USC School of Cinematic Arts
John Wells Division of Writing
for Screen and Television

<u>**CTWR 206A: WRITING THE SCREENPLAY**</u>
Fall 2023
Section: 19429D

Instructor: Robert Ramsey
Class Schedule: Fridays, 1pm – 3:50pm
Class Location: SCB 101
Office Hours: By appointment
Contact Information: robertra@usc.edu

<u>Course Objective:</u>

Students will learn techniques used by professional screenwriters as they ideate, outline and draft feature length screenplays in a collaborative, supportive workshop setting. The first semester of this yearlong course culminates with students drafting and presenting first act of screenplays.

<u>Course Description:</u>

After reviewing the basics of character development and three-act, eight-sequence story structure through the table reading and analysis of "JoJo Rabbit" by Taika Waititi, students will present three feature ideas to the class for discussion. Each student will commit to one idea, refine the logline and begin outlining their screenplay sequence by sequence. In accordance with the character-based philosophy of this program, we will spend much of our time discussing the INTENTION-DRIVEN PROTAGONIST and how to drop them into the very center of the story by calibrating their EXTERNAL WANTS and INTERNAL NEEDS. When outlines are complete, students will draft and present the first act of their screenplays sequence by sequence. We will table read all assignments in class, with robust and constructive discussions to follow.

<u>Suggested Course Reading:</u>

"The Hollywood Standard: The Complete And Authoritative Guide To Script Format And Style" by Christopher Riley

"Tools of Screenwriting" by David Howard

"Screenwriting is Rewriting" by Jack Epps, Jr.

"The Writer's Journey" by Christopher Vogler

"Making A Good Script Great" by Linda Seger.

Students should use the industry standard screenwriting software, Final Draft.

Grading Criteria:

Participation:	10%
Three ideas:	10%
Protagonist/Antagonist Bio:	10%
Short Treatment:	10%
First Crack Outline:	10%
Revised Outline:	10%
Last 10 pages:	10%
First Sequence	10%
Second Sequence	10%
Final Revised Outline and First Act	10%

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%

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 Cell Phone Policy:
Laptops are permissible for taking notes. No cell phones.

Writing Division Attendance Policy:
Class attendance is mandatory and students are expected to be on time and prepared for each class. Tardiness is unprofessional and will hold up the business of the class. Please make your best effort to be on time.

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 professor.

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.

Class Schedule:
Please note that all dates are subject to change at the discretion of the professor.

Week 1. August 25: Introduction to course with an examination of the first act of "JoJo Rabbit." Discuss how to build strong features by focusing on the intention-driven protagonist.

ASSIGNMENT #1: Come up with THREE FEATURE IDEAS. Write a logline for each.

Week 2. September 1: Students pitch THREE FEATURE IDEAS and choose the one they want to spend the rest of the year writing.

ASSIGNMENT #2:
A.Write BIOS for your protagonist and antagonist (one page each). Alt. Have them both apply for the same job at Subway. Alt. Write a letter from your protagonist to you antagonist, and vice versa.

Week 3. September 8: Share character bio exercise. Review story structure, main plot points, external and internal character beats.

ASSIGNMENT #3:

Write a SHORT TREATMENT of you story. Allow yourself one paragraph for each sequence. 1-2 pages.

Week 4. September 15: Present short treatments in class for discussion. Break into Groups A and B.

ASSIGNMENT #4 (First Crack Outline):
Group A: Take your first crack at a full sequence by sequence outline.
Group B: Watch a movie in the same genre as your film. Describe the internal and external wants and needs the protagonist and chart that character's arc. Present next week in three-five minutes.

Week 5. September 22: Group A presents their FIRST CRACK AT OUTLINES for discussion. Group B presents a brief GENRE FILM ANALYSIS with a focus on the protagonist's arc.

ASSIGNMENT #5 (Genre Film Analysis):
Group B: Take first crack at a full sequence by sequence outline.
Group A: Watch a movie in the same genre as your film. Describe the internal and external wants and needs the protagonist and chart that character's arc. Present next week in three-five minutes.

Week 6. September 29: Group B presents FIRST CRACK OUTLINE. Group A presents a brief GENRE FILM ANALYSIS.

ASSIGNMENT #6: Groups A and B: Begin Revised Outline. This means breaking it down into scenes, beat by beat, writing them as bullet points or very terse paragraphs.

Week 7. October 6: Group A presents Revised Outlines.

ASSIGNMENT #7: Write the last 10 pages of your screenplay as outlined. Due Oct. 21. Just have fun with it. Make us laugh or whatever. Although, if we present them, it will have to be in a special Zoom session, date TBD. almost certainly via zoom.

Week 8. October 13: Fall Recess.

Week 9. October 20: Group B presents Revised Outlines.

Assignment #8: Groups A and B draft FIRST SEQUENCE of screenplay.

Week 10. October 27: Group A presents FIRST SEQUENCE.

Assignment #9: Group A drafts second sequence.

Week 11. November 3: Group B presents FIRST SEQUENCE.

Assignment #10: Group B drafts second sequence.

Week 12. November 10: Veteran's Day

Week 13. November 17: Group A presents SECOND SEQUENCE.

Week 14. November 24: Thanksgiving Break

Week 15. December 1: Group B presents SECOND SEQUENCE. Discuss rewriting and revision strategies (hint: it's all about the protagonist!).

Study Days: December 3-6.

Upload your REVISED OUTLINE AND FIRST ACT to the Google Drive no later than Friday, December 8, @ 9 pm.

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 Student Accessibility Services and Programs - (213) 740-0776
osas.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](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