MCMA 543 003 Studio Seminar: Screenwriting Workshop SPRING 2016

Department of Cinema & Photography College of Mass Communication & Media Arts Southern Illinois University Carbondale

Professor: R. William Rowley B216 NW Annex

Class Meetings:
TR 0900AM-1050AM COMM 0008

Email: rwrowley@siu.edu
Office hours: W 1000AM-1150AM W 0100PM-0600PM (& by appointment)

COURSE SYLLABUS

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

This syllabus is subject to modification as we go along. If you have it with you when you come to class, you can update it on the spot & avoid potential confusion about any changes to assignments & 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.

THE GOALS OF THIS SCREENWRITING WORKSHOP ARE:

1. To provide the student with theoretical & practical perspectives & strategies for writing, long or short, for the screen, large or small. This means recognizing the formal parameters that make screenwriting a specific creative writing discipline, distinct from other forms of fiction writing like the novel, short story, narrative poem, &/or stage play, & then writing (& rewriting) within those distinct formal parameters.

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

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

4. Lastly, but importantly, to encourage each student to experiment & take risks in order to find & write from an uncommon & critical personal vision rather than settling for the generally unquestioned expectations that pervade mass culture & the more easily achieved derivations therefrom.

TEXTBOOKS

Story: Style, Structure, Substance, and the Principles of Screenwriting, by Robert McKee, Methuen (2005)

Read this book cover-to-cover as soon as you can. If you read it, you will have more to offer in class critiques. We will discuss its content as we go along.


Book III within is a resource for the principles, conventions, & examples of screenplay format. The other Books are well worthy reading, too.
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 Documents</td>
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<td>Character Biographies</td>
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<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 3-5 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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<td>Total points for the course</td>
<td>1200</td>
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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; 60-69% = D. Unfortunately, this University does not accept pluses & minuses for course grades.

Be sure to keep all your graded assignments, quizzes, etc. You will need these in the event of a grade dispute.

LATE ASSIGNMENTS

Late assignments will first be graded as if they were not late. Then for submissions 1-2 days late, a 5% deduction will apply. Following that for submissions more than 2 but no more than 5 days late, a 10% deduction will apply. Following that, the opportunity to submit the assignment may expire & the grade & points for that assignment cd be forfeited.

An example of descriptive, poetic lines from a wordsmith:
from T. S. Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” (1915)

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

COURSE COMPONENT & ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTIONS

THREE SCREENPLAY STRUCTURE REPORTS @ 50 points/each

These reports shd be no more than 3 pages. They must each be printed double-spaced in standard prose paragraphs in 12-point Courier font. They must be submitted with the name of the assignment & your name. The name of the assignment & your name shd not appear on the text pages.
When screenwriters & those who critically read screenplays for feature length films talk about screenplay structure, they usually speak in terms of three-act structure. I want you to examine the smaller narrative units.

Let's be clear, units are not fragments. A unit is a thing complete in itself. The screenplay itself is the narrative unit-of-the-whole. If we think in terms of ACTS (whatever the count, 3, 4, or 5), they are units within the unit-of-the-whole. Units-within-units have a completeness that we recognize because they reflect the completeness of the whole.

Each of the three ACTS is composed of smaller units, which are termed sequences. Sequences are composed of scenes. Sometimes a scene may be a unit.

For each Screenplay Structure Report, select three small narrative units, one from the beginning of the whole, one from the middle, & one from the end.

For each of these selected units, briefly do as much of the following as possible in the order given below:

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

2) Describe what makes the beginning of the selected unit the beginning & what makes the end the 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 it 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 assignment shd be no more than 3 pages per character. Each submission must be printed double-spaced in standard prose paragraphs in 12-point Courier font. Each submission must have a title page that can have a title you give, with the name of the assignment as a subtitle, & your name. The title, if you have one, the name of the assignment, & your name shd not appear on the text pages.

It is established practice among screenwriters to write documents that will not be in the script but will be used as ancillary resources. Character biographies are important among those documents.

Create each character.

Write her/his backstory from birth up to just before her/his story wd begin. This wd be done even if little or none of this backstory wd be directly revealed in the script.

(MORE)
Consider such things as:

- What environmental factors shaped your character’s early life?
- Who was most influential, & how, for the better or the worse during your character’s early life?
- From what do your character’s strengths & weaknesses emerge? Nature or nurture?
- What does s/he want most from life? What will s/he do to get it?
- Operate on the assumption that people are never who they seem. Can you discover one stressful situation in your character’s early life when a dimension of her/his person was revealed that no one wd have suspected was there.

