

CTWR 489a/b: The Writers' Room (Straight to Series)
Writing and Producing The Episodic Drama
2024 SPRING SEMESTER
(2 units/session)
Wednesday 9am-4:50 pm SCA Room 361

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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Welcome to the “b” section of CTWR 489a/b. If you are enrolled in this “b” section of the course, it means you have completed the Fall “a” semester where you were one of the writers and a member of a writing team who developed and scripted one of the three episodes of our series **“Top Voices”** to be produced and shot in the Spring Semester of 2024. Congratulations! The following SPRING session 489b will be a 5-month “conveyor belt” of pre-production, production and post-production shot locally as well as on the SCA Stage 4 where we have already built our standing set.

The challenge ahead will involve writing and rewriting while realizing that by the time you see your first full edited episode, you’re already shooting the last episode. You may encounter a storyline or other issue in the first episodes that isn’t delivering...now scramble!!—you better have contingency plans to rework the casting chemistry, scripts and story, and even make the tweaks to the concept, itself! In this class, you will learn some tips from experts how to foresee and deal with such problems.

THE WRITER’S ROOM (SPRING SEMESTER)

The Writers Room in the Spring Semester will meet on Wednesdays in two sessions from 9am to 12pm and from 1pm to 4:50pm with the required breaks per session. The morning session will take place in SCB 104. All the production departments will in attendance. The afternoon session will take place in SCA 345 and will be the “writers room.” The writers will continue to refine, rewrite and develop the three episodes throughout pre-production, principal photography and even post-production until each of the episodes is fully complete and ready to be viewed as “final masters.” The writers will, at times, find it necessary to rewrite scenes even as they are being shot, so writers be prepared! The writer-producers will collaborate with the EP/Producers for the series, the directors of each episode, and all the various departments involved in producing the episodes. The class time of 1pm to 4:50pm may not be sufficient to accomplish the writing and re-writing that will be required. A subsequent ***optional*** meeting time may be required. Ad hoc story sessions will no doubt be necessary, as well. These will be in person or by videoconference. The need for additional meeting times will be decided in the first meetings of the semester.

WHAT'S THE SERIES ABOUT?

Continuing from the Fall Semester, you will continue to refine “WHAT THIS SERIES IS ABOUT.” In “Top Voices” we’ve brought to the forefront the themes of “Power” and “Identity,” along with other sub-themes. “What it’s about” continues to be the most important pot of gold the series will continue to seek. Clarity in securing this space is most often the core of successful series.

As you learned in the Fall Semester, you have and will continue writing to a standing set (or sets) to handle page count. To contain costs and ease the burden of time and scheduling, approximately half of each episode will be shot on this stage. The writers and producers have consulted with the Art Department for the design of the sets for “*Top Voices*” and will continue to do so throughout production.

THE WRITING PROCESS:

Each writer has been a member of a team involved in writing and developing one of the three episodes. Each team will serve as “writer-producers” for their respective episodes. The Head Writers for our series “*Top Voices*” are Quinnolyn Benson-Yates and Angie Antoine. They will lead in making certain assignments, helping to stay on schedule, breaking ties on creative directions, etc.

The on-set roles of the writer-producers will include all aspects of the series: early casting, sitting in tone meetings, helping to build the set, watching dailies, as well as viewing the various cuts: editor’s, director’s and producer’s. The one caveat is that our pressing shooting schedule will necessitate less “voting” by all six writers than has occurred in the Fall Semester. We will limit creative opinions to the two writer-producers on their own episode. To come, there will be more specified protocols defining who will sit monitor-side, and generally how communications will be orchestrated.

