Instructor: Don Bohlinger  
Class Schedule: Tuesday 4-6:50  
Class Location: SCA 361  
Office Hours: Tuesday 12-4, SCA 354, or by appointment  
Contact Information: dfb@usc.edu, 323 804-0110

COURSE GOALS:

• Further develop your ability to write feature screenplays  
• Expand your understanding of character and character relationships  
• Learn to write character biographies and a story synopsis  
• Gain a deeper understanding of story structure  
• Utilize specific screenwriting techniques  
• Learn to write from a detailed outline  
• Write a professional first draft (with revisions)

COURSE OBJECTIVE:

The objective of this course is to build on the skills you acquired in Screenwriting Fundamentals and Intermediate Screenwriting, completing a feature outline and a feature screenplay with some revisions. Whereas last semester you utilized your intuitive skills to write your first feature, this semester you will develop a more conscious, professional approach to screenwriting.

This does not mean formula. Since you will be immersed in the techniques of story structure in 516, the danger is to fall into a “paint by numbers” way of writing your scripts. Don't. While the skills you will acquire in 516 (Feature Script Analysis) are essential to your development as a film or television writer, it is crucial that you continue to utilize your memories and experiences to bring life and meaning to your characters and stories, whatever the genre. It is both your imagination and your technique that will separate you from the pack as a screenwriter.

We will slow down the process however as a way to concentrate on the very techniques you are learning in 516; we will focus on how those techniques can help you to tell your story more effectively.

Please keep in mind that this is a learning experience, not a thesis class, and that the emphasis will be on the process, not the product. If your outline and your screenplay turn out great that’s a bonus, but our goal is for you to absorb the fundamentals of feature screenwriting and the methods by which you can put those fundamentals to use.

Since we will be emphasizing specific screenwriting methods, your work in 516 is closely related to our work in 514B. With that fact in mind, we will sometimes supplement our own discussion by talking about the films you are watching and the
concepts you are learning in 516, and discuss how that knowledge can be helpful to your own writing.

We will begin with the ideation process, the time when the writer will explore the possibilities of his or her stories and characters. Students will be expected to pitch two feature ideas in the first two weeks. **One-page pitch papers** for each story will be collected via email. I would also like you to talk about your favorite feature film of 2014. I want to get a sense of your tastes as a screenwriter as quickly as possible.

Once you’ve chosen your story we will move on to the work of creating compelling characters to bring this story to life. We will be **writing biographies**: creating histories for your characters, defining their motivations, hopes and fears. You will be challenged to make your characters fresh and original by using your own experience. At the same time you will also be organizing the general ideas of your story into a **three to five page synopsis**.

The second stage of our class will be writing the step outline or treatment. Here your work will dovetail nicely with what you are learning in 516. Character and story structure will be discussed. We will discuss the manner in which you tell the story. How is the character introduced? What is his/her defining scene? When is the tension clear? And what is the central question of the story? Then, what are the obstacles that frustrate your character in their journey? How do they find the courage to continue? Who is on their side and who is against them? What is their lowest point and what is their most brilliant moment in the story? Finally, how does your story resolve itself and what does that resolution have to say about your view of the world? In this part of the class we will work sequence by sequence, presenting groups of scenes to the class. We will attempt to ‘see’ the movie in its entirety. This is our chance to make the story work: to play with the order of scenes, of revelation and recognition, of heightening the tension and making the resolution believable. At the end of this section of the class you will have written a **20-25-page step outline** in which every scene in the movie is described.

Finally, you will write the first draft. First drafts should be written quickly and in a burst of enthusiasm and emotion. Use your outline to guide you, but let the story take you over. Let your characters speak and act. We will be reviewing the lessons of 513: how to tell a story visually, how to make your scenes rich with character, action and drama, how to make the dialogue surprising, clear and effective. Along the way you will be getting notes from your classmates; I expect you to address some of these notes in the “quick” revision that will be your final first draft. For me, a **final first draft** is a draft you feel comfortable showing someone. Not a studio or an agent!!! But I am referring to a friend, a colleague or a classmate who knows nothing of the story and who can give you fresh input.

Your final portfolio will be: two one-page pitches, ten pages of character biographies, a 3-5 page synopsis of your story, a 20-25 page treatment or step outline, a main character narrative and the first draft (90-130 pages) of your script with a quick revision.

The class is a seminar and you will be expected to read and give feedback on the material of your classmates. The collaborative process (the writer’s table) is central to writing for film and television and is an integral part of the 514B experience.

I recognize that every writer’s method is unique to them, and that you are in the process of developing your own method, if you haven’t developed it already. However, in this class you will be following the approach and the timetable described below. There are two major deadlines and you’re expected to meet them.
CLASS SCHEDULE AND ASSIGNMENTS:

Class 1: 1/13
- Discuss class expectations, deadlines and syllabus.
- Favorite film of the last year?
- First story ideas will be discussed. Why this movie? Why now?
- Homework: develop first idea into a page pitch and bring a second idea.

