**CTWR 418a – SENIOR THESIS** (4.0 units)**:**

Creation of a Feature-Length treatment and First Draft of a Senior Thesis Screenplay (including Pitching Experiences)

Prerequisite: ctwr 305

Section 19199D

FALL 2016

Pre-requisite: CTWR 305 Advanced Screenwriting: the Relationship Screenplay

Instructor: Rick Parks

Class Schedule: 1:00pm - 3:50pm   Tuesdays

Class Room: SCA 219

Office Hours: By appointment only.

Email address: rpparks@att.net

Phone/text: (818) 262-8091

**Course Description:**

The purpose of this class is to hone your skills in narrative feature-length story telling, guiding you through the process of writing an outline or treatment (15-20 pages) followed by a FIRST DRAFT of a Senior Thesis screenplay.

**Fall Semester:**

Each student will, by the December deadline, complete, from Idea to Fade Out, **the first draft of a screenplay**, which will have a strong central character, a working three-act structure and a tractable character arc.

Everyone will follow the same schedule for the first eight weeks of class, after which one will write at one's own pace, in order to meet the Dec. 7th deadline for the finished first draft.

The student will submit pages on a regular basis so that the instructor can attend to individual strengths and weaknesses. Remember the goal isn't simply to complete the assignment but to refine your craft. Don't expect perfection.

As we read your work in class, getting feedback from the professor and other students, one should keep a notebook. Write down everything useful we tell you (I expect this) and keep pushing forward. Don't forget – there will be rewrites, later. (see: 418b)

The fundamentals of screenwriting will be stressed and reviewed, as each screenplay will be based on a solid, dramatic foundation.

While **structure** holds up the house, this course will stress character over plot, since emphasis on plot can become **a trap** for the beginning screenwriter.

Stories are about people, and a screenwriter must be able to paint three-dimensional characters in realistic relationships. Emphasis will be placed on understanding the interrelationship between narrative and character, since they work together hand-in-hand.

Gathering and delineating proper story elements will be the focus of the first few weeks of the course.

One of the goals of the course will be to help each student develop a strong narrative structure that will allow their characters to travel down a clear, well-charted path to a satisfying conclusion. This course will emphasize the benefits of clear plotting and the 3-act Paradigm.

**Subject matters of the course:**

* Ideation
* The Shiny Object
* Best Man (or woman) for the Job
* Catalytic Characters
* Internal Character Engines (Wants and Needs)
* Dramatic Structures
* Three act design
* Sub-plots
* Conflict
* Complications
* Theme
* Dialogue
* Planting and Payoff
* THE BIG BEAT SHEET

**Deadlines:**

The course will approach assignments and deadlines in a professional manner. Treatments, outlines, scenes, and act conclusions must be completed by deadlines. Part of learning to be a professional screenwriter is to write under pressure and produce-- under a deadline. All assignments *must* be completed on time.

**Required reading:**

**The Writer’s Journey** (any edition) by Christopher Vogler. see AMAZON

**Save The Cat** by Blake Snyder - Michael Wiese Productions, AMAZON as well

**Suggested reading:**

Tools of Screenwriting by David Howard and Edward Mabley.

Screenplay: From Idea to Successful Script by Jule Selbo - Garth Gardner Company, Washington DC 2007

Oscar-Winning Screenwriters on Screenwriting by Joel Engel, Hyperion, New York 2002

Conversations with Wilder by Cameron Crowe, Random House, New York 1999

**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:**

eg: YourName-Assignment Name. - Format

Like this: **Smith-Bob'sMagicalWorld pg1-10.fdx** , or: **SMITH-BMW1-10.fdx**

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

**FINAL DRAFT:** As the professor (and his working peers) prefers Final Draft and the school provides it in at least a discounted or temporary format, he would prefer that *unless noted*, all assignments be completed in Final Draft format, so that both you and he can benefit from his NOTES on your work.

**Grading Criteria:**

Grading will be dependent on depth and breadth of thought in assignment preparation as well as serious and constructive class participation. All assignments must be submitted on time. "A"'s are for outstanding work. There may be **only one A grade** in this class, make it yours.

The professor expects students to conduct themselves in a **professional** manner as they prepare to work in The Industry. Professional means all work delivered on time, neat, printed, well thought out. Hurried or slip shod work will not be appreciated. Effort is of critical importance in determining final grade.