Doing this for your primary characters helps you get to know them so they can authentically emerge when you write them on your script pages.

**SUCCINCT STORY STATEMENT — 100 points**

This assignment must be no more than 4 pages for a feature length screenplay or series pilot & no more than 2 pages for a short film script. It must be printed double-spaced in standard prose paragraphs in 12-point Courier font. It must be submitted with a title page that can have a title you give, with the name of the assignment as a subtitle, & your name. The title, if you have one, 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. The Narrative Concept Statement is the why-&-how-statement. Both of these can be ancillary resources for the writer while a script is in progress.

Do not include in this statement your intentions for how you wd tell the story. That shd be done in your Narrative Concept Statement.

Two concerns for this assignment:

a. State what the story is succinctly in strict chronological order in the most simple & essential terms. Think of details as adornments to the story. The succinct story statement must be undorned. Strip away enriching detail. It is highly unlikely, for instance, that any dialog wd be included.

b. Deliberately structure this statement in three paragraphs. These paragraphs cd have functional names: set-up, conflict or development, & resolution. The following quote from Aristotle’s Poetics presents this notion of story structure:

> 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 did not intend to lay down rules to follow for the next few centuries. His statement is based on observation of what was most effective in his time.

**NARRATIVE CONCEPT STATEMENT — 100 points**

This assignment must be no more than 4 pages for a feature length screenplay or series pilot & no more than 2 pages for a short film script. Each submission must be printed double-spaced in standard prose paragraphs in 12-point Courier font. It must be submitted with a title page that can have a title you give, with the name of the assignment as a subtitle, & your name.

(MORE)
The title, if you have one, the name of the assignment, & your name shd not appear on the text pages.

Storytelling & Story are related but distinct from each other. The Narrative Concept Statement is the why-&-how-statement. The Story Statement is the what-statement. Both of these can be 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 realizing her/his idea to fall back on & see her/him through to achieving the finished script. Describe your passion for telling this story in this statement.

You do not need to retell your story in this statement. You can assume your reader has access to your Succinct Story Statement & refer to it.

Describe your purposeful storytelling intensions. Consider the following:

- Why tell this specific story? Do you hope to entertain, to engage, to enlighten?
- Does telling this story give you an opportunity to experiment?
- How will you tell the story? Will it be linear or nonlinear?
- Who tells the story? Will it be an omniscient narrator, one of the characters, an unreliable narrator, or...?
- What's behind your choices? What is your passion for telling this story?

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.

CRITIQUES per 110 minute class period
9 at 12 minutes/each
8 at 13 minutes/each
7 at 15 minutes/each
6 at 18 minutes/each
5 at 22 minutes/each
4 at 27 minutes/each
3 at 36 minutes/each
2 at 55 minutes/each
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, OR PUNCH HOLES & INSERT FASTENERS** in your manuscripts. If you don’t have a paper clip, staple in the upper left corner or just handle your pages carefully while in transit. Please don’t make photocopying difficult.
2. For written assignments for which there is a grade replacement rewrite option, the graded copy of the first draft must accompany the submission of a rewrite.
   I want to have access to my comments on the first draft.
4. **Attendance:** Be in class on time. Attendance is taken at the beginning of class. Poor attendance will impact your grade for participation.

FINAL EXAM
The scheduled Final Exam time for this course is **8:00AM to 10:00AM, Thursday, May 12**.

There will not be a final examination.

Therefore, the final exam period will be used as the last class meeting per University regulations. The Instructor & Course evaluation will be done during this class meeting & we may still have critiques to be finished.

**PLEASE NOTE THAT ATTENDANCE IS REQUIRED.**

**PLEASE DO NOT MAKE END-OF-SEMESTER TRAVEL PLANS THAT WILL INTERFERE WITH ATTENDING THIS FINAL CLASS MEETING.**
**MCMA 543 003 Studio Seminar: Screenwriting Workshop**

**SPRING 2016**

**READINGS FROM THE TEXTBOOKS WILL BE ASSIGNED AS WE GO ALONG**

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**SCHEDULE OF CLASS ACTIVITIES**

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### WEEK ONE

**Tue 1-19**
- Course overview. Make Contact list.
- Building Emergency Response Protocols.
- **Handout Assigned:** "The Screenplay Page as Apparatus"

**Thu 1-21**
- **Discuss:** "The Screenplay Page as Apparatus".
- **Lecture:** Vertical dimension of Screenplay Page, an analog for cinematic time. Writing down the page. *Form & Format* used to create a Cinematic Reading Experience.
- **Assigned:** *Character Biography*.

