERS"

CONTENT: Discussion of "Roommates" writing assignments.

EXERCISE: Pitch your 2 ideas for 507 PROJECT 1. Group feedback.

ASSIGNMENT: CHOOSE EITHER 1 or 2:

1. Create 3 short scenes showing the development of a relationship between two characters using three specific periods in their lives.
2. Create a scene with a character preparing to go out on an important mission, then a 2nd scene where they return after the mission is over.

IMPORTANT: BRING 3 COPIES OF YOUR SCENES TO THE NEXT CLASS.

JOURNALS: Continue clipping file, observations, and dream journals.

READ: Screenplay BUTCH CASSIDY AND THE SUNDANCE KID. Discuss style and character development in Journal.

SESSION #7:

DATE: 2/23

TOPIC: SCREENWRITING FUNDAMENTALS 2 of 4: "RELATIONSHIPS"

CONTENT: Cold reading of character scenes. Feedback.

Screenplay format and style.

EXERCISE: Group A – Project 2 pitches.

SCREEN: Excerpts from BUTCH CASSIDY. Discuss.

ASSIGNMENT: Write Relationship/Dialogue exercise: Seduction

IMPORTANT: BRING 3 COPIES OF YOUR SCENE TO THE NEXT CLASS.

JOURNALS: Continue clipping file, observations, and dream journals.

READ: Visions & Voices, #2 "The Screenplay".

SESSION #8:

DATE: 3/2

TOPIC: SCREENWRITING FUNDAMENTALS 3 of 4: "DIALOGUE"

CONTENT: Cold reading of seduction scenes. Feedback.

EXERCISE: Group B—Project 2 pitches.

ASSIGNMENT: Re-write dialogue scenes.

JOURNALS: Continue clipping file, observations, and dream journals.

SESSION #9:

DATE: 3/9

TOPIC: SCREENWRITING FUNDAMENTALS 4 of 4: "RE-WRITES"

CONTENT: Cold reading of seduction scene rewrites. Feedback.

EXERCISE: GROUP C – present Project 2 pitches.

ASSIGNMENT: Prepare a list of 20 one-line "triggers" for ideas.

JOURNALS: Continue clipping file, observations, and dream journals.

NO CLASS:

DATE: 3/16

CONTENT: SPRING BREAK

SESSION #10:

DATE: 3/23

TOPIC: SEMESTER 2 PROJECTS 1 of 2 "DEVELOPMENT"

CONTENT: Share triggers; discussion of each student's 3 favorites.

2nd Half of class: MID-TERM CONFERENCES

ASSIGNMENT: Prepare short treatments for 2 films out of the following 3 possibilities:

1. Documentary
2. Experimental
3. Narrative

Email TREATMENTS ONLY to the group no later than Monday 3/28, 10:00am.

JOURNALS: Continue clipping file, observations, and dream journals.

SESSION #11:

DATE: 3/30

TOPIC: SEMESTER 2 PROJECTS 2 of 2 "VISUALIZATION"

CONTENT: Share and discuss treatments.

ASSIGNMENT: Write first draft of 508 script or storyboard (6 pages, limit 2 pages of dialogue)

Email SCRIPT ONLY to the group no later than Monday 4/4, 10:00am.

JOURNALS: Continue clipping file, observations, and dream journals.

SESSION #12:

DATE: 4/6

TOPIC: SEMESTER 2 WRITING 1 of 3 "DRAFT 1"

CONTENT: Share and discuss first draft of 508 script.

ASSIGNMENT: Write 2nd draft of 508 script
Email this to the group no later than Monday 4/11, 10:00am.

SESSION #13:

DATE: 4/13

TOPIC: SEMESTER 2 WRITING 2 of 3 "DRAFT 2"

CONTENT: Discussion of 508 Drafts 2

ASSIGNMENT: Write 3rd draft of 508 script.
Email this to the group no later than Monday 4/18, 10:00 am.

SESSION #14:

DATE: 4/20

TOPIC: SEMESTER 2 WRITING 3 of 3 "DRAFT 3"

CONTENT: Discussion of 508 Drafts 3

ASSIGNMENT: Write Final draft of 508 script.
Email this to the group no later than Monday 4/25, 10:00 am.

JOURNALS: NOTEBOOKS (Journals, clipping files, observations, etc.) due next week.

SESSION #15:

DATE: 4/27

TOPIC: PRODUCING 508 SCRIPTS 2 of 2 "REVIEW"

CONTENT: Discussion of 508 Drafts

JOURNALS: Turn in Notebooks.