Areas that will be considered in determining course final grade are:

* Assignment #1: Ideas – 5%
* Assignment #2: Character Assignment – 10%
* Assignment #3: Presentation – 10%
* Assignment #4: The Setup and Conflict - aka Beat-sheet– 10%
* Assignment #5: Beat-sheet Revision – 10%
* Assignment #6: Sequence 1 - 5%
* Assignment #7: Sequences 2 & 3 - 10%
* Assignment #8: Sequence 4 - 5%
* Assignment #9: Sequence 5 - 5%
* Assignment #10: Sequence 6 - 5%
* Assignment #11: Sequence 7 - 5%
* Assignment #12: Sequence 8 - 5%
* Assignment #13: Revision - 5%
* Critique and Discussion Participation – 10%

This course is demanding and success depends on a student’s commitment to hard work and originality. Working as a professional writer involves *collaboration* and this professor expects the students to be involved in each and every discussion. Lack of involvement or lack of working on other student’s ideas may adversely affect the student’s grade.

**SCREWING UP:**

As the standards for the USC School of Cinematic arts are higher than other institutions, grading will be dependent on depth and breadth of thought in assignment preparation as well as serious and constructive class participation. All assignments must be submitted on time. "A"'s are for outstanding work. There may be **only one A grade** in this class, make it yours.

In GENERAL:

-If you show up to class, and do the minimum required work, you will get a C.

-If you show up to class, and demonstrate a significant effort, you will get a B.

-If you show up to class, demonstrate a significant effort and do exceptional work, you will then get an A.

The professor expects students to conduct themselves in a **professional** manner as they prepare to work in The Industry. Professional means all work delivered on time, neat, printed, well thought out. Hurried or slip shod work will not be appreciated. Effort is of critical importance in determining final grade.

If you shine, I will notice. If you fall back, I will also notice. Everyone succeeds in my class.

**Punctuality!**

LATE ASSIGNMENTS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED.

**Class Schedule:**

SCHEDULE:

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Date | Week | Teaching: |
| 8/23 | Wk 1 | **Introduction. Ideation. One of the paradigms. Want, need, fear. early character study – Lajos Egri, Snyder.**  Assignment: Prose character/confrontation essay (3pgs+/-)  Catalytic confrontation.  Assignment: be prepared to discuss your film idea from on or more of these elements: FRAME - Setting, location, situation.  CHARACTER(s) -  perhaps wants, needs, fears.  PREMISE -  eg., “a man cannot live life without affecting people”, or  “two friends cannot fall in love and remain friends” or “desperate situations bring out the worst in people”.  GENRE - either the usual conventions or your own version of the same. |
| 8/30 | Wk 2 | **VOGLER Joseph Campbell’s “The Hero’s Journey”, and the Four Basic Character Arcs. Archetypes, genres, commerciality.**  Assignment: Analyze 1-2 films, using one of the paradigms presented. Try to find the exact moments of structure.  Assignment: Prose assignment to write the catalytic confrontation scene from the antagonist's POV. (3pgs +/-) |
| 9/6 | Wk 3 | **Theme, Protagonists, Modifiers, Opponents. Thematic Subplots.**  Assignment: Three different protagonists for your film.  Assignment: Three different genres.  Assignment: prepare a pitch of your idea |
| 9/13 | Wk 4 | **CARDS - Acts, Sequences, Scenes, and Beats.**  Within and without the cards themselves  Assignment: card your first act. **SET UP**  Assignment: Choose one of your three ideas as the project you will write for the semester. Break this idea down by acts and 30 page chunks. |
| 9/20 | Wk 5 | **Tracking the hero - tracking the engine - following the B story**  Assignment: Find 3 great introductions to characters. |
| 9/27 | Wk 6 | **Breaking the second act: New Rules of the Game, Midpoints, Making Plot Serve Character.**  Assignment: Flesh out the second act for your treatment with the emphasis of further making plot serve character.  Assignment: Write the first page |
| 10/04 | Wk 7 | **PAGE ONE! Breaking the third act: The Inmost Cave, The Supreme Ordeal, The Tag**  Assignment: Flesh out the third act for your treatment, with the emphasis of making your characters *earn* their change.  Assignment: Bring in several different pages with different styles of screenwriting to class.  Assignment: Page One, AGAIN |
| 10/11 | Wk 8 | **Catchup Class, Additional development of problem areas. Scene Design: Objectives, Strategies, Obstacles, Reversals, etc. First Pages. Etc.**  Assignment: Bring 3 great first pages into class, one of which you’ve written. |
| 10/18 | Wk 9 | **Basics of Style, Writing a Great First Page. The TWIST**  Assignment: CARDS MUST BE FINISHED - prepare to spread them out in class. |
| 10/25 | Wk 10 | **Pages 1-10, Advanced Style and Page Design - class notes More cards**  Assignment: the next sequence |
| 11/1 | Wk 11 | **Pages 11-25**, **Finding Your Voice/ Brevity/Haiku**  Assignment: Pages 37-50 focus on finding your voice. |
| 11/8 | Wk 12 | **MORE Pages Midpoints, and Tracking the Half Way Mark**  Assignment: Re-write some of your previous pages to share them with the class. |
| 11/15 | Wk 13 | **More pages Crafting Dialogue**  Assignment: Apply dialogue lessons to writing.  Assignment: Pages 62-75 |
| 11/22 | Wk 14 | **Write more! - \*\*\* THANKSGIVING \*\*\***  pages due as usual - send them and be prepared for notes over pie. |
| 11/29 | Wk 15 | **More Pages Correlatives/Hailbacks/Payoffs**  **You should be done by now...** |
| 12/6 | Wk 16 | **Pages, Rewriting is Writing / recap of what we’ve learned. Tying it together. Bonus Lecture: Complex Structure - Pulp Fiction, Finding Nemo, & House of Sand and Fog**  Assignment: Write rewrite proposal – what you’ll change in your next class, or over break.  Assignment: To rewrite 2-5 pages a day, every day, over break. |

