SCHOOL OF CINEMATIC ARTS
The John Wells Division of
Writing for Screen and Television
CTWR 539: Advanced Hour-Long Drama Series Pilot
Section 19327D
Spring 2020

Instructor: Kate Powers
Class Schedule: Wednesdays, 7-10 p.m.
Class Location: SCA 345
Office Hours: Wednesdays, 4-6 p.m. and by appointment
Contact Information: kapowers@usc.edu

Course Objective:
To deepen students' understanding of the hour-long dramatic series, with a focus on developing a productive writing process, using character development as a story breaking tool and constructive participation in a writers' room-type environment. From an initial written pitch, students will develop a world and characters, write an outline, create a bible, and complete a first and second draft of their series pilot.

Recommended -- But Not Required -- Course Materials:
Writing the Pilot by William Rabkin (2011)
Writing the Pilot: Creating the Series by William Rabkin (2017)
A Notebook with at least 240 pages/120 sheets, lined or not, as you prefer.

Course Description:

> "If there's a book that you want to read, but it hasn't been written yet, then you must write it." – Toni Morrison

> "Make yourself happy." – Vince Gilligan

Once upon a time, every original drama pilot was written for either network or cable television. They were created largely under development deals, given to seasoned, senior-level writers who'd already broken forty or fifty episodes of television.

Today, the original pilot has become the essential writing sample for the aspiring TV writer -- managers want them, prestigious fellowships ask for them, and it is nearly impossible to be staffed without one (or more) in your portfolio.

Shorter than a feature, with the built-in expectation of launching a series, the original pilot is a demanding and difficult writing project -- and one of the most rewarding. From the tightly structured 6-act network procedural to the break-less premium series, the original pilot has become a chameleon, shifting and adapting to showcase voices and storytelling philosophies ranging from Lena Waithe's The Chi to Robert and Michelle King's The Good Fight to Damon Lindeloff's Watchmen

Over the next 15 weeks, we will analyze the structure of compelling pilots, brainstorm and evaluate premises, and use character bios and outlines to break story for a full-length pilot. The initial seed may be a fictional character or your lived experience, a fascinating world or a horrifying problem, but week by week, you will be growing that seed into a compelling story that will blossom into a five or six season narrative that hooks your audience and never lets them go.

As writers and viewers, you already know the value of believable characters, intriguing conflicts and rich worlds. This course will encourage you to deepen that understanding and to develop your creative skill set, even if that means sometimes trying things that don't quite work.

Most of the time, this course will function as a weekly writers' room, where we will discuss and improve each other's ideas. Like any professional writer, you will be expected to read your colleagues' work ahead of time and to arrive with constructive notes. Whenever the class shifts into brainstorming, whether structured around character or story issues, your enthusiastic participation will be an invaluble addition to the process.

> "A strong conflict needs nothing more than the necessity of a choice between two equal but irreconcilable ideas. What's important in a central conflict is not that it be complicated, but that it is impossible to resolve, and that it can manifest itself in myriad ways." – William Rabkin, Writing the Pilot

> "You must first put your characters in the one, singular… situation that *most* challenges their true self. That's your operational theme – a weekly duel against your character's innermost identity. It is knowing the one thing your protagonist needs more than anything else in the world and then putting him or her in the scenario most likely to deprive them of it for years to come…" – Javier Grillo-Marxuach, Shoot This One

> "You're born alone, you die alone, and this world just drops a bunch of rules on top of you to make sure you forget those facts. But I never forget. I'm living like there's no tomorrow, because there isn't one." – Matt Weiner, *Smoke Gets in Your Eyes,* Mad Men

This syllabus -- and additional material, as appropriate -- will be available on Blackboard.

LAPTOP AND CELL PHONE POLICY:
The most effective writers' rooms restrict laptop and cellphone access to the writers' assistant -- and to a lesser degree, the showrunner -- in order to keep the staff focused on the work at hand.

As much as possible, this class will mimic the structure and ethos of a productive writers' room, the better to prepare you for eventual employment in television or

other collaborative environments. Therefore, we will be adopting the same policy and relying on paper notebooks, the classroom projector and, as needed, physical documents.

Consequently, laptops and cellphones are forbidden during classtime. They should be silenced and stored out of sight. The only exception will be during discussion of your work, when you may use your phone's voice memo feature to record the conversation.

