JOHN WELLS DIVISON FOR SCREEN & TELEVISION ART

SCHOOL OF CINEMATIC ARTS

THE SCREENPLAY
CTWR 414
Section: 19189
MONDAYS, 10 AM – 12:50 PM
FALL 2020
Professor: Bonnie Garvin
310-990-4708

COURSE OBJECTIVE

This course inspires you to tell stories that come from the heart. It is also meant to give you a deeper understanding of story structure.

To complete the course, you will complete one 10 page script suitable for 480, as well as a step outline for a feature screenplay and the first act of that screenplay.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The course is intended to teach you to tell compelling stories by exploring the differences between a short and full-length scripts. Among the things we'll cover are: creating three- dimensional characters who reveal themselves through actions as well as dialogue; text and subtext, as well as realistic vs. stylized dialogue; the difference between plot vs. story. We'll also analyze how screenplays are structured and explore techniques for keeping the reader (and audience) engaged.

You'll learn the benefit of participating in critical feedback in a supportive environment with an "ear" toward understanding and interpreting notes so that subsequent scripts will improve. You will be expected to read the work of your classmates and offer helpful criticism.

ONLINE CLASS

This class will be taught online via Zoom. Class meetings may include some or all of the following: brief, focused presentations by me, watching clips, discussing key concepts, pitching ideas, reading pages aloud, and workshopping assignments, either as a full class or in smaller breakout groups. To avoid "Zoom fatigue," you will give notes to your classmates' assignments in writing (as written threads to their Blackboard posts) rather than verbally in class. When necessary, we can also arrange one-on-one time.

All outlines and script pages must display proper format as well as correct spelling and grammar.

BLACKBOARD

Work will be submitted on blackboard to the week's DISCUSSION FORUM. Submit comments for every writer's work as a thread to their submission. Your notes should include at constructive criticism, suggestions that might help improve the work. Be specific. Saying "good" or "I like it" is NOT enough. You are to give actual input that will help improve the work. Your work must be based on new, original ideas and completed on your own. No previously written work may be used.

Since class is Monday morning, please post your work no later than midnight Saturday so students can have time on Sunday to read and post comments.

OVERALL

This is a difficult time and we're going to work together to make it as productive and fun as humanely possible. I want people to feel safe, be open and honest with each other and work as a team. If at any time anyone is uncomfortable with any aspect of anything, I urge you to speak to me. I am committed to making sure that this is a successful experience for everyone. I want you to feel free to express your needs in this class.

ASSIGNMENTS

You must use Final Draft or Movie Magic screenwriting software. Scripts must be properly formatted and PROOFREAD. **Revisions must be red-lined to show changes.**

GRADES

Assignments: 20%;
Participation 5%
Short film script w/revisions: 30%
Full-length screenplay outline and pages: 45%

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

A 100% to 94%

A- 93% to 90%

B+ 89% to 87%

B 86% to 83%

B- 82% to 80%

C+ 79% to 77%

C   76% to 73%

C- 72% to 70%

D+ 69% to 67%

D 66% to 63%

D- 62% to 60%

F   59% to 0%

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.

PARTICIPATION

This is your education and it's important that you be part of the process. Your comments and input are crucial for your classmates and vice versa. It's equally important that you let me know any time you are having difficulty or need individual attention. I want to be able to help you and I can only do that if I know you're having an issue. Please, never be afraid to speak up either in class or in private.

WRITING DIVISION ATTENDANCE POLICY

Students are expected 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.

INTERNET POLICY

Material discussed in the room is considered private and should not be blogged, tweeted, posted, snapchatted, or be posted anywhere else on the internet.

RECORDING DEVICES:

You may not record lectures or workshops without the consent of the instructor.

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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.

SHORT FILM RULES:

RULES FOR SHORT FILM: NO MORE THAN THREE CHARACTERS. NO SCIENCE FICTION. LIMIT YOUR LOCATIONS TO TWO. WRITE SOMETHING THAT IS PERSONAL AND COMES FROM YOUR OWN EXPERIENCE OR OBSERVATIONS.

