

CTWR 419A: Senior Thesis In Dramatic Television
4 units – Section 19436D

SYLLABUS – FALL 2019

Instructor:	Barbara Nance
Class Schedule:	Thursdays, 4:00 pm – 6:50 pm
Class Location:	SCA 361
Office Hours:	By Appointment
Contact Information:	<u>BNance@cinema.usc.edu</u>

Two-Semester Objective

Develop an original hour-long dramatic television series including characters, world, and story lines for Season One; write a pilot episode, and a mid-season episode.

First Semester Objective

Create/write a professional quality revised first draft hour-long pilot episode script

Course Overview

pilot (n): one who steers through dangerous winds and waters to an ultimate destination.

Using this analogy, a pilot script is the prototype for what will drive a television series. Its characters will sink or swim depending on how masterfully their path is conceived and directed. The series creator is indeed a show's "captain", responsible for shepherding the ship and its passengers on a safe and successful journey from initial launch to final docking.

The pilot script is a provocative storytelling hybrid – it must create a unique, interesting world and introduce a cast of compelling characters, all the while pushing a dramatic story forward, only to dangle a captivating carrot at the end of the script that will make the reader/viewer "lean in" and want to know, "Wait, what happens now?!" This is tricky business, and not for the faint-hearted.

When a pilot is approved for production, each episode will be a chapter in the hero's journey through life's drama, trauma, and catharsis. A New York Times Magazine article likened our best television series to "Dickensian" sagas – the serialized literature of our day.

Character, premise, and place form the foundation for any pilot. It introduces a universal protagonist who confronts both threatening obstacles of external antagonists and internal demons, e.g., a mafia boss trapped between the demands of work and family, a savvy, unconventional Washington D.C. "fixer" who does damage control for a living while trying to avoid doing damage in her own life; a hard-charging U.S. attorney and a corrupt hedge fund king battle law versus money, with power, sex, and the soul of New York in the balance; after bringing down a Marine soldier prisoner-of-war who she believed has been turned into an Al Qaeda operative, a bi-polar CIA agent navigates her way through the turbulent, back-stabbing corridors of government. Even in an ensemble series, there is a primary central character that drives the inter-relationships with other characters.

The pilot script must contain the seeds for evolutionary development over a potentially long period of time. That is why each continuing character -- not only the lead(s) -- needs to be fully dimensional and flexible enough to incorporate major learning curves and growth spurts. Whether the projected series endures for six weeks or six years, or six decades in syndication (one can dream!), the end is in the beginning.

Prerequisite

CTWR 305

CTWR 421

Suggested Text

- Writing the TV Drama Series by P. Douglas (not required, but highly recommended)
- Deadline Hollywood Daily (just the TV section)
- Cynopsis (www.cynopsis.com)
- Various other news web sites (i.e., Huffington Post, NY Times, etc.)

Course Goals

- Exposure to the process of writing a TV drama pilot
- Appreciation of high quality series concepts and pilots
- How to choose and shape your pilot world and characters
- How to outline the pilot
- How to complete the pilot script

Grading

10%	Participation in discussion/notes/feedback of other students' work
10%	Pitch
15%	Outline
25%	First Draft
40%	Revised Draft

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%

All work is to be delivered via e-mail **no later than 9 am on the TUESDAY MORNING prior to Thursday's class** to allow time for review/notes to be given to student during class. If work is not delivered by this deadline, notes from teacher are not guaranteed. Late assignment will result in grade being lowered 5 points for every 12 hours it is delayed, i.e., a 95 → 90 if delivered after Tuesday morning but before Tuesday evening by 9 pm; 95 → 85 if delivered before Thursday morning, etc.

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.

Attendance Policy

Attendance is mandatory. Students are expected to be on time and prepared for each class. Two late arrivals (over 5 minutes after start of class) equates to one full unexcused absence. The **first unexcused absence** will drop final grade **one full letter** (i.e., if you have an A at the end of the semester, it will become a B). The second, another (B → C). Three unexcused absences will result in an automatic failing grade for the semester.

In order for an 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.

Laptop and Cell Phone Policy

Laptops may be used for note-taking during lectures and to read assignments out-loud. Internet may be used for research purposes only (i.e., to look up information on a topic-related matter that we are discussing in class).