At no other time may you record lectures or workshops without the consent of the instructor, per department policy.

As in professional writers' rooms, material discussed in the room is considered private and should not be blogged, tweeted, posted, snapchatted, or be posted anywhere else on the internet.

(If you're interested in learning more about the value of deep focus and creative work, I recommend Cal Newport's Deep Work. Although Newton is an academic, his workload closely resembles that of many professional TV writers, and serves as an invaluable example of how to balance competing obligations.)

Expectation of Professionalism:
All material is expected to be turned in on time and in the proper format.

Please proof your assignment prior to submission. If an assignment contains more than three grammatical mistakes, spelling errors, format mistakes or typos per five pages, the grade will be reduced by half a point (an A will be docked to an A-, B+ yo a B.) A semester-long pattern of sloppy proofing or an obviously unproofed final script and bible will result in a full point reduction in the final grade (an A will be docked to a B, an A- will become B-).

Grading Criteria:
For this class, weekly written assignments are to be delivered as PDFs, attached to an email to kapowers@usc.edu (and if required, to the entire class), USUALLY by 9 p.m. on the Monday before class. There are a handful of exceptions to this deadline, all noted below.

Late assignments will result in the grade being lowered half a point.

The file name, document header and email's subject line should read:

 Last Name Assignment name (Revised Outline, Revised Act One, etc.) Date

For example, this document is named: Powers 539 Syllabus 011520

SCRIPTS should be written in Final Draft or Movie Magic Screenwriter.

Your grade is based primarily on written assignments. Your outline will serve as your mid-term exam; your second draft and series bible are your semester final.

You are expected to read ALL your classmates' submitted pages in advance of class, and to have prepared -- preferably WRITTEN -- feedback. Your particiation during class -- what I call "staff ethic" -- is also important. This means not just giving and receiving notes, but listening to your classmates, contributing to the discussion and above all, helping create a safe space for this class to do its best work.

Staff Ethic:	10%
Pitches and Pilot Worksheet (2.5% each)	5%
Treatment:	5%
Beatment:	10%
Outline:	15%
First full draft:	20%
Statement and Goals Chart:	5%
Series Bible (10%) and Second Draft (20%):	**30%**
(both due via email by 9 p.m. on Wednesday, May 6)	

TOTAL   100%

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%

Writing Division Attendance Policy:
Students are expected be on time and prepared for each class.

On the third absence, students will have their final grade lowered by 10% and an additional 10% for each absence thereafter. Two late arrivals equates to one full absence.

Note: This is a change in policy. Instructors will no longer distinguish between an excused or unexecused absense. <u>An absence will be an absence.</u>

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/or know you will miss class please contact your professor prior to class or contact the Writing Division at 213-740-3303.

If a student has an emergency and additional accomodations are needed, those accomodations will need to come through the USC Campus Support and Intervention (CSI) office. The Writing Division recommends the student and/or advocate contact CSI at 213-821-4710 and their home department adviser for additional support.

Class Schedule:
Please note that dates and assignments are subject to change at the discretion of the professor. Screenings will be incorporated as appropriate.

Week 1: Wednesday, January 15, 2020
> Class and instructor introduction; review syllabus
> Workshopping expectations as writers and colleagues
> Elements of pilot: Concept, characters, conflict, theme and franchise
> The emotional core of compelling stories
> ASSIGNMENTS FOR NEXT WEEK:
> 1. Prepare TWO one-page pilot premises, complete with concept, characters, conflict, theme and franchise (i.e. two or three examples of possible episode storylines).
> 2. Select and watch an existing pilot that shares one or more elements with your favorite premise.
> 3. Complete the Pilot Analysis Worksheet **(2.5% of final grade)** for your selected pilot**.**
> 4. Email your worksheet and a PDF of TWO one-page pilot pitches **(2.5% of final grade)** to kapowers@usc.edu by **9 a.m. on Tuesday, January 21.** (Please note the late deadline, due to Monday's holiday.)
> 5. Be prepared to discuss your worksheet and to verbally pitch your pilot premises in class.

