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School of Cinematic Arts  
Writing Division  
CTWR-435: Writing the Hour-Long Genre Pilot  
2 units -- Section 19213D

SYLLABUS -- SPRING 2018

Instructor: Jeff Vlaming  
Class Schedule: Wednesdays, 7:00 – 10:00 pm  
Class Location: TBD  
Office Hours: by Appointment  
Contact Information: [vlaming@usc.edu](mailto:vlaming@usc.edu)

### **COURSE OBJECTIVE**

To instruct students in the creation, and distinct and specific requirements, of an hour long genre television pilot -- while experiencing a collaborative writers room environment. Students will pitch series ideas, write an outline from a prepared beatsheet and write a complete spec genre drama pilot.

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

The ever increasing number of television platforms present an equally growing amount of programming – and a respectable number of those series are genre series. Analysis can offer as to why, but the simple truth is that *science fiction, fantasy and horror lend themselves to visual storytelling and viewers can't get enough*. Despite their broad appeal, few ardent viewers recognize what differentiates a fantastical genre pilot episode from other series' inaugural episodes. Nor are those viewers aware that emotional elements, inherent in traditional drama pilots, are not only required in the fantastic realm but are all the more necessary -- the more out-of-this-world a series premise might be, the more grounded in viewer sympathy/empathy/relatability it must be.

Creatively, as in every television writers' room, students will be encouraged to actively weigh in with opinions, observations and interpretations. Every student will complete a finished genre pilot script. By workshopping their and fellow classmates' documents step-by-step in the room via round table discussions, students will experience the nuts-and-bolts process of pilot creation.

Academically, students will better understand (and appreciate) the complex process of television production. A selection of genre pilot episodes to be screened and discussed in class will not only serve as examples of successful projects, but offer opportunities for critical analysis as well. Students will be given the tools to relate the familiar process of watching genre pilots to the more exacting and intricate task of recognizing social relevance, the nature of characterization and the narrative structure of genre television. Lastly, students will examine the history of genre series in television, why it's never been more popular (not even counting superhero series), and how that enduring appeal will inform and impact programming to come.

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### **COURSE READING**

Writing the Pilot – Creating the Series by William Rabkin (2017, available at the USC Bookstore or <https://www.amazon.com/Writing-Pilot-Creating-William-Rabkin/dp/1546599509>)

### **LAPTOP AND CELL PHONE POLICY**

Laptops and pads are not a part of a working TV writers' room and in an effort to replicate that environment as closely as possible, such devices will not be allowed in the classroom. They will be kept turned off and out of sight. Notes will be taken by hand, when students read their work aloud it will be from hard-copy documents and only when a class member needs to record notes/discussion of *their own work* will a phone be allowed. Otherwise, no phones. Ringers off.

So, sorry, no e-mailing, texting, tweeting, messaging, surfing, or gaming during class time. Anyone breaking that rule will be asked to leave at once and be counted as absent (unexcused).

### **GRADING CRITERIA**

ALL WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS will be sent, via e-mail, to the instructor at [vlaming@usc.edu](mailto:vlaming@usc.edu) and, if required, to the entire class **by 9 p.m. on the deadlines spelled-out in the syllabus.**

ALL WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS (*and this is important*) should be proofread before sending. On staff, work handed in with typos and dropped words slow down the process. A few inevitably slip past but an assignment containing more than two typos per five pages will result in the grade being lowered by half a point. A continuous, semester full of negligent proofing will result in a final grade being lowered by a full point.

ALL WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS are to be delivered as PDFs.

SCRIPTS should be written in Final Draft – and we'll eventually be using Revision Mode.

Grades are based primarily on written assignments. Your outline will serve as your Mid-term exam, and, no surprise, your final pilot script draft is your Final.

Students are expected to complete all reading -- from the assigned text AND your classmates' submitted pages -- in advance of class, and to have prepared feedback.

Class participation, AKA "staff work ethic", is vital not only for this course, but in preparation for a career working in television. This entails not just giving and receiving notes, but listening to your classmates, being a part of the discussion and helping create a cordial, respectful classroom environment that benefits everyone.

#### Staff Work Ethic

(includes class preparation, assigned reading, assessing classmates' pages): 20%

Pilot Concepts: 10%

Beatsheet: 10%

Outline: 20%

Final script (Due by 9:00 pm Sunday, April 29th): 40%

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TOTAL 100%

Students will email their assignments to the instructor [vlaming@att.net](mailto:vlaming@att.net) and their fellow classmates per the class schedule deadlines.

As per Writing Division policy the following is a breakdown of numeric grade to letter grade:

A	100% to 94%	C	76% to 73%
A-	93% to 90%	C-	72% to 70%
B+	89% to 87%	D+	69% to 67%
B	86% to 83%	D	66% to 63%
B-	82% to 80%	D-	62% to 60%
C+	79% to 77%	F	59% to 0%

### **COURSE SCHEDULE**

\*\*All class topics (and screenings) are subject to change at the discretion of the instructor\*\*

#### **Week 1 – Wednesday, January 10<sup>th</sup>, 2017:**

Instructor introduction. Discuss “what is genre” and what makes a genre pilot different from other pilots. Review Syllabus.

Watch pilot episode of FRINGE.

#### ***Assignment:***

- All students come up with 3-5 pilot pitches – approx. 6 minutes presentation time
- Prepare to verbally pitch those ideas to class
- Read Rabkin, Writing the Pilot – Creating the Series chapters 1-3 and the Mooresville Pitch Appendix at the back of the book.

