MCMA 543 004 Studio Seminar: Screenwriting Workshop  
FALL 2016

Department of Cinema & Photography  
College of Mass Communication & Media Arts  
Southern Illinois University Carbondale  
Professor: R. William Rowley  
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cell: 618-521-5334  
rwrowley@siu.edu  
Office hours: W 0900AM-1150AM  
W 01:30PM-5:00PM (by appointment)

Class Meetings:  
TR 01:00PM-02:50PM  COMM 0008

COURSE SYLLABUS

Please read this entire syllabus at the beginning to have a clear overview of the course objectives, the pattern of deadlines, & other details that cd have a significant impact on the evaluation of your performance in the course.

Please have this syllabus with you when you come to class. It is subject to modification as we go along. If you have it with you, you can update it on the spot & avoid potential confusion about any changes to assignment parameters & deadlines.

BUILDING EMERGENCY RESPONSE PROTOCOLS

During our first class meeting, we will go over these protocols, which are included for your reference in the Addendum found at the end of this syllabus.

DEPARTMENTAL MISSION STATEMENT

The Department of Cinema & Photography offers undergraduate & graduate courses in the history, theory, criticism, & production of cinema, photography, & digital arts. Our educational orientation is a holistic, arts & humanities based understanding of media as social & cultural practice. We are committed to graduating critical, original, & socially responsible artists & scholars who, as global citizens, can imagine & produce alternatives in media theory & practice. We are dedicated to fostering a creative & intellectual climate of active engagement & support for students & faculty.

GOALS

The overarching objective for this screenwriting workshop course is for each student writer to select & complete a Primary Creative Projects listed next page as well as a few ancillary resource documents.

1. To delineate screenwriting as a specific, professional creative writing discipline, distinct from other forms of fiction writing like the novel, short story, narrative poem, &/or stage play, & to provide the student with theoretical & practical perspectives & strategies for screenwriting.

2. To instill a sense of professional writing craftsmanship through critical analysis & rewriting. Critical revision is often the major factor in writing excellence.

3. To instill a sense of professional discipline by meeting deadlines. The deadlines for the assignments & rewrites in this course are like the contractual deadlines that are a part of professional scriptwriting.

4. To sharpen critical & analytical skills by inviting fully engaged participation in classroom critiques & discussions of each other's work.

5. Lastly, but importantly, to encourage each student writer to experiment & take risks in order to find her/his own creative voice rather than to settle for the generally unquestioned expectations that pervade mass culture & the more easily achieved derivations therefrom.
COURSE REQUIREMENTS & THEIR WEIGHTS
There are three basic choices for the Primary Creative Project for the course. You can propose other possibilities to be negotiated & approved. These choices provide basic parameters.

#1 Complete First Draft of a Feature Length Screenplay

#2 Complete First Drafts of 2-3 Short Film Scripts - depending on length, etc.

#3 Complete First Draft of a 45-90 minute Series Pilot & Rough-Out for Subsequent Episodes or Series Bible

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REQUIREMENTS</th>
<th>POINTS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Three Screenplay Structure Reports @ 50 points/each</td>
<td>150</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teaching Presentation</td>
<td>100</td>
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<td>Three Ancillary Resource Documents</td>
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<tr>
<td>Character Biographies</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Succinct Story Statement(s)</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Narrative Concept Statement(s)</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Complete First Draft(s) Parts presented in 3-4 critiques.</td>
<td>450</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class participation in critiques &amp; discussions</td>
<td>200</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total points for the course</td>
<td>1200</td>
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GRADING CRITERIA
Your written work will be evaluated for:

- **Creative Practice: conceptual form, originality, experimentation.** This is the most important factor, but this will not be evident, if the criteria below are not strong.
- **Writing well.** This includes grammar, spelling, well-structured sentences, the absence of typos, etc. You are advised to proof read your work before submitting it.
- **Creating a cinematic reading experience.** The discipline of screenwriting is distinct from other forms of creative writing.
  - The screenplay page has evolved as an apparatus for filmic writing. Cinematographers learn to use the camera creatively. So too, the screenwriter must learn how to use the apparatus of the screenplay page to create a cinematic or filmic reading experience that is an analog for a film viewing experience.
  - Screenwriters write, almost exclusively in the present tense, very occasionally in the present perfect, so that events happen event-by-event as the reader reads them. This mimics a film viewing experience.
  - Screenwriters don't tell. They don't explain. They show.
  - Screenwriters write only what a film viewer wd see & hear.
  - Screenwriters can write the rhythm of unfolding events.
  - The vertical dimension of the screenplay page is cinematic time.
Novelists write across the page. Screenwriters write down the page with events unfolding in cinematic time. White space counts.

