

**CTWR 421: Advanced Hour-Long Television Drama**  
**2 units – Section 19214D**

**SYLLABUS – SPRING 2020**

Instructor: Siavash Farahani  
Class Schedule: Mondays, 10:00 am – 12:50 pm  
Class Location: Online  
Office Hours: By Appointment  
Contact Information: [sfarahan@usc.edu](mailto:sfarahan@usc.edu)

The speculative one-hour drama script is foundational to a TV writer’s portfolio. In this class, the student will be introduced to the tools of the craft of writing the episodic TV drama. We will cover the vast canvas of hour-drama television available today – from network to cable to streaming dramas and how they differ in structure, tone, content, and broadcast cycle. In addition, students will create a mock TV Writers’ Room and continue participation in this workshop process throughout length of the course.

**Course Objective**

Create a professional quality one-hour speculative script for an existing drama series (either cable, streaming, or network ), with an emphasis on conception, pitching, structure, and episode integration into existing show. Completed second draft of teleplay will count as the final for the course. If no second draft is completed, first draft of script will be evaluated for the final.

**Course Goals**

- Create and pitch a story for an existing drama series
- Outline a one-hour script for an existing drama series
- Write first draft of a one-hour script for an existing drama series

**Course Reading**

- Writing the TV Drama Series (third edition) by Pamela Douglas
- Save the Cat Blake Snyder

**Grading Criteria**

In-class participation:	10%
Assignments 3 @ 10% each:	30%
Story pitch:	10%
Script Outline:	20%
First Draft:	30%

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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%

**A** : Work of **excellent** quality. Outstanding application of the dramatic principles and fulfillment of course requirements and deadlines as specified in the syllabus.

**B** : Work of **good** quality. Above average fulfillments of course requirements and deadlines.

**C** : Work of **fair** quality. Minimum fulfillment of course requirements and deadlines for passing graduate credit.

All work is to be delivered via e-mail before or by **9 am on MONDAY MORNING prior to class** for table read and discussion.

*If work is not delivered by this deadline, notes from professor are not guaranteed. Late assignments will result in grade being lowered 5 points for every 12 hours it is delayed (95 → 90 if delivered after Sunday at 9 am but before Sunday night; 95 → 85 if delivered before Monday morning at 9 am, etc.)*

**All work must be sent in .PDF format.** Clearly titled with last name of student and assignment.

A grade of incomplete will be considered only after the twelfth week of classes. The only acceptable reason for taking an incomplete in the course is personal illness or family emergency. Students must inform the professor on or before the twelfth week and present verifiable evidence in order for an alternative make-up plan to be developed.

### **Note About Grades While Writing Draft**

While pages themselves will not be graded, their timely delivery WILL. For every act that is handed in late, 5 points will be deducted from the First Draft grade. For example: if you hand in Acts 2 and 4 late, and you get a 90 on your First Draft, your grade will be an 80.

**Turning in assignments on time, both in class and in the real world, is paramount.**

**NOTE:** This class is a workshop and your participation in the discussion is important. Participation includes full involvement in, and contribution to, class discussion, as well as reading (in advance at times; see schedule) the assignments of your colleagues and offering thoughtful, constructive comments. Class attendance is mandatory and students are expected to be on time and prepared for each class. Tardiness is unprofessional and disrespectful to the class.

### **Writing Division Attendance Policy:**

Students are expected to 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 unexcused absence. An absence will be an absence.

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 accommodations are needed, those accommodations 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.

### **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.

### **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.

**Laptop and internet use** is restricted to classroom purposes.

**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).

***'m not kidding.***

### **The Online Classroom**

Class dynamics are substantially compromised without the ability to see the people in class; therefore, the default is that students have their cameras on during synchronous online sessions. Those facing challenging situations, such as internet connectivity, illness, or home environments that make this difficult or impossible shall contact me to work out accommodations. I encourage you to use virtual backgrounds, and earphones or headsets, should your home environment benefit from these privacies.

Keep yourself muted unless called on. When your camera is on, please dress as you would in the classroom, and behave as you would in a professional environment.

Students are not permitted to create their own class recordings without the instructor's permission. Violations of these policies will be met with the appropriate disciplinary sanction.

In the case of medical emergencies, family emergencies, or allowances needed for personal well-being, all concerns must be communicated and approved by the Instructor. If there is a difference of opinion, the student can contact the Writing Division at (213) 740-3303 or [writing@cinema.usc.edu](mailto:writing@cinema.usc.edu)

If a student has an emergency and additional accommodations are needed, those accommodations 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.

Please be aware 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.

### **Class Schedule**

\*\* NOTE: Subject to change at professor's discretion

**Week 1 – Monday, January 18, 2021 – NO CLASS – MLK DAY**

**Week 2 – Monday, January 25, 2021**

Introductions. Review syllabus. Lecture: The principles of “A Good Story Well Told.” Writing episodic one-hour TV, and how it differs from feature films, half-hour multi-camera, and half-hour single camera. Discuss network vs. cable/streaming drama – differences in structure, tone, content, broadcast cycle. Discuss landscape of television.

