

**THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT LOS ANGELES**

DEVELOPMENT PROCESS OF Film and Television

COM 324 2 (06050)

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UTLA CENTER, BURBANK, CALIFORNIA

Semester Credit Hours: 3

10:00 AM – 1:00 PM Mondays

Office Hours: 1:00 – 2 PM Mondays, UTLA Center

**FALL 2017**

The University of Texas at Austin provides upon request appropriate academic accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. For more information, contact Services for Students with Disabilities at 471-6259 (voice) or 232-2937 (video phone).

**COURSE OVERVIEW.** This course is designed for students who seek insight into the development process of material for film and television. The currency of Hollywood is ideas. But it's not enough to have good ideas. Those who succeed know how to develop their vision, how to communicate it effectively to others, and how to translate it into a form appropriate for the screen. We will look at the basics of story structure, how to assess literary material, how to adapt a story, the process of pitching, how to give script notes to writers, how to write coverage, the development process at studios, networks and independent production companies, and how story structure figures in the process of producing, writing, directing and editing narrative film. In addition to lectures and in-class analysis of both classic and current movies, there will be guest speakers who will share their career paths and perspective on these creative issues. Other topics will include genre conventions, acquisition of rights and how to write a marketable presentation. Emphasis will be on generating ideas and concepts. You can expect to write regularly during the semester, complete substantial writing projects and receive feedback to help you improve your writing. Developing good writing skills requires learning to edit and rewrite your work. Therefore you will be asked to choose at least one assignment to revise and resubmit, after receiving notes. You are free to revise as many assignments

as you wish. You will also have the opportunity to discuss the work of your peers. A substantial portion of your grade will come from your written work.

**WRITING FLAG (Core Component 010).** This course may be used to fulfill three hours of the communication component of the university core curriculum and addresses the following four core objectives established by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board: communication skills, critical thinking skills, teamwork and personal responsibility.

### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

Upon completion of this course, you will be able to:

- Analyze an existing piece of media using structure elements presented in class.
- Identify a piece of material from another medium that is suitable for adaptation and write coverage.
- Pitch a vision for a film based on a piece on that material.
- Create a written presentation describing how to adapt the material.
- Create constructive notes on an original screenplay that are designed for the eyes of the screenwriter.

**PLEASE NOTE: THIS IS NOT A SCREENWRITING COURSE, BUT IT IS A FLAGGED WRITING COURSE. STUDENTS WILL BE GRADED ON GOOD WRITING STYLE AND GRAMMAR, AS WELL AS MASTERY OF THE PRINCIPLES OF DEVELOPMENT.**

**ASSIGNMENTS.** Please do not give me printed material. Email it to: [Dkerew@Charter.net](mailto:Dkerew@Charter.net). **Make sure your name appears on the title of the document and on the paper itself, as well as on the covering letter. Please send as a .doc or .docx file.** Extensions of due dates will only be granted for extreme circumstances, such as a death in the family or your own illness; please contact me via email before the deadline so that we can discuss the issue.

**GUEST SPEAKERS.** Periodically guest speakers from the industry will appear to offer their insights and personal experiences. Owing to their busy lives and unpredictable schedules, there may be last minute changes in the schedule. You will be required to research the guest speakers in advance of their appearances. Each student will submit three questions for the guest speaker to the Canvas discussion board. Students will vote on their favorite questions. The ones with the most votes will be posed to the speaker. You may also be asked to write a brief report of the guests' presentations. As in all writing exercises for this course, grammar and writing style will count.

**ABSENCES /TARDY.** If you have a legitimate scheduling problem (this does NOT include business lunches, family visits and screenings!) please contact me prior to class via email or phone. An unexcused absence will result in a half-step down in your class participation grade (e.g. A- becomes B+). Two unapproved late entries or early exits will have the same effect. **Two unexcused absences will result in a half-step down in the overall course grade.**

**REQUIRED READING.**

THE ART OF DRAMATIC WRITING, by Lajos Egri. Preface and Chapter 1, "Premise." This book is in the public domain and can be downloaded from the web.

WOE IS I, by Patricia T. O'Connor. Students are required to purchase this book, which is a modern guide to good grammar. It will become a lifelong reference source for good writing skills.