**Writing Division Attendance Policy:**

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

You will be allowed **one,** unexcused tardiness. After that, you will have your grade lowered by one-third letter grade for each occurrence. BE ON TIME. IT IS HIGHLY INCONSIDERATE TO YOUR PEERS IF YOU ARE NOT.

Two unexcused absences will result in your grade being lowered by one full point (ex: A to a (A-).

A third unexcused absence will result in your grade being lowered another full point (ex: B to a (B-). Your grade will be lowered by one point for every absence after.

Two late arrivals equates to one full absence.

In order for absence to be excused the student must have approval from the professor and provide documentation at the next attended class session.

Please note that if you are a 'Writing for Screen and Television' major/minor you must receive a grade of a "C" or better in order to receive degree credit. If you have any questions about the minimum grade required for credit please check with your home department.

If you have an emergency and must miss class please contact your professor prior to class or contact the Writing Division at 213-740-3303.

**SICK POLICY**

If you are sick and contagious, please do not come to class. If you are unsure whether you are contagious, contact the USC Health Center. Any genuine illness will be accommodated for, and I will make up that class with the student either over the phone, skype, or in person at another time. I would much rather spend an extra couple of hours with a student when they are well, than to lose several days of creative time to illness, and I’m sure most of your fellow classmates will feel the same way.

**Individual Meetings:**

Students are encouraged to take advantage of office hours. Each student is expected to meet with the professor at least twice during the semester. **The professor will answer questions by email, but would rather answer them in depth during class** so that the other students may benefit from discussing individual story/character/structure problems.

# Classroom Decorum

The professor expects all students to respect and support the ideas and writing of their fellow students. Writing is a fragile evolving process and we can only expect success if we are supportive and positive in our feedback and criticisms of our fellow students. Any excessive negative attacks will reflect poorly on the student making the attacks and will affect their final grade. We are here to help each other become better writers. Rather than trying to tell a student what is wrong, this professor is more interested in revealing how to make it better. We should strive at all times for constructive criticism.

**Issues:**

If any issues or concerns arise with *any* member of the classroom, which might affect a supportive learning environment, the professor would highly encourage the student to contact him privately to seek a resolution.

**Laptop and Cell Phone Policy:**

Students may bring laptops to class to take notes and review work. However, internet usage during class is allowed only for class discussion. Cellphone use is not allowed, except before and after class and during breaks.

**Class Schedule:**

Standard Fall schedule - take a look at your calendar for USC holidays. Please note that all dates are subject to change at the discretion of the professor.

**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](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](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](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](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](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.

**PLEASE NOTE:**

**FOOD AND DRINKS (OTHER THAN WATER) ARE NOT PERMITTED IN ANY INSTRUCTIONAL SPACES IN THE CINEMATIC ARTS COMPLEX**