

## **Advanced Hour-Long Drama Series Pilot -- CTWR 539 – Spring 2022**

Section 19447D / 4 units  
Thurs 7-10 PM / SCA 362  
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### **COURSE GOALS:**

Overview: MFA students are challenged to make the leap from a finite screenplay or episode to create the pilot for an original series involving dramatic elements that could propel storylines and characters for years. Coming up with a premise that introduces the main cast and incites the action in the pilot is similar to beginning any screenplay. But discovering “springboards” for future episodes and enlarging relationships and issues so that stories will have “legs” requires a new layer of creativity and craft.

#### Specific 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
- How to revise and polish the pilot script
- How to write a series bible

**COURSE OBJECTIVE:** The object of this course is to write a professional-quality pilot script for an original one-hour drama series and a mini-bible for the first season. The completed script and bible will be turned in during finals week and will count as the final for this course.

**REQUIRED TEXT:** WRITING THE TV DRAMA SERIES — 4<sup>th</sup> Edition (2018) by Pamela Douglas

### **ATTENDANCE POLICY:**

Attendance is mandatory because of the workshop element of this class. Three absences will be cause to fail for the semester. Students are also expected to be on time and prepared for each class.

If you have a conflict that will cause you to miss class, you need to secure the instructor's approval of that absence in advance of the class. Excused absences can include, but are not limited to: illness, both physical and mental; death of a loved one; personal emergency; sporting events (for Student-Athletes) or other university-sponsored activities; religious holidays, and so on. In addition, due to current Covid protocols, if you are feeling ill, without time to test before class, please notify your instructor, do not attend class and get a test. If you test positive, inform your instructor and quarantine for the Health Department's designated period of time.

If you miss class without informing your instructor, it will be considered an unexcused absence. Unexcused absences can lower your final grade for the course. If you find you must miss class due to personal emergency or personal crisis, please contact your professor as soon as possible so they can assist you in finding the appropriate University care and guidance. Your health and well-being are of utmost importance to the Wells Writing Division and to your Faculty.

### **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).

### **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.

**GRADES:**

- 10% Participation in discussion of other students' work
- 30% Outline incorporating class notes due March 2
- 50% Completed script due April 6
- 10% Series mini-bible due April 27

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 **9AM THURSDAY MORNING prior to class** for table read and discussion. *If work is not delivered by this deadline, notes from professor are not guaranteed.*

In addition to the quality of the writing of the pages, their timely delivery WILL also be graded. 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.

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

## CLASS SCHEDULE AND ASSIGNMENTS:

All assignments are due the week following the assignment.

1. Jan. 13

Introduction to principles of creating an original series. How does a series get “legs?” How are “springboards” used? To what extent are “franchises” helpful? How are new series affected by the changing TV landscape? What qualities contribute to an effective pilot?

Assignments: Read the Preface, Introduction and John Wells comments in Writing the TV Drama Series, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition.  
Prepare to pitch your pilot concept and world next class.

2. Jan. 20

Workshopping on student pitches and discussion of “world.”

Assignments: Revise and develop your concept.  
Read Chapter One in Writing the TV Drama Series, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition.

3. Jan. 27

Student pitches continue.

Assignments: Continue revisions and development on the pilot ideas.  
Read Chapter Three in Writing the TV Drama Series, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition.

4. Feb. 3

Student presentations continue with emphasis on character. How to write a pilot outline.

Assignment: Outline your pilot. Email the Teaser and Act One.  
Read Chapter Four in Writing the TV Drama Series, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition especially pages 105 to 107 “How to Write Your Outline”

5. Feb. 10

In-class feedback on outline beginnings.

Assignment: Act Two outline. Email it to the class in advance.

6. Feb. 17

In-class discussion of Act Two outline.

Assignment: Act Three outline. Email to all.

7. Feb. 24

In class discussion of Act Three outline,

Assignment: Act Four outline. Email to all.

8. March 3

In-class discussion of Act Four, and review of the finished outlines.

Assignment: Write the Teaser and Act One. Email all through Act One to the class in time to read before our next meeting.

9, 10, 11, 12. March 10 to April 7

Intensive workshopping on scripts in progress.

Assignment: Each week, email pages to everyone ahead of class. Read the pages and be prepared to give notes. Re-write.

**\*\*\* Note: March 17 is Spring Break – no class meeting**

13. April 14

How to write a series bible. Examples are available online.

Assignment: Write the bible for your series. Email to all.

14. April 21

Workshop on series bibles.

Assignment: Revise the bible per class notes and continue re-writing.

15. April 28

Review of revised pages. Where do you go from here with your pilot?

Assignment: Email the re-written script and bible by May 12.

## 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 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>

**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 unexcused absense. 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.

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