In addition, there will be an assortment of scripts and handouts to read, and movies to be watched.

**SUGGESTED ADDITIONAL READING.**

All of the following titles are available in the Center Library or in my office, and may be checked out for review.

THE ELEMENTS OF STYLE by Strunk and White. The gold standard for professional writers.

ARISTOTLE'S POETICS: the basics of all dramatic structure in Western art.

OTHELLO by William Shakespeare: the first modern villain.

HAMLET by William Shakespeare: the model of dramatic structure.

THE CONVERSATIONS by Michael Ondaatje: an analysis of modern films by Walter Murch, the renowned film editor.

EASY RIDER, RAGING BULLS by Peter Biskind. The birth of the Hollywood Indie.

ADVANTURES IN THE SCREEN TRADE and WHAT LIES DID I TELL? Further Adventures in the Screen Trade, by William Goldman: the smartest, wittiest film writer working today shares his observations.

MONSTER: Living Off the Big Screen by Joan Didion and John Gregory Dunne. The cautionary tale about the development of BROADCAST NEWS.

FINAL CUT by Steven Bach (the making of HEAVEN'S GATE). The best analysis ever of how a movie turns into a disaster and brings down a studio.

TRUBY'S GREAT SCREENWRITING CLASS by John Truby (Audio CD): Truby takes the ideas of Egri and applies them to film.

**GRADING OF WRITTEN REPORTS.** You will be graded on the following elements.

- Writing style: this includes grammar and syntax; it also looks at whether your writing is lively, entertaining and compelling.
- Creativity: Do you take risks? Are you original in your approach to the material, while remaining relevant and cohesive? Are your ideas novel and unique?
- Ability to understand and follow direction: have you written a paper that fulfills the parameters of the assignment?

Each element will count for 1/3 of the grade on your paper. Everyone is given the opportunity to rewrite and revise, in order to improve a grade or simply hone their work. Every student is required to revise at least one writing assignment over the course of the semester. Failure to do so will result in a half step down in your writing grade.

**OFFICE HOURS.** I will be in my office, at the Center, every Monday from 1 PM – 2 PM. Please feel free to stop in with your questions, or to schedule a meeting if you need more time. I am also available at all times via email or telephone.

**The Moody College Writing Support Program.** This excellent resource has offered to work with UTLA students. To make an appointment, go to: <http://moody.utexas.edu/students/moodywriting>. The coaches working this summer are Diana Dawson and Kris Seavers and they will be accepting appointments by Monday, June 6. You'll look for their bios, click on the link at the end and book a 30-minute slot. When booking, remember that there is a two-hour time difference between Austin and Los Angeles. If none of the times work for you, please email Diana at [diana.dawson@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:diana.dawson@austin.utexas.edu). Diana and Kris will be happy to work with you at any stage of the writing process. If you have a draft, please email it to the coach with whom you've booked the appointment as early as possible so she can review it before you meet by Skype or FaceTime. Please be on time for the appointment because they may have someone scheduled after you. If you'd like to learn more about the resource, visit the web page.

**CLASS PARTICIPATION.** You will not excel in this course if you don't participate. So come with questions, read/screen the assigned material, research the guest speakers, and do your best to be a contributing member of the class. **Merely showing up and occupying a chair will not translate into a good grade.**

You will be graded on:

- Quality of your questions/reports on guest speakers.
- Frequency of your participation in class discussion.
- Relevance of your comments.
- Completion of all in-class assignments.

LAPTOPS IN CLASS ARE BANNED. So are cell phones, text-messaging, iPads and all forms of outside communication. NO EATING OR DRINKING IN CLASS, PLEASE!

**GRADING.**

Class Participation:	25%.
Each element listed above is worth 1/3 of this grade.	
Written Assignment #1 (Film Analysis):	10%
Written Assignment #2 (Coverage):	10%
Written Assignment #3 (Script Notes):	10%
Oral Pitch:	15%
Final Assignment:	30%

Final grades for the course will be expressed in a plus/minus system, according to the following chart:

- A = 4.0
- A- = 3.67
- B+ = 3.33
- B = 3.0
- B- = 2.67
- C+ = 2.33
- C = 2.0
- C- = 1.67
- D+ = 1.33
- D = 1.0
- D- = 0.67
- F = 0.0

**RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS.** By UT Austin policy, you must notify me of your pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of an observance of a religious holy day. If you will miss a class, assignment, test or project due to observance of such a day, you will be given an opportunity to complete the work within a reasonable period of time after the absence.

**UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS HONOR CODE:** "The core values of the University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity and responsibility. Each member of the University is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community."

**ACADEMIC DISHONESTY.** In accordance with these principles, any student who is found to have cheated on an exam, plagiarized or engaged in other dishonest course-related activities will be subject to disciplinary action and a limited to: copying another's work, procuring or purchasing papers on line or from others and submitting them under one's own name, paraphrasing another's work without attribution, reprinting work found on the internet under one's own name.

## **WEEKLY SCHEDULE (Subject to Change)**

### **CLASS ONE: GETTING ACQUAINTED (Monday, August 21).**

Who are you? What do you expect from this course?

A discussion of personal responsibility and academic honesty.

The role of passion in making movies.

The essence of development: critical thought, writing skills, sales power, editorial skills, interpersonal skills.

Learning the marketplace.

The development job ladder.

Assigned Reading for discussion next week: Lajos Egri, Preface and Chapter 1, Premise.

### **CLASS TWO: PRINCIPLES OF STORY (PART I) (Monday, August 28).**

Three-act Structure, TV Structure, Classic Story Structure.

Discussion of Premise

Viewing for discussion next week: THE GODFATHER, PART I.

Identify the 7 elements of Classic Story Structure. Define the Premise.

**LABOR DAY FALLS ON MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 4 AND CLASS WILL NOT MEET. CLASS WILL BE HELD ON TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 5.**

**CLASS THREE: PRINCIPLES OF STORY STRUCTURE (PART II)(Tuesday, September 5, ).**

Back story. The worthy antagonist. Character Development. Expanded Story Structure. Application of structure to television series. Analysis of structure in THE GODFATHER.

Assignment: Pick two films to discuss: one that works for you and one that doesn't, and analyze based on the principles we have been discussing for the past two weeks. **DO NOT WRITE A "REVIEW" OF THE MOVIE. THIS EXERCISE IS ABOUT STORY STRUCTURE AS YOU HAVE COME TO UNDERSTAND IT.** Do not discuss casting, cinematography or direction. Minimum length: 500 words per film. Total length of paper: 1000 words. Due Monday, February 6.

Assignment: Research next week's speaker and develop a question for next week's presentation. Post question to Canvas and vote on all questions posted by your classmates. Questions with the most votes will be posed to the speaker. Failure to create a question will garner a grade of zero for that day's class participation.

**CLASS FOUR: DEVELOPMENT FROM THE WRITER/DIRECTOR'S POV (Monday, September 11).**

A writer and director discuss their experiences in the industry.

**Movie analyses due today.**

Viewing for discussion next week: LITTLE MISS SUNSHINE

**CLASS FIVE: THE KILLER ENDING (Monday, September 18).**

Why are some movies so satisfying, while others leave you walking out of the theater unmoved? The elements of a great ending, using LITTLE MISS SUNSHINE as an example.

Endings in television.

Assigned Reading for Discussion Next week: Jane Espensen, 2 articles posted on Canvas.

**CLASS SIX: GENRE CONVENTIONS (Monday, September 25).**

A look at the categories of feature films and television formats in today's world.

Viewing for next week: ADAPTATION, WALK THE LINE. Other films under discussion: LA VIE EN ROSE, LAST KING OF SCOTLAND, CLUELESS.

Assigned Reading for discussion next week: L.A. Times article on adapting "Into the Wild," article entitled "Fresh stories are a hard sell in Hollywood. Posted on Canvas.

**CLASS SEVEN : ADAPTATION, THE BIO PIC, THE TRUE STORY (Monday, October 2).**

The pitfalls and rewards of re-imagining stories for the screen. What makes a story adaptable? Why do some tales pop up again and again in different incarnations? How far can you go?

Review of assigned articles.

Discussion of availability of material and rights issues. The trajectory of the modern bio pic. The role of the "true story" in the film world.