Class 2: 1/20
- Discuss First and Second Idea.
- Homework: chose your screenplay idea and write a page synopsis of it.
- Homework begin character work on main character
- Handout: sample synopsis

Week 3: 1/27
- Discuss chosen idea and character biography work.
- Homework: write a short (one page) mission statement -- why this movie must be made and why it will launch your career as a screenwriter.
- Homework: continue character biography work.

Week 4: 2/3
- Discuss mission statements.
- Discuss character work.
- Homework: more character work. Begin work on secondary/ subplot characters.
- Write expanded 3-page synopsis with questions and ideas.
- Handout: sample step outline.

Week 5: 2/10
- Discuss synopsis and character work.
- Homework: pitch character introduction, outline main character routine
- Homework: first sequence step outline is due.

February 10th – biographies and synopsis are due.

Week 6: 2/17
- Discuss first sequence step outline.
- Discuss character introduction, routine, point of attack
- Write second sequence up to the end of Act One.
- Write a first person description: What is your main character’s want?

Week 7: 2/24
- Discuss outlines, character and Act One. Is want clear? Do we empathize with the main character? Does the audience identify?
- Homework: rewrite first act outline.
- Homework: describe the tension of act two: hope vs. fear?
- Homework: describe obstacles to character’s goal: internal or external?
- Homework: write first sequence of second act outline.

Week 8: 3/3
- Discuss outlines, character wants, obstacles.
• Homework: write up to the midpoint (fourth sequence.)
• Describe the midpoint of your film. What is the big scene? Does your character get close to achieving their goal?

Week 9: 3/10
• Discuss outline up to the midpoint (first culmination.)
• Homework: complete you outline. Sequences 4-8.
• Describe the end of the second act. Is there a low point for your character? Is there a point of high tension? Describe it.

Week 11: March 17: Spring Recess
(*Class will be divided to “A” and “B” groups for the rest of the semester.)

Week 12: 3/24 (Group A)
• Discuss final outline.
• Discuss third act. Is the resolution fulfilling? Does it test the character’s change? Is there a twist that can do this? Is the want fulfilled? Has the need been achieved?
• Homework: write a 3 to 5 page first person account of the main character’s journey in the story. Get his or her voice right. Have them describe what they go through and what it means to them.
• Make final changes to outlines.

April 3rd: outline is due.

Week 13: 3/31 (Group B)
• Discuss final outline. (Group B) (Both Groups)
• Discuss first person accounts.
• Remember the best stories are all about character!
• Homework: write the first 30 pages of your script. Email to the class.
• Homework: read and comment on classmates’ first 30 pages.

Week 14: 4/7
• Discuss first 30 pages.
• Homework: write the next 30 pages of your script. Email to class.
• Homework: read and comment on classmates’ first 30 pages.

Week 15: 4/14
• Discuss the next 30 pages.
• Homework: write the next 30 pages of your script. Email to class.
• Homework: read and comment on classmates’ next 30 pages.

Week 16: 4/21
• Discuss the next 30 pages.
• Homework: write the next 30 pages of your script. Email to class.
• Homework: read and comment on classmates’ next 30 pages.
Week 17: 4/28
• Discuss pages.
• Homework: Complete the first draft of your script
• Homework: make any revision requested by instructor.

Last Class Day – April 28th

May 8th – first draft of script (with revisions) is due.

EVALUATION CRITERIA:
CNTV 514B grades will be based on careful consideration in the following areas of the students’ work:
1. The ability to keep up with the writing required in the course’s schedule.
2. Demonstrated understanding of the fundamental principles of a good story: character, tension, and movement.
3. Demonstrated understanding of the fundamental principles of a good script: character, visualization, scene, dialogue.
4. The ability to develop a feature synopsis, treatment and first act of the script.

GRADING WEIGHTS:
CNTV 514B grades are based on:

   Quality of writing:
     Two Pitches 10%
     Character Biographies and Synopsis 20%
     Step Outline 30%
     First Draft 40%

Attendance is required. Tardiness will not be tolerated.

LETTER GRADES:
91-100.... A  78-80....B-  65-67.....D+
88-90......A-   75-77....C+  61-64.....D
85-87......B+   71-74....C  58-60.....D-
81-84......B    68-70....C  0-59......F

LAPTOP AND CELL PHONE POLICY:
Laptops are welcome (but should be used for reading and responding to classwork, no facebook, no email, please!) Cell phones off.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Section 11, Behavior Violating University Standards https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-
appropriate-sanctions. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the Office of Equity and Diversity http://equity.usc.edu or to the Department of Public Safety http://capsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us. This is important for the safety of the whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. The Center for Women and Men http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage http://sarc.usc.edu describes reporting options and other resources.

Support Systems

A number of USC’s schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the American Language Institute http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students. The Office of Disability Services and Programs http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, USC Emergency Information http://emergency.usc.edu will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.

Disruptive Student Behavior

Behavior that persistently or grossly interferes with classroom activities is considered disruptive behavior and may be subject to disciplinary action. Such behavior inhibits other students’ ability to learn and an instructor’s ability to teach. A student responsible for disruptive behavior may be required to leave class pending discussion and resolution of the problem and may be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs for disciplinary action.