#### **Week 2 – Wednesday, January 17<sup>th</sup>, 2017:**

Class hears and discusses students’ pitch ideas

Watch pilot episode of TEEN WOLF

Divide the class into A and B sections

#### ***Assignment:***

- GROUP A choose one (1) series idea and come up with 3-5 storylines. Submit to instructor & classmates no later than 9:00 pm Sunday, January 21<sup>st</sup>.
- Read Rabkin chapters 4 - 7

#### **Week 3 – Wednesday, January 24<sup>th</sup>, 2017:**

Class discusses Group A’s premises & storylines. Talk about beatsheets.

Watch pilot episode of OUTLANDER

***Assignment:***

- Group B choose one (1) series idea & come up with 3-5 storylines. Submit to instructor & classmates no later than 9:00 pm Sunday, January 28<sup>th</sup>.
- Group A start writing beatsheet
- Read Rabkin, chapters 8 - 12

**Week 4 – January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2017**

Class discuss Group B's premises and storylines

***Assignment:***

- Group A send in beatsheets. Submit to instructor & classmates no later than 9:00 pm Sunday, February 4<sup>th</sup>.
- Group B start writing beatsheet

**Week 5 – Wednesday, February 7<sup>th</sup>, 2017:**

Class discusses Group A beatsheets

***Assignment:***

- Group B send in beatsheets. Submit to instructor & classmates no later than 9:00 pm Sunday, February 11<sup>th</sup>.
- Group A start on pilot outlines

**Week 6 – Wednesday, February 14<sup>th</sup>, 2017:**

Class discusses Group B beatsheets.

***Assignment:***

- Group A sends in outlines. Submit to instructor & classmates no later than 9:00 pm Sunday, February 18<sup>th</sup>.
- Group B start on pilot outlines

**Week 7 – Wednesday, February 21<sup>st</sup>, 2017:**

Class discusses Group A outlines

***Assignment:***

- Group B sends in outlines. Submit to instructor & classmates no later than 9:00 pm Sunday, February 25<sup>th</sup>.
- Group A begins writing pilot scripts

**Week 8 – Wednesday, February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2017:**

Class discusses Group B outlines

***Assignment:***

- Group A sends in first 13-15 pages of scripts. Submit to instructor & classmates no later than 9:00 pm Sunday, March 4<sup>th</sup>.
- Group B begins writing pilot scripts

**Week 9 – Wednesday, March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2017:**

Class discusses Group A's first 13-15 pages

***Assignment:***

- Group B sends in first 13-15 pages of scripts. Submit to instructor & classmates no later than 9:00 pm Sunday, March 11<sup>th</sup>.
- Group A continues writing

**Week 10 – Wednesday, March 14<sup>th</sup>, 2017 – NO CLASS -- Spring Recess****Week 11 – Wednesday, March 21<sup>st</sup>, 2017**

Class discusses Groups B's first 13-15 pages

***Assignment:***

- Group A sends in next 15-18 pages of script. Submit to instructor & classmates no later than 9:00 pm Sunday, March 18<sup>th</sup>.
- Group B continues writing.

**Week 12 – Wednesday, March 28<sup>th</sup>, 2017:**

Class workshops Group A pages

***Assignment:***

- Group B sends in next 15-18 pages of script. Submit to instructor & classmates no later than 9:00 pm Sunday, March 25<sup>th</sup>.
- Group A keeps writing

**Week 13 – Wednesday, April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2017:**

Class workshops Group B pages

***Assignment:***

- Group A sends in final section of script. Submit to instructor & classmates no later than 9:00 pm Sunday, April 1<sup>st</sup> (April Fools Day – ignore any temptations!)
- Group B keeps writing

**Week 14 – Wednesday, April 11<sup>th</sup>, 2017:**

Class workshops group A pages

***Assignment:***

- Group B sends in final section of script. Submit to instructor & classmates no later than 9:00 pm Sunday, April 8<sup>th</sup>.
- Group A revises per workshop notes

**Week 15 – Wednesday, April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2017:**

Class workshops Group B pages

***Assignment:***

- Group A revises/polishes entire pilot script
- Group B revises per workshop notes

**Week 16 – Wednesday, April 25<sup>th</sup>, 2017:**

Discuss “So, what’s next?”

**Assignment:**

-- Groups A & B send in completed pilot scripts to instructor by 9:00 pm Sunday, April 29th

Spring Semester Classes end April 27<sup>th</sup>

FINAL EXAMS WEEK May 2<sup>nd</sup> – 9th

**Expectation of Professionalism**

All material is expected to be turned in on time and in the proper format. Assignments will be penalized for grammatical mistakes, spelling errors, format mistakes, and typos. Please proof your assignment prior to submission.

**Writing Division Attendance Policy:**

Students are expected to be on time and prepared for each class. 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.

**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 Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” <https://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b/>. 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>.

**Support Systems:**

*Student Counseling Services (SCS) - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call*

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling/>

*National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1-800-273-8255*

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

*Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-4900 - 24/7 on call*

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp/>

*Sexual Assault Resource Center*

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: <http://sarc.usc.edu/>

*Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086*

Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. <https://equity.usc.edu/>

*Bias Assessment Response and Support*

Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support/>

*The Office of Disability Services and Programs*

Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. <http://dsp.usc.edu>

*Student Support and Advocacy – (213) 821-4710*

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa/>

*Diversity at USC*

Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. <https://diversity.usc.edu/>

*USC Emergency Information*

Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, <http://emergency.usc.edu>

*USC Department of Public Safety – 213-740-4321 (UPC) and 323-442-1000 (HSC) for 24-hour emergency assistance or to report a crime.*

Provides overall safety to USC community. <http://dps.usc.edu>

**PLEASE NOTE:**

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