**Assignment: Coverage of a text from another medium.** Pick a piece of published material you would like to adapt, either as a film or a television series. This will be material you work with through the end of the course. No screenplays or original ideas, please. Fiction, Biographies, Memoirs, non-fiction, short stories, graphic novels, comic books, magazine articles and video games are acceptable. Choose material that you could actually sell: it must be available to option, marketable, and never have been filmed before. Write traditional coverage, following studio format. For the remainder of the semester this will be "your project." In later weeks, we will discuss how to construct an oral pitch, and how to depart from the original material in order to write a presentation of the film/series that you envision. 1,500 words. Due Monday, March 6.

Samples posted on Canvas.



Assignment: Research speaker and develop a question for next week's presentation. Post question to Canvas and vote on all questions posted by your classmates. Questions with the most votes will be posed to the speaker.

**CLASS EIGHT: GUEST SPEAKER TBD (Monday, October 9).**

Tales from the writers' room.

**Coverage Due Today**

Assigned reading: original screenplay: "In the Big Inning." Be prepared to discuss this script in the next class. Available on Canvas.

**CLASS NINE: SCRIPT NOTES: HOW TO WORK WITH WRITERS (Monday, October 16).**

A classroom dialogue focusing on the assigned script which will examine its strengths and weaknesses, look for ways to strengthen its premise, and develop a strategy for communicating with the writer.

Assignment: At the end of this session, another script will be assigned to read, for which you will write notes that are designed for the eyes of the writer. 1,500 words. Due Monday, March 27.

Sample script notes will be posted on Canvas.

**CLASS TEN: THE ART OF THE PITCH, PART I. (Monday, October 23).**

We will begin by discussing various methods, styles and lengths of pitches. The class will then divide into groups to practice pitching the project they selected for coverage and for the semester-end project. After the group sessions are done the entire class will reconvene to discuss what they have discovered about shaping their pitches.

Assignment:Read "The Art of the Pitch" by Syd Field. Posted on Canvas.

**Script Notes are due today.**

**CLASS ELEVEN: THE ART OF THE PITCH, PART II. (Monday, October 30).**

Students will be assigned numbers in random order for their pitch. The first half of the class will pitch today. The remainder will pitch next week, November 6.

There will be a critique and class discussion regarding each pitch. Length of pitch will be determined by the size of the class.

Assignment: Final Exam Essay: a full written presentation/treatment based on story/coverage from the project you chose in Week Six. THIS IS NOT A REPEAT OF THE SYNOPSIS, BUT A FULLY REALIZED RESTRUCTURING OF THE MATERIAL AS YOU HAVE IMAGINED IT FOR THE SCREEN. 2500 words. Due Monday, November 27, Final day of class.

Sample presentations are posted on Canvas.

**CLASS TWELVE: THE ART OF THE PITCH, PART III. (Monday, November 6).**

Assignment for Thursday, November 9: Research the TBD Guest Speaker. Post questions on Canvas, and vote on your classmates' questions. The ones with the most likes will be posed to the speaker.

**CLASS THIRTEEN: GUEST SPEAKER (tbd). (THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 9, 7 PM**

**PLEASE NOTE: THIS THURSDAY EVENING CLASS REPLACES THE USUAL MONDAY CLASS FOR MONDAY, NOVEMBER 20. CLASS WILL NOT MEET ON NOVEMBER 20 AS I WILL BE IN WASHINGTON, D.C. TEACHING A WORKSHOP.**

A Producer or agent shares insights about the business.

Assignment for discussion next week: Article regarding the merging of Pixar and Disney, posted on Canvas.

**CLASS FOURTEEN: STUDIO VISIT (Monday, November 13).**

A guided VIP tour of the Disney lot. Details/parking instructions/maps posted on Canvas.

Discussion of reading material relating to Disney.

Assignment for next week: develop a substantive question about life/work/philosophy of working in Hollywood, for discussion at the round table.

**NO CLASS ON MONDAY, NOVEMBER 20.**

**CLASS FIFTEEN: ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION (Monday, November 27).**

Everything you wanted to know about the creative life in Hollywood, but were afraid to ask, or you felt did not get answered.

Breakfast will be served.

**FINAL PAPERS ARE DUE TODAY.**