Screenwriters make it a point to pare down to the fewest possible words.

Screenwriting is more akin to poetry writing than to any other form.

For an example of the power of poetic description to evoke an affect, consider this quote from T. S. Eliot's poem, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” (1915):

... the evening is spread out against the sky like a patient etherized upon a table...

GRADE SCALE
Assignments are first graded with letter grades: A+, A, A-, B+, B, B-, & so on. Then the points earned are calculated using the following scale: A+ = 98%, A = 94%, A- = 90%, B+ = 88%, B = 84%, B- = 80%, & so on. Similarly, final course grades are determined on the following conventional scale: 90% & above = A; 80-89% = B; 70-79% = C; & so on. Pluses & minuses for final course grades at SIU may be possible soon.

You must have your graded assignments in the event of a grade dispute. Keep them all.

LATE ASSIGNMENTS
A late assignment will first be graded & points calculated as if it was not late. Then for a submission 1-2 days late, a 5% deduction from points will apply. For a submission more than 2 but no more than 5 days late, a 10% deduction will apply. For a submission more than 5 days late, the opportunity to submit the assignment for partial credit may expire & the grade & points for that assignment cd be forfeited.

FURTHER COURSE POLICIES
1. Written assignments are due at the beginning of the class period on the due date.
2. Most of your written assignments will be photocopied for class critique sessions. Therefore, DO NOT fold corners, staple, or punch holes & insert fasteners in your manuscripts. Paper clips are ideal. If you don't have a paper clip, turn your pages in loose leaf. Handle your pages carefully in transit. Please don't make photocopying difficult.
3. For written assignments for which there is a grade-replacement rewrite option, your rewrite WILL NOT BE GRADED, unless the graded First Draft accompanies it.
   I want to have access to my comments on the First Draft.
4. Attendance: Be on time. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of class. Poor attendance will impact your grade for participation.

FINAL EXAM PERIOD CLASS MEETING
Per University regulations, in lieu of an exam, our final exam period will be used as the last class meeting. PLEASE NOTE: Your attendance for this Final Exam Period Class is required.

DO NOT make end-of-semester travel plans that will interfere with your attendance for this Final Exam Period Class meeting.

We will have critiques to be done in this Final Exam Period Class. Given the importance of the Instructor & Course evaluation, also to be done during this class meeting, a 5% reduction to points for Class Participation will apply for an absence. This reduction wd change an A for Class Participation to a B+, a B to a C+, & so on.

The scheduled Final Exam Period for this course is 12:30pm to 2:30pm, Thursday, Dec 15.
COURSE COMPONENT & ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS

THREE SCREENPLAY STRUCTURE REPORTS @ 50 points/each

Each report shd be no more than 3 pages. It must be typewritten & printed double-spaced in 12-point Courier font in standard prose paragraphs.

Each report must be submitted with a title page with the name of the assignment & your name centered on the page. The name of the assignment & your name shd not appear on the text pages.

The screenplay itself is the narrative unit-of-the-whole. Screenplay structure is often spoken of in terms of three-act structure, three narrative units within the whole. I want you to examine even smaller narrative units within units that might be called the Acts.

I am positing that within the narrative unit-of-the-whole screenplay, you will find narrative units within units within units, much like Russian matryoshka dolls nested one within another within another.

Units are not fragments. A unit is a thing complete. These units-within-units each have a completeness that reflects the completeness of a narrative unit-of-the-whole.

Acts are composed of the next smallest narrative units, which are termed sequences. Sequences are composed of scenes. Sometimes a scene may be a unit unto itself.