Assignment #1: Watch pilot episodes of three (3) one hour drama series. Network, cable, streaming.

Write/turn in paragraph summarizing the story of each episode (**10% of grade**).

**Week 3 – Monday, Feb 1, 2021**

Discuss Assignment #1. Difference between serialized episodes and procedural. Review hour-drama act structures and story lines (A, B, C). Breakdown how they apply to episodes watched in Week 1.

Assignment #2: Watch episode (TBD). Identify the A, B, C stories. Break down episode by beats per act (**10% of grade**)

**Week 4 – Monday, February 8, 2021**

Discuss Assignment #2. Class chooses 2 series to speculate for the semester. Explain what a “writers’ room” is – how it functions, what are the rules. Discuss how to find a story for existing series, yet how to make it personal to you as a writer.

Assignment #3: Analyze chosen series. Write/turn in one page or less on its creative components, i.e., is it serialized, procedural? Who are main characters? Plots, sub-plots, etc. Write/turn in five (5) one-line ideas for potential story lines for episode (they don’t have to all be A story lines) (**10% of grade**).

**Week 5 – Monday, February 15, 2021 – NO CLASS – PRESIDENT’S DAY**

**Week 6 – Monday, February 22, 2021**

Discuss Assignment #3. Workshop storylines for episodes. Discuss importance of guest character.

Assignment: Write/turn in pitch paragraph, including A, B, C story ideas + any guest char/s bio (**10% of grade**).

**Week 7 – Monday, March 1, 2021**

Workshop story pitches. Discuss how to break your episode – the concept of “carding”, writing to act breaks. For purposes of this class – episode will be structured into FIVE SECTIONS (this could be a Teaser and Four Acts, or Five Acts). **Break room up into two groups.**

Assignment: Write/turn-in beats for each story line (separately and woven into sections).

**Week 8 – Monday, March 8, 2021**

Workshop story lines. What is your PLOT (i.e., what HAPPENS???) Explain process of “carding”. Demonstrate carding to class. Review what a standard TV outline looks like. Discuss structure/rules/importance of outlines, how to create an outline from a board.

Assignment: Card story (everyone)/Create Outline

**Week 9 – Monday, March 15, 2021**

Group 1: Pitch episode to the class using cards. Incorporate writer’s room feedback into episode.

Assignment: Hone outline.

**Week 10 – Monday, March 22, 2021**

Group 2: Pitch episode to the class using cards. Incorporate writer’s room. If time, review outline structure.

Two-part assignment:

- Class: By Wednesday, 3/29: Turn-in outline (**20% of grade**)
- Everyone begin writing
- Group 1: By Monday, 3/29 prior to class: Turn in S1 & S2 of script

**Week 12 – Monday, March 29, 2021**

Group 1: Workshop S1 & S2

Class: Explain the concept of a “crap draft”. Discuss various real-life scenarios of writing process on shows. Discuss professor’s personal script writing policy. Review formatting rules.

Assignment: Group 1: Start/continue writing S3 & S4

Group 2: Turn in S1 & S2 of script by morning prior to next class.

**Week 13 – Monday, April 5, 2021**

Group 2: Workshop S1 & S2

Class: Discuss scene/act/episode momentum & dramatic pacing, interwoven with humor. What is the purpose of humor in a drama?

Assignment: Group 1: Turn in S3 & S4

Group 2: Start/continue writing S3 & S4

**Week 14 – Monday, April 12, 2021**

Group 1: Workshop S3 & S4

Class: Discuss dialogue; importance of writing character voices that reflect episode.

Assignment: Group 1: Start/continue writing S5

Group 2: Turn in S3 & S4

**Week 15 – Monday, April 19, 2021**

Group 2: Workshop S3 & S4

Class: Discuss penultimate “all is lost” ending.

Assignment: Group 1 & 2: Turn in S5

Create a list of your script’s act outs

**Week 16 – Monday, April 26, 2020. FINAL CLASS**

Group 1 & 2: Workshop S5

Class: Discuss issues students may have with story holes, character development, lulls in dramatic pacing. Discuss script editing. Discuss scene/act transitions, character development. Discuss script in-progress: how does it “sit in the pile” of existing show?

Review all act outs. Discuss the WGA; its role and importance to the working writer. Discuss career paths for becoming a writer on one-hour show. Discuss conceptualizing the next teleplay in your TV portfolio: an original TV pilot.

**FINAL DUE:** Monday, May 10, 2021 by noon – **First draft of script (30% of grade)**

## 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](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, [policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct](https://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct).

### Support Systems:

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

[engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling](https://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](https://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](https://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](https://equity.usc.edu), [titleix.usc.edu](https://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](https://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](https://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](https://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](https://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](https://dps.usc.edu), [emergency.usc.edu](https://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](https://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](mailto: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.