NO CELLPHONE USAGE WHATSOEVER will be tolerated. Cell phones must be turned off or silenced (no vibrate) before class begins.

No other e-mailing, text messaging, tweeting, web surfing, game-playing, etc. will be tolerated. Anyone found doing this will be asked to leave *immediately* and they will be marked as absent (unexcused).

I'm not kidding.

Course Schedule

** Please note that all class topics are subject to change at the discretion of the professor**

Week 1 – Thursday, August 29, 2019

Introduce class and instructor; review syllabus

Review of one-hour dramatic TV – how it differs from feature films, half-hour multi-camera.

Review of one-hour structure, including A/B/C storylines and the four to six act structure.

Introduction to principles of creating an original series. What is **sustainability**? How are new series affected by the changing TV landscape? What qualities contribute to an effective pilot?

Where do ideas come from? What are your passions? What do you want to watch? Discuss the concept of location as character.

Screen Emmy Award-winning pilot (time permitting)

Assignment: Prepare to pitch your pilot concept and world next class.

Week 2 – Thursday, September 5, 2019

Workshop student pitches and discussion of world.

Assignment: Revise and develop concept and world. Turn-in official pitch (5% of grade).

Week 3 – Thursday, September 12, 2019

Continue to workshop student pitches. Discuss CHARACTER elements.

Assignment: Write/turn-in character bios on main character/s

Week 4 – Thursday, September 19, 2019

Discuss character bios and how they relate to the plotting of the pilot. Begin discuss of multiple storylines and act breaks (for purposes of this class, scripts will be written with a five-act structure). Explain how to write a pilot outline.

Assignment: Begin shaping the structure of the pilot outline. Write/turn-in fleshed-out structure of pilot idea in simple beats-per-act format.

Week 5 – Thursday, September 26, 2019

Workshop outline beginnings. Discuss importance of opening scenes, with special attention being given to establishment of world and start of character arcs. Discuss “carding”.

Assignment: Create card board!

Week 6 – Thursday, October 3, 2019

Pitch show with cards.

Assignment: Revise and complete outline. Turn-in 1st draft of outline.

Week 7 – Thursday, October 10, 2019

Workshop Outlines. What works, what doesn't? Are characters strong? Teaser? Does it establish world/tone?

Assignment 1: Write/turn-in revised outline (15% of grade).

Assignment 2: Write/turn-in Act One

Week 8 – Thursday, October 17, 2019 – FALL BREAK – NO CLASS**Week 9 – Thursday, October 24, 2019**

Workshop Act One

Assignment: Write/turn-in Act Two

Week 10 – Thursday, October 31, 2019

Workshop Act Two

Assignment: Write/turn-in Act Three

Week 11 – Thursday, November 7, 2019

Workshop Act Three

Assignment: Write/turn-in Act Four

Week 12 – Thursday, November 14, 2019

Workshop Act Four

Assignment: Write/turn-in Act Five.

Week 13 – Thursday, November 21, 2019

Workshop Act Five

Assignment: Read/review/edit entire draft of script. Turn-in official first draft of script (20% of grade).Assignment: Incorporate suggested revisions.**Week 14 – Thursday, November 28, 2019**

Thanksgiving Break – NO CLASS

Week 15 – Thursday, December 5, 2019

Workshop entire script. Discuss process of getting notes. Discuss issues with story holes, character development, dramatic pacing. Discuss Holiday Break assignment and work to be accomplished during Spring Semester.

Assignment: Continue revisions. Polish script for final grade.**Final revised script** (hardcopy to professor) due on Monday, December 16, 2019 (40% of grade).

E-mail copy of script to fellow students. Notes on draft will be delivered back to students in first class of Spring semester.

HOLIDAY BREAK ASSIGNMENT

Create/write draft outline of a ten-episode series bible PLUS final episode of season (including A/B/C storylines for each episode) to be delivered to professor + class the first session of Spring semester.

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 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 callFree 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* - 1-800-273-8255Provides 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 callFree 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>

<p>PLEASE NOTE: FOOD AND DRINKS (OTHER THAN WATER) ARE NOT PERMITTED IN ANY INSTRUCTIONAL SPACES IN THE CINEMATIC ARTS COMPLEX</p>
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