For each Screenplay Structure Report, select three small narrative units, one from what cd be called Act One, one from Act Two, & one from Act Three.

For each of the small units you select, briefly do as much of the following as possible in the order given below:

1) Cite where the selected unit specifically begins & ends by scene headings & by page numbers. Units will always begin with a scene heading & finish at the end of a scene before a subsequent scene heading.

2) Describe what makes the beginning of the selected unit its beginning & what makes the end its end. Cite specifics from the text of the screenplay to support your argument.

3) State the functionality of each of your selected units. What does the unit accomplish in & for the whole? Does it add to character development? Does it introduce or continue a narrative thread? Does it move the narrative forward? Does it accomplish multiple functions?

4) Describe how each of your selected units connects to the smaller units immediately before & after it.

   If you choose the very first unit in the whole, describe how nothing needs to come before it or, in your view, how something that shd come before it is missing.

   If you choose the very last unit, describe how nothing needs to come after it or, in your view, how something that shd come after it is missing.

Try to write no more than one page double-spaced for each of the three selected units in each report.

CHARACTER BIOGRAPHIES — 100 points

This resource document must be typewritten & printed double-spaced in standard prose paragraphs in 12-point Courier font.

(MORE)
CONTINUED:

Your Character Biography must be submitted with a title page. If you provide a title of your own, use the name of the assignment as a subtitle. Your title, the name of the assignment, & your name shd not appear on the text pages.

Read:
McKee, pp. 100-109 & 374-387.
Fields, pp. 43-58, 59-73, & 74-88.
Trottier, pp. 57-78 & 127-130

then…

Create a character. Get to know her or him.

Write, chronologically in the present tense, her/his backstory from birth up to just before the story in which we wd find this character wd begin.

Try not to explain or label your character. Try to reveal via an accumulation of unfolding life events, who s/he is, what s/he most wants from life, & what s/he thinks & feels s/he wd do to get it. Do not spoon feed your reader. Let your reader surmise.

Who &/or what is most influential, for better or worse, in your character’s early life.

In what measure do Nature &/or nurture shape your character’s strengths & weaknesses?

On the assumption that people are never quite who they seem, perhaps can you discover a situation/event in your character’s early life when a dimension of her/his person is revealed that no one wd have suspected was there, perhaps not even your character her/himself.

**SUCCINCT STORY STATEMENT — 100 points**

This assignment shd be no more than 4-5 pages. It must be typewritten & printed double-spaced in standard prose paragraphs in 12-point Courier font.

Your Succinct Story Statement must be submitted with a title page. If you provide a title of your own, use the name of the assignment as a subtitle. Your title, the name of the assignment, & your name shd not appear on the text pages.

Story & Storytelling are related but distinct from each other. The Story Statement is the what-statement for story. The Narrative Concept Statement is the why-&-how-statement for storytelling. Each of these can be important ancillary resources for the writer while a script is in progress.

Do not include in this statement why you want to tell this story or your intentions for how you wd tell it. That shd be done in your Narrative Concept Statement.

Two concerns for this assignment:

1) State the essential story events in the present tense in strict chronological order. Think of details as adornments to the story, & try to write an unadorned story statement. It is highly unlikely, for instance, that any dialog wd be included.

2) Structure this statement in three paragraphs. Think of these paragraphs in functional terms — the first as set-up, the second as conflict, development, or narrative problem, & the third as the resolution.

The following quote from Aristotle’s Poetics reflects on story as well as storytelling:

(MORE)
CONTINUED:

A whole is that which has a beginning, a middle, & an end. A beginning is that which does not itself follow anything by causal necessity, but after which something naturally is or comes to be. An end, on the contrary, is that which itself naturally follows some other thing, either by necessity, or as a rule, but has nothing following it. A middle is that which follows something as some other thing follows it. A well-constructed story, therefore, must neither begin nor end at haphazard, but conform to these principles.

It is important to keep in mind that Aristotle intended to provide an observation of what he found to be effective in the storytelling of his time, not rules for us to follow for centuries.

**NARRATIVE CONCEPT STATEMENT — 100 points**

This assignment shd be no more than 4-5 pages. It must be typewritten & printed double-spaced in standard prose paragraphs in 12-point Courier font.

