USC School of Cinematic Arts

The John Wells Division of Writing for Screen and Television

Advanced Half-Hour Comedy Series Pilot
Course Syllabus
CTWR 537
Section 19324D
Spring 2024

Instructor: Maggie Bandur
E-mail: bandur@usc.edu
Office hours: By appointment, in person or via Zoom

Class Schedule: Wednesdays, 4:00 - 6:50 pm
Location: SCB 304
Units: 4

Course Description: An introduction and guide to developing and writing an original half-hour comedy pilot for the industry.

Course Objective: The objective of this course is to develop a professional understanding of the art and craft of half-hour comedy writing through the creation of an original pilot script. At the end of the semester, the complete, polished script will serve as both the final for the class and a potential professional sample.

Prerequisite: CTWR 514a

Software Required: Final Draft (or a reasonable facsimile.)

Course Reading and Supplementary Materials: There are no required textbooks, although scripts and viewings may be assigned and books may be recommended during the course of the semester.

Description and Assessment of Assignments: In this course, you will be generating a pitch, story beats, an outline and ultimately a polished pilot script. Your work will be graded on creativity, understanding of concepts and its adherence to a professional standard of formatting, spelling and grammar.

On-time attendance, class participation and handing in of assignments in a timely and complete manner are mandatory for the workshop. In an ever-changing creative landscape, personal

professionalism is the one thing a writer can always depend on. <u>There will be a deduction of a half grade step for all work turned in late unless cleared with me before the due date.</u>

Your script drafts will be assessed for structure, humor and professionalism. Does your script read well? Is it interesting and original and realize the promise of the pitch and the outline? Do the characters have unique and interesting voices? Were notes addressed appropriately?

In addition, your scripts and all your written work should be proofread, spell-checked and grammatically sound.

Participation: As this is a workshop environment, students will be expected to read, discuss and comment constructively on each other's work.

The goal of this course is to replicate the atmosphere of a real writer's room (one of the good ones anyway! We'll talk about the others...) in the sense that it will be supportive and highly collaborative. People should feel safe to share. We will also discuss how to take notes with good grace. (If, for any reason, speaking in class is particularly difficult for you, please contact me.)

Grading Breakdown:

Weekly Assignments: 10%
Participation: 10%
Beat sheet: 10%
Outline: 20%
First Draft: 20%
Final Draft: 30%

The final draft will be graded both on its own merits and how well you addressed the notes on the first draft. Rewriting being an incredibly important part of the process, you will be marked down if you don't consider the notes of your professor and peers.

Grade Scale: As per Writing Division policy, the following is the breakdown of numeric to letter grades:

A	94% - 100%	C	73% - 76%
A-	90% - 93%	C-	70% - 72%
B+	87% - 89%	D+	67% - 69%
B	83% - 86%	D	63% - 66%
B-	80% - 82%	D-	60% - 62%
C+	77% - 79%	F	0 - 59%

Assignment Submission Policy: Please note, to give both your professor and your peers time to read your work, most assignments will be **DUE THE PRECEDING MONDAY AT 6 PM.** A Google Drive will be provided to submit work and provide access to reading and samples.

Classroom Policies and Norms: You should bring your laptop with you for class, but unless in active use (e.g. taking notes, reading and critiquing work), it should be closed. Absolutely no cell phones are allowed. Please, also bring an analog way to take notes should your classmates abuse their digital privileges.

Often notes will be delivered verbally. It is your responsibility to write down these notes, as is industry standard.

Students should arrive to class and turn in their work on time. They will be expected to abide by hard deadlines, as they would in a professional writers room.

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 and 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.

Course Content Distribution and Synchronous Session Recordings Policies: USC has policies that prohibit recording and distribution of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment.

Recording a university class without the express permission of the instructor and announcement to the class, or unless conducted pursuant to an Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) accommodation. Recording can inhibit free discussion in the future, and thus infringe on the academic freedom of other students as well as the instructor. ([Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook](#), page 13).

Distribution or use of notes, recordings, exams, or other intellectual property, based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study. This includes but is not limited to providing materials for distribution by services publishing course materials. This restriction on unauthorized use also applies to all information, which had been distributed to students or in any way had been displayed for use in relationship to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the internet, or via any other media. ([Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook](#), page 13).

