EXPANDED COURSE DESCRIPTION
FILM AND VIDEO
School of the Arts, Media, Performance and Design
Department of Cinema and Media Arts
FA / FILM 3830 3.0 SECTION F
HISTORY, THEORY PRACTICE OF SCREENWRITING
FALL 2019 / WINTER 2020

Last Modified Date: 09/17/2019

COURSE CALENDAR DESCRIPTION

Examines the history, theory and practice of screenwriting. It explores the ways in which the screenplay has been positioned in the film industry from the beginning of the 20th century to the present. Prerequisite: FA/FILM 1400 6.00 or permission of the Department of Film.

Explores the ways in which the screenplay has been positioned in the film industry from the beginning of the 20th century to the present. It draws on contemporary histories of film and screenwriting and on North American screenwriting manuals, guide books, and other publications about the nature of screenwriting and its shape as a particular kind of practice. We examine the notion of the script as blueprint, the emergence of the screenplay, the politics of writing for the screen, new perspectives on auteurism, processes of funding, digital technology, and the future of screenwriting. We will consider the screenplay as a literary work in its own right, and study analyses of screenplays from a variety of frameworks, including feminism, Marxism, structuralism, philosophy, and psychology. The course has a creative component: students explore different storytelling styles, character and characterization, openings and endings, dialogue, genre, and screenplay format through a series of short and long assignments ranging from free-writing to analyzing screenplay structure in preparation for writing the first act of their own feature-length screenplay. Prerequisite: FA/FILM 1400 6.00 or permission of the Department of Film.

INSTRUCTOR(S)

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<th>Section / Format / Term</th>
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SPECIAL FEATURES

This class explores the ways in which the screenplay has been positioned in the film industry from the beginning of the 20th century to the present. It draws on contemporary histories of film and screenwriting and on North American screenwriting manuals, guide books, and other publications about the nature of screenwriting and its shape as a particular kind of practice. We will examine the notion of the script as blueprint, the emergence of the screenplay, the politics of writing for the screen, new perspectives on auteurism, processes of funding, digital technology, and the future of screenwriting. We will consider the screenplay as a literary work in its own right and analyse screenplays from a variety of frameworks, including feminism, Marxism, structuralism, philosophy, and psychology. The course has a creative component: you will explore different storytelling styles, character and characterization, openings and endings, dialogue, genre, and screenplay format through a series of short and long assignments ranging from free-writing to analyzing screenplay structure in preparation for writing the first act of your own feature-length screenplay. Prerequisite: FA/FILM 1400 6.00 or permission of the Instructor.

Class format: Discussions, in-class writing, homework assignments and revisions, peer critique. Active participation in peer critiques is crucial.

TOPICS AND CONCEPTS
Topics and Concepts

Sept 4: Introduction

Sept 11
Read: Price, pp.1-94

Sept 18
Read: Price, pp. 94-171
Visit to the Clara Thomas Archive

Sept 25
In class: Discussion of the Chinatown screenplay in light of the reading
Group work: analyze the following sequences in preparation for the homework assignment:
#1 - #11 (inclusive)
#224--#231 (inclusive)
#52-#56 (inclusive)
#57-#59 (inclusive)

Oct 2
Due: Sequence analysis AND the Premise for your screenplay
In class discussion of everyone’s premise + brainstorming

Oct 9
In class discussion of everyone’s premise + brainstorming

Oct 16: NO CLASS

Oct 23
Due: Rough drafts of Film Treatment and Character Biography
In class: Film Treatment and Character Biography peer critique

Oct 30
Due: Revised, final draft of Film Treatment and Character Biography
Due: Rough draft of pages 1-10 of your screenplay
In class: peer critique of pages 1-10

Nov 6
In class: peer critiques of pages 1-10 continued
Nov 13

**Due:** Revised, final draft of pages 1-10  
**Due:** Rough draft of pages 10-20 of your screenplay  
In class: peer critique of pages 10-20

Nov 20

In class: peer critiques of pages 10-20 continued

Nov 27

**Due:** Revised, final draft of pages 10-20  
**Due:** Rough draft of pages 20-30  
In class: peer critique of pages 20-30

***Final draft of Act 1 due Dec 4 by 4pm***

LIST OF LEARNING OUTCOMES AND EXAMPLES OF

The purpose of this course is to introduce BA Film Studies students to the fundamentals of screenwriting in order to enrich their understanding of story structure. The specific objectives of the course are that students will be able to:

- understand the connection between the history, theory and practice of screenwriting
- acquire a firm grasp of the conventions of storytelling as well as of alternative forms of structuring stories
- engage in creative work (writing the first act of a feature length screenplay) that would enrich their critical/theoretical work in the Studies concentration

Course texts:


Robert Towne, *Chinatown* (available online at http://www.script-o-rama.com)

Helpful site: http://canadianscreenwriters.blogspot.com/

Attendance Policy

Attendance is mandatory. You are allowed ONE unexcused absence. If you miss two classes—without a valid, properly documented reason—your final grade will be reduced by 10%. If you miss three classes, your final grade will be reduced by 20%. If you miss four classes, your final grade will be reduced by 30%. If you miss five classes, you final grade will be reduced by 40%. Finally, if you miss six classes, you should expect to fail the class.

GRADED ASSESSMENT

**Grading:** The grading scheme for the course conforms to the 9-point grading system used in undergraduate programs at York (e.g., A+ = 9, A = 8, B+ = 7, C+ = 5, etc.). Assignments and tests will bear either a letter grade designation or a corresponding number grade (e.g. A+ = 90 to 100, A = 80 to 90, B+ = 75 to 79, etc.)  
(For a full description of York grading system see the York University Undergraduate Calendar - https://calendars.students.yorku.ca/)
Last date to drop a Fall course without receiving a grade: **November 8th, 2019**

**Assignment submission:** Proper academic performance depends on students doing their work not only well, but on time. Accordingly, assignments for this course must be received on the due date specified for the assignment. Assignments are to be handed in at the end of class.

