MCMA 543 006 Studio Seminar: Screenwriting Workshop — FALL 2015
Department of Cinema & Photography
College of Mass Communication & Media Arts
Southern Illinois University Carbondale

Professor: R. William Rowley
B216 NW Annex
office: 618-453-2017 / cell: 618-521-5334
rwrowley@siu.edu

Class Meetings:
TR 0100PM-0250PM COMM 0008

Office hours: MW 0900AM-1150AM (& 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 can have a significant impact on the evaluation of your performance in this 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 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.

Professor is a Faculty Member in the Department of Cinema & Photography
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 faculty & students.

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.
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 to experiment & take risks in order to find & write from an uncommon & critical vision out of personal experience rather than settling for the generally unquestioned expectations that pervade mass culture & the more easily achieved derivations therefrom.

Textbook

Recommended Reading
Story: Style, Structure, Substance, and the Principles of Screenwriting, by Robert McKee, Methuen (2005)
MCMA 543 006 Studio Seminar: Screenwriting Workshop  FALL 2015

COURSE REQUIREMENTS & THEIR WEIGHTS:

Class participation__________________________________________100 points

Three Screenplay Structure Reports — at 50 points each____________________150 points

Four Writing Exercises — at 100 points each — done in any order________________400 points

Required: Choose one:
1. Succinct Story Statement
2. Narrative Concept Statement
3. Character Biographies
4. Dialog Snapshot
5. Sound Calls, Image Responds
6. Spontaneously Assigned Ancillary Writing

Teaching Presentation(s)__________________________________________100 points

Primary Creative Project — Choose one________________________________________300 points

First Complete Draft of a Feature-Length Screenplay
First Complete Drafts of 2-3 Short Film Screenplays
First Complete Draft of a 60-90 minute Series Pilot Episode
& Rough Out for Subsequent Episodes or Series Bible

Written Critique of a writer colleague's screenplay — 2-page doubled spaced____50 points

________________________
Total points for the course 1100 points

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. The 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% late penalty will apply. Following that for submissions more than 2 but no more than 7 days late, a 10% very late penalty will apply. Following that, the opportunity to submit the assignment cd expire & the grade & points to be earned for that assignment cd be forfeited.

CLASS PARTICIPATION

You are an important participant in class even when you are silently paying attention. Be in class on time & be willing to risk taking part in discussions. We can all tend to worry that our comments might reveal us to be less informed than others. Think of our class meetings as a protected chance to practice, even fumble, & develop critique skills.
SCREENPLAY FORM & FORMAT

Consider both screenplay form & screenplay format for all script exercises & for choice of a primary creative project for the course.

Screenplay form is a matter of creative judgment for an effective design of the page to create a reading experience that becomes an analog of a film viewing experience in the reader's imagination. A screenplay reader wants to imagine a unified fabric woven from the elements, the characters, the pacing of the action, the affect or mood of the scene, & the trajectory of the unfolding narrative.

Screenplay format is primarily a technical matter, the conventions for correct placement of screenplay elements on the page. Mastering format may take some time. The best way to master it is to start writing & be willing to rewrite. Eventually, format conventions become more second nature. Format has & continues to evolve, but there are underlying conventions, some long standing, that need to guide any innovations with format we consider.

Don't think of screenwriting as producing a set of directions for making a film. You want to provide an evocative reading experience for a reader like yourself who is quite familiar with the language of cinema & wants to actively imagine a film without encumbrances.

DESCRIPTIONS OF THE WRITING ASSIGNMENTS:
These writing Exercises are intended to get you writing right away, regardless of where you are with choosing to write for a feature film, 2-3 short films, or a series pilot. These may be written in any order. Thus the writer who already has a story idea might begin with the Succinct Story Statement. The writer, who has a narrative concept for the storytelling, cd start with the Narrative Concept Statement. The writer who does not yet have either of these ready might write the Succinct Story Statement & Narrative Concept Statement last.

You are required to write the screenplay structure reports & exercises 1, 2, & 3, above, & choose one from 4 or 5 or 6, above.

Screenplay Structure Reports. Guidelines for each of these will be presented in class.

1. Succinct Story Statement. Strictly limited to a maximum of two pages in prose paragraphs. This is to be printed double-spaced in 12-point Courier font, with page numbers, & a title page.

Present the distilled essence of your story events in chronological order. Strip away enriching detail. Only the most necessary information shd remain. It is highly unlikely, for instance, that any dialog wd be included.

Before plunging into actually writing a screenplay, sketching out the bare essential story is a manageable way to work through & clarify the story itself, separated from other screenwriting concerns, like development of characters & your concept for the creative act of telling the story. You may find as you write your screenplay that your story seems to be shifting. Rewriting the succinct story statement may be the most useful way to test out story revisions before rewriting any elements of the screenplay.

Note: Initially, you may need to write out something much longer than specified for this exercise just to get it on paper. If need be, let this happen & then rewrite. A clear & concise distillation of your story may require you to edit your initial raw story material.
2. **Narrative Concept Statement.** Strictly limited to a maximum of two pages in prose paragraphs. This is to be printed double-spaced in 12-point Courier font, with page numbers, & a title page.