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### WEEK TWO

**Tue 1-26**
- **Lecture:** Story Structure.
- **Lecture:** Creating Characters.

**Thu 1-28**
- **Screen:** *The Way Way Back*. Please be on time.

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### WEEK THREE

**Tue 2-2**
- Graded 1st Drafts *Form & Format* returned with comments.
- **Workshop Session:** Rough Drafts of Character Biographies.
- Last 15 minutes of class for a debrief.

**Thu 2-4**
- **Assigned:** Reading & Screenplay Structure Report: *eXistenZ*, a screenplay by David Cronenberg. PDF copy provided.
- **Critique:** Wkshp Succinct Story- & Narrative Concept Statements.

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WEEK FOUR

Tue 2-9
➢ Critique: Wkshp Succinct Story- & Narrative Concept Statements & All Character Bio(s).

Thu 2-11
➢ Critique: All Character Bio(s).

WEEK FIVE

Tue 2-16
➢ Critique: 452 Dialog Snapshot.

Thu 2-18
➢ Screen: eXistenZ. Please be on time.

DEADLINES/NOTES
eXistenZ Screenplay Structure Report

WEEK SIX

Tue 2-23
➢ Assigned: Reading & Screenplay Structure Report: Burn After Reading, a screenplay by Joel Coen & Ethan Coen. PDF copy provided.
➢ Critique: 452 Character Scene.

Thu 2-25
➢ Critique: 452 Character Scene & Wkshp Possible Pages.

DEADLINES/NOTES
Possible Pages for Critique on 2-25

WEEK SEVEN

Tue 3-1
➢ Critique: 452 Sound Calls, Image Responds.

Thu 3-3
➢ Critique: 452 Sound Calls, Image Responds & Wkshp Possible Pages.

DEADLINES/NOTES

WEEK EIGHT

➢ NO CLASS — SPRING BREAK
WEEK EIGHT

Tues 10-13
➢ **FALL BREAK. NO CLASS.**

Thur 10-15
➢ Finish Critiques: 3rd of 4 Wkshp Writing Exercises.

WEEK NINE

Tues 10-20
➢ Discuss: Characterization in & narrative structure of the *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* screenplay.
➢ If the *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* screenplay were submitted in class, how wd its form & format be graded?
➢ Screen: First 10 minutes of *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*.

Thur 10-22
➢ Screen: *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*.
➢ Come a minute early. The rest of this film will just fit into our class period.

WEEK TEN

Tues 10-27
➢ Critiques: **452 Grp1 Succinct Story- & Narrative Concept Statements** (4).

Thur 10-29
➢ Critiques: **452 Grp2 Succinct Story- & Narrative Concept Statements** (4).

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WEEK ELEVEN

Tues 11-3
➢ Critiques: **452 Grp3 Succinct Story- & Narrative Concept Statements** (2).
➢ Critiques: **Wkshp First Pages** (1).

Thur 11-5
➢ Critiques: **Wkshp First Pages** (2).
WEEK FOURTEEN

Tue 4-19
- **Critique:** 452 Complete First Draft Act 1 — assigned writers.

Thu 4-21
- **Critique:** 452 Complete First Draft Act 1 — assigned writers.

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WEEK FIFTEEN

Tue 4-26
- **Critique:** 452 Complete First Draft Act 1 — assigned writers.

Thu 4-28
- **Critique:** *Wkshp Continuing Pages* — assigned writers

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WEEK SIXTEEN

Tue 5-3
- **Critique:** *Wkshp Continuing Pages* — assigned writers

Thu 5-5
- **Critique:** *Wkshp Continuing Pages* — assigned writers

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WEEK SEVENTEEN — FINALS WEEK

NOTE THIS IS A CLASS MEETING — NO EXAM
8:00AM-10:00AM — COMM 0008
**ATTENDANCE REQUIRED**

Thu 5-12
- **Instructor & Course Evaluation**
- **Critique:** *Wkshp Continuing Pages* — assigned writers
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.
Addendum to Syllabus

Building Emergency Response Protocols

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.