**Lateness Penalty:** Assignments received later than the due date will be penalized one-half letter grade (1 grade point) per day that the assignment is late. Exceptions to the lateness penalty for valid reasons such as illness, compassionate grounds etc. may be entertained by the Course Instructor but will require supporting documentation (e.g., a doctor’s letter).

**Missed Tests:** Students with a documented reason for missing a course test, such as illness, compassionate grounds, etc., which is confirmed by supporting documentation (e.g., doctor’s letter) may request accommodation from the Course Instructor (e.g. they may be allowed to write a make-up test on a date specified by the Course Instructor.) Further extensions or accommodation will require students to submit a formal petition to the Faculty.

**Academic Policies / Information**

The Senate Academic Standards, Curriculum and Pedagogy Committee (ASCP) provides a Student Information Sheet that includes:

- York's Academic Honesty Policy and Procedures / Academic Integrity Web site
- Access/Disability
- Ethics Review Process for Research Involving Human Participants
- Religious Observance Accommodation
- Student Code of Conduct

See: [http://secretariat.info.yorku.ca/files/CourseInformationForStudentsAugust20121.pdf](http://secretariat.info.yorku.ca/files/CourseInformationForStudentsAugust20121.pdf)

The Senate Grading Scheme and Feedback Policy stipulates that (a) the grading scheme (i.e. kinds and weights of assignments, essays, exams, etc.) be announced, and be available in writing, within the first two weeks of class, and that, (b) under normal circumstances, graded feedback worth at least 15% of the final grade for Fall, Winter or Summer Term, and 30% for ‘full year’ courses offered in the Fall/Winter Term be received by students in all courses prior to the final withdrawal date from a course without receiving a grade.

- Important University Sessional Dates (you will find classes and exams start/end dates, reading/co-curricular week, add/drop deadlines, holidays, University closings and more here: http://www.registrar.yorku.ca/enrol/dates/index.htm
- Manage my Academic record

- [http://myacademicrecord.students.yorku.ca/](http://myacademicrecord.students.yorku.ca/)

**20% Rule**

No examinations or tests collectively worth more than 20% of the final grade in a course will be given during the final 14 calendar days of classes in a term. The exceptions to the rule are classes that regularly meet Friday evenings or on Saturday and/or Sunday at any time, and courses offered in the compressed summer terms.

**Academic Honesty and Integrity**

York students are required to maintain high standards of academic integrity and are subject to the Senate Policy on Academic Honesty

Students are expected to review the materials on the Academic Integrity website (http://www.yorku.ca/academicintegrity/students.htm).

Access/Disability

York provides services for students with disabilities (including physical, medical, learning and psychiatric disabilities) needing accommodation related to teaching and evaluation methods/materials. It is the student’s responsibility to register with disability services as early as possible to ensure that appropriate academic accommodation can be provided with advance notice. You are encouraged to schedule a time early in the term to meet with each professor to discuss your accommodation needs. Failure to make these arrangements may jeopardize your opportunity to receive academic accommodations.

Additional information is available at www.yorku.ca/disabilityservices or from disability service providers:
- Learning and Psychiatric Disabilities Programs - Counselling & Development Centre: 130 BSB, 416-736-5297, www.yorku.ca/cdc

Ethics Review Process

York students are subject to the York University Policy for the Ethics Review Process for Research Involving Human Participants. In particular, students proposing to undertake research involving human participants (e.g., interviewing the director of a company or government agency, having students complete a questionnaire, etc.) are required to submit an Application for Ethical Approval of Research Involving Human Participants at least one month before you plan to begin the research. If you are in doubt as to whether this requirement applies to you, contact your Course Director immediately.

Religious Observance Accommodation

York University is committed to respecting the religious beliefs and practices of all members of the community, and making accommodations for observances of special significance to adherents. Should any of the dates specified in this syllabus for an in-class test or examination pose such a conflict for you, contact the Course Director within the first three weeks of class. Similarly, should an assignment to be completed in a lab, practicum placement, workshop, etc., scheduled later in the term pose such a conflict, contact the Course director immediately. Please note that to arrange an alternative date or time for an examination scheduled in the formal examination periods (December and April/May), students must complete an Examination Accommodation Form, which can be obtained from Student Client Services, Student Services Centre or online at http://www.registrar.yorku.ca/pdf/exam_accommodation.pdf

Student Conduct

Students and instructors are expected to maintain a professional relationship characterized by courtesy and mutual respect and to refrain from actions disruptive to such a relationship. Moreover, it is the responsibility of the instructor to maintain an appropriate academic atmosphere in the classroom, and the responsibility of the student to cooperate in that endeavour. Further, the instructor is the best person to decide, in the first instance, whether such an atmosphere is present in the class. A statement of the policy and procedures involving disruptive and/or harassing behaviour by students in academic situations is available on the York website
http://www.yorku.ca/secretariat/legislation/senate/harass.htm

Please note that this information is subject to periodic update. For the most current information, please go to the CCAS webpage (see Reports, Initiatives, Documents):
Graded Assessment
Contribution to class discussions and peer critiques: 20%
Analysis of a sequence from Chinatown (3 pages): 10%
Film treatment (5-7 pages, double-spaced): 20%
Character biography (3-5 pages, double-spaced): 20%
Act 1 of your screenplay (30-35 pages): 30%

Many courses utilize Moodle, York University’s course website system. If your course is using Moodle, click here to access it.
Moodle @ York University