Course Evaluations: Course evaluation occurs at the end of the semester university-wide. It is an important review of students' experience in the class.

Course Schedule:

This schedule and assignments may change at any time.

As this is a workshop, every effort will be made to make sure each student receives an equitable amount of time and feedback in class. (All the more reason, you need to show up!) When we begin tabling acts and then whole scripts, we may focus on a group of scripts each week, but everyone should get the same number of "turns."

In addition, time permitting, I'd like students to have an opportunity to run the room to help break their stories. Students will cycle through "being on the board" during the initial weeks.

Week 1 - January 10

Introductions
Review course
Discuss students' comedy interests and influences
Viewing of successful pilot episodes
Discussion of what makes a good pilot

Assignment: analyze a pilot and come in with two to three pilot ideas to discuss

Week 2 - January 17

Discuss the importance of character in driving story and humor
Workshop ideas
Discuss good pitching technique

Assignment: Pilot pitches to be turned in as a document -- and pitched aloud in class

Week 3 - January 24

Pitch pilots in class
Discuss story structure and "boarding"

Assignment: Start breaking stories

Week 4 - January 31

Continue to discuss structure, different strategies
Discuss voice and tone
Workshop and "board" stories

Assignment: Beat sheet

Week 5 - February 7

Workshop beat sheets
Discuss how to craft effective scenes

Assignment: Outline

Week 6 - February 14

Outline feedback from professor and peers
Room terms and culture

Assignment: Write "first act"/ first 10 pages

Week 7 - February 21

Workshop first acts

Assignment: Write "second act"/second ten pages

Week 8 - February 28

Workshop second acts

Assignment: Write "third act"/final ten pages

Week 9 - March 6

Workshop third acts

Assignment: First draft due AS A PHYSICAL COPY after spring break

Week 10 - March 13

Off for Spring Break

Week 11 - March 20

First Drafts are due IN CLASS, as a HARD COPY
In-class writing exercise
Discussion of rewriting
Possible guest

<u>Week 12 - March 27</u>

Individual Conferences

Assignment: Begin revising your script

<u>Week 13 - April 3</u>

Table scripts

Assignment: Continue revising your script

<u>Week 14 - April 10</u>

On-set etiquette
Continue tabling scripts

Assignment: Continue revising your script

<u>Week 15.- April 17</u>

"The business"
Continue tabling scripts
Punch up

Assignment: Continue revising your script

<u>Week 16 - April 24</u>

Accumulated career advice
Continue punch up

Assignment: Continue revising your script

<u>Final Draft due - May 8</u>

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Integrity: The University of Southern California is a learning community committed to developing successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the dissemination of ideas. Academic misconduct, which includes any act of dishonesty in the production or submission of academic work, compromises the integrity of the person who commits the act and can impugn the perceived integrity of the entire university community. It stands in opposition to the university's mission to research, educate, and contribute productively to our community and the world.

All students are expected to submit assignments that represent their own original work, and that have been prepared specifically for the course or section for which they have been submitted. You may not submit work written by others or "recycle" work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s).

Other violations of academic integrity include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), collusion, knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage.

The impact of academic dishonesty is far-reaching and is considered a serious offense against the university. All incidences of academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity and could result in outcomes such as failure on the assignment, failure in the course, suspension, or even expulsion from the university.

For more information about academic integrity see the student handbook or the Office of Academic Integrity's website, and university policies on Research and Scholarship Misconduct.

Please ask your instructor if you are unsure what constitutes unauthorized assistance on an exam or assignment, or what information requires citation and/or attribution.

Students and Disability Accommodations: USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at osas.usc.edu. You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at osasfrontdesk@usc.edu.

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.

Support Systems:

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call
Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline - 988 for both calls and text messages – 24/7 on call
The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline is comprised of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The new, shorter phone number makes it easier for people to remember and access mental health crisis services (though the previous 1 (800) 273-8255 number will continue to function indefinitely) and represents a continued commitment to those in crisis.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL) – 24/7 on call
Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender- and power-based harm (including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking).

Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX (EEO-TIX) - (213) 740-5086
Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298
Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) - (213) 740-0776
OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

USC Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 740-0411
Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion - (213) 740-2101

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
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) 442-1200 – 24/7 on call
Non-emergency assistance or information.

Office of the Ombuds - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)
A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice - (323) 442-2850 or otfp@med.usc.edu
Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.