USC SCHOOL OF CINEMATIC ARTS
John Wells Division of Writing
CTWR 515a: Practicum in Screenwriting
FALL 2023
(Four Units, Required, Section # 19342)

Instructor: David Howard
Class Schedule: Tuesdays 1:00 - 3:50
Class Location: TBD
Office Hours: Best by appointment; Tuesdays 10-1
Contact Information: dhoward@cinema.usc.edu

COURSE GOALS:
  - Development and creation of a first draft, feature-length screenplay
  - Development of the feature story
  - Creation of a sequence breakdown
  - Creation of a step outline
  - Further development and honing of students' screenwriting and
       scene-writing skills

COURSE OBJECTIVE:
This course is for students in the graduate screenwriting program to write the first draft of their thesis script for the MFA degree.

CLASS SCHEDULE AND ASSIGNMENTS:

Week 1   Introduction and discussion of students' story
                     idea number one

Week 2   Discussion of students' story idea number two

Week 3   Final decisions between story ideas, commit to
                     story being developed for 515A and 515B

Week 4   Character biographies (under three pages) –
                     protagonist and other significant characters

Week 5   Three paragraph (approximately one page)
                     delineation of the story idea

Week 6   Sequence breakdown (approximately two pages) of
                     story idea – how the story will be told/shaped

Week 7   Revised and refined sequence breakdown

Week 8   Step outline (approximately 5 pages) of first half
                  of story/script

MID-QUARTER ASSIGNMENT DUE:
OCTOBER 10, 2023
Refined, final sequence breakdown
(to HAND IN)

Week 9   Step outline (approximately 5 pages) of second half
                  of story/script

[**NOTE**: Most weekly assignments – except the mid-quarter assignment - are not to be handed in, but are to be brought to class for presentation and discussion. Once script pages are being written, they must be **emailed to all class members by each Sunday evening previous to class** so everyone has time to read and consider the pages.]

[**NOTE**: The weekly writing of pages is an approximation, and the number will vary by the week. Including the Thanksgiving weekend for a few additional pages, the goal is to complete the first draft by the end of the semester or at latest, during finals week. The exact deadline for delivery of the first draft to the Thesis Committee will be announced during the semester.]

Week 10   Sequence one – written script, approximately 12 pages

Week 11   Sequence two – written script, approximately 12 pages

Week 12   Sequence three – written script, approximately 12 pages

Week 13   Sequence four – written script, approximately 12 pages

Week 14   Sequence five – written script, approximately 12 pages

Week 15   Sequence six – written script, approximately 12 Pages

FIRST DRAFT OF SCREENPLAY DUE:
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 8 BY 2PM
(or as announced by the Division)

Writing Division Attendance Policy:

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 & disrespectful to the class. Two late arrivals equal one full absence. Two unexcused absences will result in your final grade being lowered by a half grade point (Ex. A to A-) Any further unexcused absences will result in your final grade being lowered another two thirds of a point (ex: B to a C+) for each absence .

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.

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.

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.

A.I. Policy：

The uses of generative Artificial Intelligence to create narrative continue to evolve throughout the media workplace. However, it is vital that before relying on AI to assist in aspects of storytelling that we learn to source and execute our work via our own unique imagination.

Creating, analytical, and critical thinking skills are part of the learning outcomes of this course. All assignments should be prepared by the student working individually or in groups. Students may not have another person or entity complete any substantive portion of the assignment. Developing strong competencies in these areas will prepare you for a competitive workplace. Therefore, using AI-generated tools is prohibited in this course, will be identified as plagiarism, and will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

ASSIGNED READING:
The Tools of Screenwriting, Howard and Mabley, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1993

RECOMMENDED READING:
How to Build a Great Screenplay, Howard, St. Martin's Press, New York, 2004

Three to five feature screenplays from the CNTV Library, Doheny. Choose scripts with similar tone, style, theme or genre to your thesis project.

GRADES:
　　　　Your course grade will break down as follows:

10% <u>Attendance</u>
　　　　Attendance is mandatory because of the workshop nature of this class. The only way an absence can be excused is with medical documentation. Excessive absences will be cause for failure for the semester. More than three absences will be basis for failure of the course. Two unexcused absences will constitute a 10 percent reduction in grade.

20% <u>Weekly</u> <u>assignments</u>
　　　　The assignments for weekly discussion are the key to progress and learning in this course. Failure to bring assigned materials, and inadequate preparation to discuss them each week, significantly contribute students falling behind the rigorous pace necessary to complete a first draft screenplay by the end-of-semester deadline.

10% <u>Contributions</u> <u>to</u> <u>weekly</u> <u>discussions</u>
　　　　Full engagement in the discussions of all students' work on their stories is required in this course. This sometimes will involve reading other students' material outside of class time and will <u>always</u> entail active participation in the discussion and ideation process for each story being developed in the group.

20% <u>Mid-quarter</u> <u>assignment</u>
　　　　The revised sequence breakdown for the feature screenplay being developed in this course will be handed in and graded. Mid-quarter grades will be issued via email.

40% <u>First</u> <u>draft</u> <u>screenplay</u>
　　　　A completed first draft of each student's screenplay will be handed in at the end of the semester. It's completion, its timely submission and its quality will constitute a large portion of the student's final grade.

*Note:: Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and 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. The telephone number for DSP is (213) 740-0776.

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