Introduction. Review syllabus. Screen shorts and discuss short film structure. Discuss differences between shorts and features. Conflict: what is it, how to you depict it. Character: what makes a character compelling? Choosing a viable story.

Assignment: Read "The Edge of Seventeen" https://www.scriptslug.com/assets/ uploads/scripts/the-edge-of-seventeen-2016.pdf; **Prepare two ideas for your short film (8-10 page script). Write ONE paragraph telling us what we're going to see on the screen. The ACTIONS, not the thoughts of the characters. Post comments on Blackboard by midnight Saturday/Sunday.**

WEEK TWO

Discuss "Edge of Seventeen." Workshop short film ideas. Select film to write.

Assignment: Based on notes you received, revise your short film idea.What is the character's conflict or problem? What is at stake? What action does your take to overcome problem/conflict? What does character learn by the end? Create a beat outline. Post Comments.

WEEK THREE

Workshop outline. The Want. World. Problem. Obstacles. Tone. Writing great dialogue.

Assignment: Write the firsts half of your short. Post comments.

WEEK FOUR

Discuss the first half of short. What's working, what's not.

Assignment: Based on notes revise your first half and complete the second half. Post comments.

<u>WEEK FIVE</u>

Discuss completed 480 script. Last round of notes and revisions. Writing the feature film. What makes a character compelling? Internal vs. external struggle. Story structure. "Breaking" your story using index cards.

Assignment: Rewrite your short, IN REVISION MODE, based on the notes you received. Prepare two feature film ideas. Write a log line and one page on each idea. Write it through your protagonist's journey. Post on Blackboard.

<u>WEEK SIX</u>

Workshop feature film ideas. First act. Benefits of a premise. Protagonist and Antagonist. Establishing the problem. Inciting incidents. Secrets. Revealing action via character. Rising and falling action. Subplots.

Asssignment: Read: THE VISITOR. Write the first act of your outline. Post comments.

<u>WEEK SEVEN</u>

Discuss The Visitor. Workshop outlines. How to create a memorable second act. Emotional intensity chart. Planting and paying things off. Subverting expectations.

Assignment: Write the Second Act of outline. Post.

<u>WEEK EIGHT</u>

Discuss outlines. Making your Third Act work. Does your ending fulfill the expectation of the beginning. Climax and Resolution.

Assignment: Write Third Act outline. Post.

<u>WEEK NINE</u>

Workshop outlines.

Assignment: Revise outlines. Make sure to redline. Post.

<u>WEEK TEN</u>

Review and workshop revisions. How to launch. Establishing the first ten pages.

Assignment: Write pages 1-10 of First Act. Read: TBA

<u>WEEK ELEVEN</u>

Workshop openings. Discuss TBA script.

Assignment: Write pages 10-20. Post.

<u>WEEK TWELVE:</u>

Workshop pages.

Assignment: Write pages 20-30

<u>WEEK THIRTEEN</u>

Workshop pages. Wrap up questions.

Assignment: Revise Feature Outline and Script.

ALL FINAL WORK MUST BE POSTED NO LATER THAN MIDNIGHT, NOVEMBER 15th

STATEMENT ON 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 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 sarc@usc.edu describes reporting options and other resources.

STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC 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.htmlprovides 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.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on disability is required to register with Disability Services Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP; please be sure this letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m. – 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Telephone is (213) 740-0776.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS/COURSE CONTINUITY IN A CRISIS:

In case of a declared emergency if travel to campus is not feasible, USC executive leadership will announce an electronic way for instructors to teach students in their residence halls or homes using a combination of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technologies.

Please activate your course in Blackboard with access to the course syllabus. Whether or not you use Blackboard regularly, these preparations will be crucial in an emergency. USC's Blackboard learning management system and support information is available at blackboard.usc.edu.