Story & Storytelling are related but distinct from each other. This exercise shd describe your purposeful storytelling intentions. Will it be linear or nonlinear? Who tells the story? Will it be an omniscient narrator, one of the characters, an unreliable narrator, or...? Why have you made these choices?

You may want to deliberately structure your storytelling concept in three sections according to the Aristotelian 3-act paradigm, one page for the beginning, act one, or the setup, two pages for the middle, act two, or the development, & one page for the end, act three, or the resolution. Consider this quote from Aristotle's *Poetics*:

> 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.

Here again, you may find as you write your screenplay that your storytelling intentions shift. Rewriting the narrative concept statement may be the most useful way to test out a different mode of storytelling before rewriting any elements of the screenplay.

3. **Character Biographies.** This exercise, in prose paragraphs, is to be printed double-spaced in 12-point Courier font with a title page.

These character biographies might contain backstory information that is never clearly revealed in your screenplay. The purpose here is for you to know your characters as people. While writing your screenplay, this knowledge will help you to write the character's behavior & dialog.

Rely on actual observations of human behavior for important elements of your characterization. For most genres, your characters shd seem to be real, not just transparent fictional creations. Base each character on a real person or a composite of attributes from real persons, the identity of whom you do not need to reveal.

4. **Dialog Snapshot.** This assignment shd be 3 to 5 pages in length. It must be printed in 12-point Courier font, in screenplay form & format, with page numbers, & a title page.

Capture a *dialog snapshot* — an actual piece of overheard conversation taken from real life — but one that reads like a unified scene. Once you have captured a suitable snapshot, write it out in screenplay form & format, provide description of the setting, the appearance of *characters*, the gestures & actions of the *characters*, etc. These can be fictionalized (*see below for note on protecting the actual speakers identity), but be as faithful as possible to the dialog as you hear it.

You, the writer, must not be one of the speakers or even a silent participant.

*Important caution:* Please do not violate anyone's privacy by including any elements that identify specific people. Change names. Be certain that neither the content of the
CONTINUED:

dialog nor any part of description allows a particular person to be identified. Use good judgment. Anonymous conversations overheard in public places are best.

You may have to try more than once to successfully capture a snapshot that reads as if it is a scene that can be part of a longer narrative. You probably have to make notes as you listen. Have a book open next to your note pad. Try to look like you are studying.

This is writer's research. There are three objectives for this assignment:

b. Be a keen observer of human behavior, watching & listening to it as it goes on around you. Like an engaging photographic snapshot, try to capture a compelling, spontaneous, real moment that reflects a larger piece of reality. Try not to edit except to choose where it starts & stops.

c. Preserve the authenticity of the observed speech. Spoken dialog may sometimes be fragmented, & it may not always be grammatically correct.

a. Practice writing effectively in screenplay form & format. The emphasis is on dialog, but description of location, characters, & gestures & actions should be included.

After the 1st draft for this assignment, this snapshot is yours & you may make of it what you will. To make it a scene of your own, you may edit, cut parts out, re-sequence events, & add lines of dialog you write that match the cadence & manner of speaking of your characters. However, keep in mind there is a chance for your snapshot to capture details of human interaction that you might not otherwise invent. Creative imagination is not always a matter of outright invention. Sometimes it is a matter of alert recognition.

5. Sound Calls, Image Responds. This assignment should be 3 to 5 pages in length. It must be printed in 12-point Courier font, in screenplay form & format, with page numbers, & a title page.

Write a scene in which a sound or sounds become like characters. Cinematic writers can inadvertently allow sound(s) to slip away. The cinematic world must be a composite sound/image world. This exercise provides the opportunity to grasp this notion & hold onto it.

6. Spontaneously Assigned Ancillary Writing. One of these might be proposed by anyone in our workshop group, & once proposed, it will be a challenge that any writer in the group can undertake. For instance, it can be proposed that writer A write a character scene based on a character from writer B's scene or character biography.

NOTES FOR THE COMPLETE FIRST DRAFT(S) FOR PRIMARY CREATIVE PROJECT(S)

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 screenplay format & submitted with a title page.

You are required to submit a complete first draft of all primary creative projects. We will discuss how to handle final critiques as we move toward the end of the semester.
COURSE POLICIES:

1. For submission of your assignments: Each of your manuscripts must be printed in 12-point Courier font, in the format specified with page numbers & a title page. The name of the assignment must be used as the title or subtitle.

2. DO NOT STAPLE, FOLD CORNERS, OR PUNCH HOLES & INSERT FASTENERS in your manuscripts. This will facilitate duplication of your material for class critique. Your graded original manuscripts will be returned with comments from the instructor.

2. The graded copy of a first draft must accompany the submission of a rewrite. You will see that the written comments on your pages tend to carry on a discourse about your work. The instructor may need to see the first draft comments again.

The grade you earn for the first draft of an assignment will be replaced by the grade you earn for the rewrite unless the rewrite grade is lower. You will receive only the higher of the two grades.