SCRIPT DELIVERY

As mentioned above and re-iterated here, DELIVERY OF SCRIPTS on time is critical. All departments depend on receiving the drafts in a timely fashion. Your grades will be adversely affected if scripts and revisions are late. This extends to all manner of written revisions, including post-production, “wild lines,” and “ADR.” All rewrites after the first all white script in **.PDF format** should be given to the **486 faculty, SA’s and ADs before the Wednesday morning class session** (please note that emailing changes in the early hours of Wednesday morning is rude and not helpful). These rewrites must be in the **approved color sequence** — blue, pink, yellow, green, goldenrod — with new dialogue, scenes, effects or business marked by an asterisk (*) in the right-hand margin of the line in which there is a change. During production, all revisions (if any) must be submitted for review to the Writing Instructor, Kevin Arkadie, and Lead Instructor, Gail Katz, by 10am the Tuesday before class. This will be a much stricter deadline than in the Fall Semester. Please make note of it.

There may be times during the shoot, in between scenes, after scene rehearsals where rewriting of dialog and/or a scene will be necessary. In these instances, the writer on-set will need to implement rewrites immediately with little or no time to second-guess the work. It's part of production and the writer-producer must be prepared.

Foremost to remember is that anything can be made better, and that a good idea can come from anywhere—and being smart enough to grab--and grow--a great idea is a talent in itself. Collaboration remains the most important aspect in the production process. Collaboration with the Executive Producers (EP's) will continue to be essential.

NOTES:

Along with the input from the EPs there will always be notes from the “studio” and the “network” (to be played by Gail and myself.) In this Spring Semester, the note-giving will expand to the various production departments, their professors and others: production designers, the editorial staff and others. So, welcome to a world where “layers of notes” will abound... It will require being good listeners, trying on alternative approaches, and in the end, following your creative instincts. In the real world, you have been hired because of your skills, your strong beliefs, points of view, and cinematic perspective...in the real world you are paid for this “voice” of yours...and you have the right to defend your work....so bring it!

Time permitting in the Spring session, you will also occasionally attend various CTPR 486 “breakout sessions” for Producers with Lead Instructor Gail Katz, and get a deep-dive look into the myriad details of television series PRODUCING: budgets, script supervising, showrunners defining their jobs, composers discussing their craft, etc.—

<u>Grading Criteria:</u>	
In Class Participation*	10%
First Draft	25%
Production Draft	40%
Crew & Production	25%
Total	100%

*In class participation includes pitching story ideas and arcs, giving and getting notes on outlines and drafts, and expressing an openness to outside notes from EP's and “the studio.”

PROFESSIONALISM:

All material is to be in proper format: including naming and dating draft of outlines and scripts, completing all drafts with proper use of scene numbers, starring changes, keeping color pages in proper order, etc. Credit will be subtracted for grammatical and/or spelling errors, format mistakes, improperly defined stage directions, typos, etc. In the real world, professionals will eventually be evaluating your work—and errors are distractions to your otherwise great work—why diminish your creative gifts and reputation by delivering anything other than pristine work? MOST IMPORTANTLY: PROFESSIONALISM ALSO MEANS MEETING ALL AGREED UPON DEADLINES INCLUDING DELIVERING OUTLINES AND SUCCESSIVE EPISODIC DRAFTS ON TIME!! Should there ever be delays in delivering, an immediate communication to the receiving parties concerned must be achieved early as possible.

HEADS UP ON TIME COMMITMENT:

Lastly, the SPRING Production course is quite demanding—the production process is particularly intense and requires deft movement. As previously stated, notes will abound during pre-production as well as when cameras roll— episodes are typically shot on two weekends during 10-hour days and the writers who are also producers may also be called upon to assist other departments. Please be advised that you will be expected to deliver on all responsibilities you’ve been assigned to. Production of the first episode (Pilot Episode) will flow into the second episode (mid-way through the supposed series order) and the second episode will flow into the third episode (season-ender and “cliffhanger”) that sets up the second year’s promise of escalated conflicts and clever complications. And don’t forget, there will be ADR lines to write during editing and post-production.

In this Spring Semester, production begins all at once. With drafts of the three scripts in hand, we will be straightaway setting up casting sessions and beginning to discuss locations with production design. As indicated above, the process of writing and delivering materials per deadline, will be strongly monitored—I can’t say it enough: ALWAYS BE ON TIME!! Unlike in the Fall Semester, production will be dependent on prompt delivery of rewrites. Writers are the lifeblood of television, so let’s get back to work!!

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 micro-aggressions 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