Week 2: Wednesday, January 22, 2020
> Character and conflict as story-building tools
> Discussion of pilot worksheets
> Pitching of pilot premises
> Breaking into Group A and Group B
> ASSIGNMENTS FOR NEXT WEEK:
> 1. Select your pilot premise, develop your A/B/C stories into a two- to three-page TREATMENT **(5% of final grade)**; emails as a PDF to instructor and classmates by 9 p.m. on Monday, January 27.
> 2. Be prepared to discuss your pilot and pitch storylines in class.
> 3. Read treatments and prepare feedback for next class.

Week 3: Wednesday, January 29, 2020
Workshopping Group A Pilot stories
Structure and tone: Beyond commercial breaks and content ratings
A/B/C stories and runners, character arcs, conflict and stakes
What is a "Beatment"?
ASSIGNMENTS FOR NEXT WEEK:
1. Write a BEATMENT **(10% of final grade)**; email as a PDF to instructor and classmates by 9 p.m. on Monday, February 3.
2. Read beatments and prepare feedback for next class.

Week 4: Wednesday, February 5, 2020
Workshopping Group B Pilot stories
The world of your Pilot - setting and supporting cast
Franchise and story ideas: What would this series look like?
Discuss how BEATS fit into each ACT and strong ACT BREAKS
Discuss "carding" beats
ASSIGNMENTS FOR NEXT WEEK:
1. BOTH GROUPS prepare cards for in-class pitches.
2. GROUP A plan to pitch pilots in class

Week 5: Wednesday, February 12, 2020
Group A pitches their pilots with cards
Analyze and restructure as needed
Expanding a BEATMENT into a Pilot OUTLINE
ASSIGNMENTS FOR NEXT WEEK:
1. GROUP A to turn beatments into OUTLINES **(15% of final grade)**; email as a PDF to instructor and classmates by **9 a.m. on Tuesday, February 18**. (Please note the late deadline, due to Monday's holiday.)
2. GROUP B revise cards as necessary, plan to pitch pilots in class

Week 6: Wednesday, February 19, 2020
Group B pitches their pilots with cards
Analyze and restructure as needed
Discuss relationship between outlines and script
ASSIGNMENTS FOR NEXT WEEK:
1. GROUP A to write TEASERS and FIRST ACTS; email as a PDF to instructor and classmates by 9 p.m. on Monday, February 24.
2. GROUP B to turn beatments into OUTLINES **(15% of final grade)**; email as a PDF to instructor and classmates by 9 p.m. on Monday, February 24.
3. Read classmates' work and prepare feedback for next class.

Week 7: Wednesday, February 26, 2020
> Workshopping Group A TEASERS AND FIRST ACTS
> ASSIGNMENTS FOR NEXT WEEK:
> 1. GROUP B to write TEASERS and FIRST ACTS; email as a PDF to instructor and classmates by 9 p.m. on Monday, March 2.
> 2. GROUP A to revise TEASERS and FIRST ACTS; start ACT TWO and THREE
> 3. Read classmates' work and prepare feedback for next class.

Week 8: Wednesday, March 4, 2020
> Workshopping Group B TEASERS AND FIRST ACTS
> ASSIGNMENTS FOR NEXT WEEK:
> 1. GROUP A to complete ACT TWO and THREE; email as a PDF to instructor and classmates by 9 p.m. on Monday, March 9.
> 2. GROUP B to revise TEASERS and FIRST ACTS; start ACT TWO and THREE. **Please note the early deadline next week, due to Spring Break.**
> 3. Read classmates' work and prepare feedback for next class.

Week 9: Wednesday, March 11, 2020
> Workshopping Group A ACTS TWO and THREE
> ASSIGNMENTS FOR NEXT WEEK:
> 1. GROUP A to revise ACT TWO and THREE, begin ACT FOUR
> 2. GROUP B to complete ACT TWO and THREE; email as a PDF to instructor and classmates by **9 p.m. on Saturday, March 14.**
> 3. Read classmates' work and prepare feedback for next class.