3. Written assignments are due at the beginning of the class period on the due date.

Late assignments will first be graded as if they were not late. Then for submissions 1-2 days late, a 5% late penalty will apply. Following that for submissions more than 2 but no more than 7 days late, a 10% very late penalty will apply. Following that, the opportunity to submit the assignment cd expire & the grade & points to be earned for that assignment cd be forfeited.

4. Attendance: Be in class on time. Attendance is taken at the beginning of class. Poor attendance will impact your grade for participation.

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

...the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherized upon a table...
SCHEDULE OF CLASS ACTIVITIES

WEEK ONE

Tues 8-25
- Course overview. Make Contact list.
- Go-over: Building Emergency Response Protocols.
- The vertical dimension of the Screenplay Page — an analog for cinematic time.
- Assigned: Find a few descriptive lines from a poem to present & briefly discuss as the work of a wordsmith (see above example).
- Assigned: 4 Writing Exercises (see above).
- Reading Assigned: "The Screenplay Page as Apparatus" (handout given).

Thur 8-27
- Discuss: "The Screenplay Page as Apparatus".
- Form & Format used to create a Reading Experience.
- Present the poetry line(s) as work of a wordsmith.

NOTES/DEADLINES

WEEK TWO

Tues 9-1
- Syd Field on characterization in, & 3-act structure for, the Chinatown screenplay.
- Sketch other possible narrative structures.
- If the Chinatown screenplay were submitted in class, how wd its form & format be graded?
- Screen: First 25-30 minutes of Chinatown.

Thur 9-3
- Screen: Chinatown.
- Come a minute early. The rest of this film will just fit into our class period.

NOTES/DEADLINES

Chinatown
Screenplay
Structure Report

1st of 4 Writing Exercises, in any order

WEEK THREE

Tues 9-8
- 1st of 4 Writing Exercises returned as critiques are completed.
- Begin Critiques: 1st of 4 Wkshp Writing Exercises (6).

Thur 9-10
- Finish Critiques: 1st of 4 Wkshp Writing Exercises (1).
- Begin Critiques: 2nd of 4 Wkshp Writing Exercises (5).

NOTES/DEADLINES

2nd of 4 Writing Exercises, in any order
WEEK FOUR
Tues 9-15
- 2nd of 4 Writing Exercises returned as critiques are completed.
- Reading & Screenplay Structure Report Assigned: Nightcrawler, a screenplay by Dan Gilroy (pdf copy of Nightcrawler via email).
- Finish Critiques: 2nd of 4 Wkshp Writing Exercises (2).
- Begin Critiques: 452 Dialog Snapshots (4).

Thur 9-17
- Finish Critiques: 452 Dialog Snapshots. (6)

WEEK FIVE
Tues 9-22
- Discuss: Characterization in & narrative structure of the Nightcrawler screenplay.
- If the Nightcrawler screenplay were submitted in class, how wd its form & format be graded?
- Screen: First 15-20 minutes of Nightcrawler.

Thur 9-24
- Screen: Nightcrawler.
- Come a minute early. The rest of this film will just fit into our class period.

WEEK SIX
Tues 9-29
- Begin Critiques: 3rd of 4 Wkshp Writing Exercises (5).

Thur 10-1
- Finish Critiques: 3rd of 4 Wkshp Writing Exercises (2).
- Begin Critiques: 452 Character Scenes & Bios (3).

WEEK SEVEN
Tues 10-6
- Continue Critiques: 452 Character Scenes & Bios (5).

Thur 10-8
- Finish Critiques: 452 Character Scenes & Bios (2).
- Begin Critiques: 4th of 4 Wkshp Writing Exercises (3).
MCMA 543 006 Studio Seminar: Screenwriting Workshop  FALL 2015

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).

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).

NOTES/DEADLINES

Eternal Sunshine...
Screenplay
Structure Report

From this point, pages will be due from Wkshp writers on a schedule worked out in class.
WEEK TWELVE

Tues 11-10
➢ Critiques: Wkshp First Pages (2).

Thur 11-12
➢ Critiques: Wkshp First Pages (2).

WEEK THIRTEEN

Tues 11-17
➢ Critiques: 452 Grp1 Act 1/Setup (4).

Thur 11-19
➢ Critiques: 452 Grp2 Act 1/Setup (4).

WEEK FOURTEEN

Tues 11-24
➢ Critiques: 452 Grp3 Act 1/Setup (2).

Thur 11-26
➢ THANKSGIVING RECESS. NO CLASS.

WEEK FIFTEEN

Tues 12-1
➢ Final Critiques: Wkshp (3)

Thur 12-3
➢ Final Critiques: Wkshp (3)

WEEK SIXTEEN

Tues 12-8
➢ Final Critiques: Wkshp (3)

Thur 12-10
➢ Final Critiques: Wkshp (3)

WEEK SEVENTEEN — FINALS WEEK
Note this is a class meeting — no exam
12:30PM-2:30PM — COMM 0008
Attendance required

Thur 12-17
➢ Final Critiques: Wkshp (2)
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.