You do not need to retell your story in this statement. Write with the assumption your reader can conveniently refer to your Succinct Story Statement.

Storytelling & Story are related but distinct from each other. The Narrative Concept Statement is the why-&-how storytelling statement. The Story Statement is the what-statement for story. Each of these can be important ancillary resources for the writer while a script is in progress.

Writing a script very often presents the writer with unexpectedly difficult work. When that happens, it is important for the writer to have a passion for the script to fall back on to continue to pursue her/his storytelling & finish the script.

What's behind your choices? Why tell this specific story? In this statement describe your passion for telling this story. Describe your purposeful storytelling intensions.

Include what you expect the adventure of writing your script will be.

How will you tell the story? Will it be linear or nonlinear? To whom will your reader attribute the telling? Will it be an omniscient narrator able to any of the characters' actions or will it be tied to the perspective of just the main character? Will there be first-person narration? Will there be an unreliable narrator, or...?

**FIRST COMPLETE DRAFT(S) OF PRIMARY CREATIVE PROJECT(S) — 450 points**

You will be called upon to submit pages from your primary creative project(s) in progress for critique a number of times during the semester. Your screenplay pages must be printed in 12-point Courier font in proper screenplay format, with page numbers. Each submission must have a title page that can have a title you give, & your name. The title, if you have one, & your name shd not appear on the script pages.

**NOTE:** You are required to submit a complete first draft of all primary creative projects. Incomplete primary creative projects will be graded first for the quality of the screenwriting & then points will be reduced proportionately to the amount of work completed.

**CLASS PARTICIPATION — 200 points**

This is a significant component in your course grade. You are an important participant in class even when you just silently pay attention. Be in class on time & be willing to risk taking part in class critiques. We can all worry at times that our comments are not worth saying out loud. Think of our class critique sessions as a protected chance to practice, even to fumble a bit, & to develop critique skills. Poor attendance will significantly reduce your grade for this component.
# SCHEDULE OF CLASS ACTIVITIES

## WEEK ONE

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tue</td>
<td>8-23</td>
<td>Course overview. Patterns &amp; Policies.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Gather Info for Contact List.</td>
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<td>Building Emergency Response Protocols.</td>
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<td><strong>Assigned:</strong> Read: &quot;The Screenplay Page as Apparatus&quot;.</td>
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<td><strong>Assigned:</strong> Character Biography.</td>
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<td><strong>Assigned:</strong> Read: 1st Screenplay. Write: 1st Structure Report. Screenplay to be announced. PDF copy emailed.</td>
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<th>Day</th>
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<th>Activity</th>
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<tr>
<td>Thu</td>
<td>8-25</td>
<td>Lecture/Discussion: &quot;The Screenplay Page as Apparatus&quot;.</td>
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<td>Class Reading: Form &amp; Format starter pages, &amp;…</td>
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<td>Discuss: To Create a Cinematic Reading Experience.</td>
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<td>Workshop writers excused from last hour of class period.</td>
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## WEEK TWO

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<th>Day</th>
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<th>Activity</th>
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<tr>
<td>Tue</td>
<td>8-30</td>
<td><strong>Small Groups:</strong> Length or Depth Exercise. (30 min)</td>
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<td>Lecture: Landmarks on the Narrative Terrain.</td>
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<td><strong>Assigned:</strong> Succinct Story Statement &amp; Narrative Concept Statement.</td>
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<td>Workshop writers may be excused from last hour of class period.</td>
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<th>Day</th>
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<th>Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thu</td>
<td>9-1</td>
<td>Critique: All Wkshp Character Biography.</td>
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## WEEK THREE

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<th>Day</th>
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<th>Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tue</td>
<td>9-6</td>
<td>Discussion: 1st Screenplay Structure Report.</td>
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<tr>
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<td><strong>Assigned:</strong> Read: 2nd Screenplay. Write: 2nd Structure Report. Screenplay to be announced. PDF copy emailed.</td>
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<td><strong>Small Group Critique:</strong> Rough Draft 452 Character Biography.</td>
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<th>Day</th>
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<th>Activity</th>
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**WEEK FOUR**