Wednesday, March 18, 2020 - SPRING BREAK - NO CLASS

Week 10: Wednesday, March 25, 2020
> Workshopping Group B ACTS TWO and THREE
> ASSIGNMENTS FOR NEXT WEEK:
> 1. GROUP B to revise ACT TWO and THREE, begin ACT FOUR
> 2. GROUP A to complete ACT FOUR; email as a PDF to instructor and classmates by 9 p.m. on Monday, March 30.
> 3. Read classmates' work and prepare feedback for next class

Week 11: Wednesday, April 1, 2020
> Workshopping Group A ACT FOUR
> Discuss series bibles
> ASSIGNMENTS FOR NEXT WEEK:
> 1. GROUP B to complete ACT FOUR; email as a PDF to instructor and classmates by 9 p.m. on Monday, April 6.
> 2. GROUP A to revise ACT FOUR, complete FIRST DRAFT of pilot **(20% of final grade)** and email as a PDF to instructor and classmates by 9 p.m. on Monday, April 13.
> 3. Read classmates' work and prepare feedback for next class.

Week 12: Wednesday, April 8, 2020
    Workshopping Group B ACT FOUR
    Discuss series bibles
    ASSIGNMENTS FOR NEXT WEEK:
    1. GROUP B to revise ACT FOUR, complete FIRST DRAFT of pilot **(20% of final grade)** and email as a PDF to instructor and classmates by 9 p.m. on Monday, April 20.
    2. Read classmates' work and prepare feedback for next class.

Week 13: Wednesday, April 15, 2020
    Workshopping Group A FIRST DRAFTS
    ASSIGNMENTS FOR NEXT WEEK:
    1. Group A to re-read current drafts and draft a statement/goals chart **(5% of final grade)** for your second draft; email as a PDF to INSTRUCTOR ONLY by 9 p.m. Friday, April 17.
    2. Group A to commence work on second draft and series bible

Week 14: Wednesday, April 22, 2020
    Workshopping Group B FIRST DRAFTS
    ASSIGNMENTS FOR NEXT WEEK:
    1. Group B to re-read current drafts and draft a statement/goals chart **(5% of final grade)** for your second draft; email as a PDF to INSTRUCTOR ONLY by 9 p.m. Friday, April 24.
    2. Group B to commence work on second draft and series bible

Week 15: Wednesday, April 29, 2020
    Possible guest speaker
    Review concepts covered over past semester
    Discussion of next steps and industry realities.
    ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK:
    Polish, proofread and email second draft **(20% of final grade)** and series bible **(10% of final grade)** as PDFs to instructor by 9 p.m. on Wednesday, May 6th.

Classes end: Friday, May 1, 2020

Polished SECOND DRAFT and SERIES BIBLE due via email by 9 p.m. on Wednesday, May 6th.

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" 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, policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct.

Support Systems:

Student Health Counseling Services - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call
engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling
Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

Student Health Leave Coordinator – 213-821-4710
Located in the USC Support and Advocacy office, the Health Leave Coordinator processes requests for health leaves of absence and advocates for students taking such leaves when needed.
https://policy.usc.edu/student-health-leave-absence/

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call
suicidepreventionlifeline.org
Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call
engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp
Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED) | Title IX - (213) 740-5086
equity.usc.edu, titleix.usc.edu
Information about how to get help or help a survivor of harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants. The university prohibits discrimination or harassment based on the following protected characteristics: race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, physical disability, medical condition, mental disability, marital status, pregnancy, veteran status, genetic

information, and any other characteristic which may be specified in applicable laws and governmental regulations.

Bias Assessment Response and Support - (213) 740-2421
studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support
Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions for appropriate investigation and response.

The Office of Disability Services and Programs - (213) 740-0776
dsp.usc.edu
Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

USC Support and Advocacy - (213) 821-4710
studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa
Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.
Diversity at USC - (213) 740-2101
diversity.usc.edu
Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call
dps.usc.edu, emergency.usc.edu
Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call
dps.usc.edu
Non-emergency assistance or information.

Diversity and Inclusion
Diversity and Inclusion are foundational to the SCA community. We are committed to fostering a welcoming and supportive environment where students of all identities and backgrounds can flourish. The classroom should be a space for open discussion of ideas and self- expression; however, SCA will not tolerate verbal or written abuse, threats, harassment, intimidation or violence against person or property. If students are concerned about these matters in the classroom setting they are encouraged to contact their SCA Diversity and Inclusion Liaison, http://cinema.usc.edu/about/diversity.cfm; e-mail diversity@cinema.usc.edu. You can also report discrimination based on a protected class here https://equity.usc.edu/harassment-or-discrimination/

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