**Tue 9-13**
- Critique: *Four Assigned 452 writers Character Biography.*

**Thu 9-15**
- Critique: *Five Assigned 452 writers Character Biography.*

**DEADLINES/NOTES**

**WEEK FIVE**

**Tue 9-20**
- Discussion: 2nd Screenplay Structure Report.

**Thu 9-22**
- Critique: *All Wkshp Succinct Story Statement & Narrative Concept Statement.*

**DEADLINES/NOTES**

**WEEK SIX**

**Tue 9-27**
- Critique: *Five Assigned 452 writers Character Scene.*

**Thu 9-29**
- Critique: *Four Assigned 452 writers Character Scene.*

**DEADLINES/NOTES**

**WEEK SEVEN**

**Tue 10-4**
- Discussion: 3rd Screenplay Structure Report.

**Thu 10-6**
- Critique: *Assigned Wkshp Writers First Pages.*

**DEADLINES/NOTES**

**WEEK EIGHT**

**Tue 10-11**
- FALL BREAK — NO CLASS

**Thu 10-13**
- Critique: *Assigned Wkshp Writers First Pages.*
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**WEEK NINE**

Tue 10-18  
➢ **Critique:** Five Assigned 452 writers Succinct Story Statement & Narrative Concept Statement.

Thu 10-20  
➢ **Critique:** Four Assigned 452 writers Succinct Story Statement & Narrative Concept Statement.

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**WEEK TEN**

Tue 10-25  
➢ **Critique:** Assigned Wkshp Writers First Pages.

Thu 10-27  
➢ **Critique:** Assigned Wkshp Writer Continuing Pages.

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**WEEK ELEVEN**

Tue 11-1  
➢ **Critique:** Five Assigned 452 writers First Pages.

Thu 11-3  
➢ **Critique:** Four Assigned 452 writers First Pages.

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**WEEK TWELVE**

Tue 11-8  
➢ **Critique:** Assigned Wkshp Writer Continuing Pages.

Thu 11-10  
➢ **Critique:** Assigned Wkshp Writer Continuing Pages.

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**WEEK THIRTEEN**

Tue 11-15  
➢ **Critique:** Assigned Wkshp Writer Continuing Pages.

Thu 11-17  
➢ **Critique:** Three Assigned 452 writers First Complete Draft: Act 1 or 1st half Act 2 or 2nd half Act 2 or Act 3.
WEEK FOURTEEN

Tue 11-22
➢ Critique: Three Assigned 452 writers First Complete Draft: ACT 1 or 1st half Act 2 or 2nd half Act 2 or Act 3.

Thu 11-24
➢ THANKSGIVING RECESS — NO CLASS.

WEEK FIFTEEN

Tue 11-29
➢ Critique: Three Assigned 452 writers First Complete Draft: ACT 1 or 1st half Act 2 or 2nd half Act 2 or Act 3.

Thu 12-1
➢ Critique: Assigned Wkshp Writer Final Pages.

WEEK SIXTEEN

Tue 12-6
➢ Critique: Assigned Wkshp Writer Final Pages.

Thu 12-8
➢ Critique: Assigned Wkshp Writer Final Pages.

WEEK SEVENTEEN — FINALS WEEK

THIS IS A REQUIRED CLASS MEETING — NO EXAM
R 12:30PM-2:30PM — COMM 0008
ATTENDANCE REQUIRED

Thu 12-15
➢ Instructor & Course Evaluation.
➢ Critique: Assigned Wkshp Writer Final Pages.

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Addendum to Syllabus

Building Emergency Response Protocols

University’s Emergency Procedure Clause:
Southern Illinois University Carbondale is committed to providing a safe and healthy environment for study and work. Because some health and safety circumstances are beyond our control, we ask that you become familiar with the SIUC Emergency Response Plan and Building Emergency Response Team (BERT) program. Emergency response information is available on posters in buildings on campus, available on BERT’s website at www.bert.siu.edu, Department of Public Safety’s website www.dps.siu.edu (disaster drop down) and in the Emergency Response Guideline pamphlet. Know how to respond to each type of emergency.

Instructors will provide guidance and direction to students in the classroom in the event of an emergency affecting your location. It is important that you follow these instructions and stay with your instructor during an evacuation or sheltering emergency. The Building Emergency Response Team will provide assistance to your instructor in evacuating the building or sheltering within the facility.

Students With a Disability:
Instructors and students in the class will work together as a team to assist students with a disability safely out of the building. Students with a disability will stay with the instructor and communicate with the instructor what is the safest way to assist them.

Tornado:
During the spring semester we have a Storm Drill. Pick up your belongings and your instructor will lead you to a safe area of the basement. No one will be allowed to stay upstairs. Stay away from windows. The drill should not last more than 10 minutes. You must stay with your instructor so he/she can take roll. Students need to be quiet in the basement as the BERT members are listening to emergency instructions on handheld radios and cannot hear well in the basement.

Fire:
During the fall semester we have a Fire Drill. Pick up your belongings and your instructor will lead you to either the North or South parking lot depending on what part of the building your class is in. You must stay with your instructor so he/she can take roll. As soon as the building is all clear, you will be allowed to return to class.

These drills are to train instructors and the Building Emergency Response Team to get everyone to a safe place during an emergency.

Bomb Threat:
If someone calls in a bomb threat, class will be suspended and students will be asked to pick up their belongings, evacuate the building and leave the premises. Do not leave anything that is yours behind. We will not allow anyone back into the building until the police and bomb squad give us an all clear. DO NOT USE YOUR CELL PHONES. Some bombs are triggered by a cell phone signal.
Shooter in the Building:
If it is safe to leave, move to a safe area far from the building away from where the shooter is located. If anyone has any information about the shooter, please contact the police after they have gone someplace safe.

If it is not safe to leave, go into a room, lock the door and turn out the lights. Everyone should spread out and not huddle together as a group. Don't stand in front of the door or in line of fire with the door. Students' chair and desks should be piled in front of the glass and door as a barricade and the teacher's desk, podium and anything movable can be pushed against the door. This is intended to slow down any attempts to enter the classroom. If it looks like the shooter is persistent and able to enter, make a lot of noise and have the students use everything in their backpacks to throw at the shooter to distract him.

Silence all cell phones after one person in the room calls the police and informs them of their location and how many people are in the room. **Be quiet and wait for the police to arrive.** The police are looking for one or more shooters, and they have no way of knowing if the shooter is in the room people are hiding in. For this reason, when the police enter the room, no one should have anything in his/her hands and each person **MUST** raise his/her hands above his/her head.

Earthquake:
In the event of an earthquake, you are advised to take cover quickly under heavy furniture or crouch near an interior wall or corner and cover your head to avoid falling debris. Outside the building are trees and power lines and debris from the building itself that you will need to stay away from. In the building, large open areas like auditoriums are the most dangerous. Do not try to escape on a stairway or elevator. Do not hide under a stairway. We do not recommend that you stand in a doorway because the door could shut from the vibrations and crush your fingers trapping you there.

Rave Mobile Safety Alert System:
We recommend that you sign up for the Rave Mobile Safety Alert System. It is a new system that replaces the WENS system to alert you through emergency text messages on your cell phone and emails for emergencies on campus, weather reports and emergency school closures. You have to sign up. If you were signed up for WENS it does not roll over. You have to sign up for Rave Mobile Safety Alert System. Go to Saluki Net, go to my records tab, under SIUC Personal Records, click on View My SIUC Student Records, Under Main Menu click on Personal Information, click on View and Update Addresses and Phones, in the middle of the page click [Update Addresses and Phones], under phones click Primary: This will take you to Update Addresses and Phones – Update/Insert, under primary phone number for this address put in your cell phone and submit. For more information, visit dps.siu.edu, contact SalukiTech at 453-5155 or salukitech@siu.edu.

CPR/Defibrillator and First Aid Class:
If you would like to take a CPR/Defibrillator and/or First Aid class, contact LaVon Donley-Cornett, lavong@siu.edu or call 453-7473.

Women's Self Defense Classes are offered to female students faculty and staff by the Department of SIU Public Safety. For more information contact Officer Mary Stark marys@dps.siu.edu.