EXPANDED COURSE DESCRIPTION

FILM AND VIDEO
School of the Arts, Media, Performance and Design
Department of Cinema and Media Arts

FA / FILM 3120 6.0 SECTION A
FEATURE SCREENWRITING I
FALL 2020 / WINTER 2021

Last Modified Date: 09/03/2020

COURSE CALENDAR DESCRIPTION

Focuses on the initial stages of writing a feature-length screenplay. Explores idea of development, story groundwork and principles of story structure. Leads students through craft challenges in the creation of a fully developed story outline. The first of two year-long courses. Prerequisite: FA/FILM 2120 6.00; or FA/FILM 2121 6.00 and permission of the Film Department.

INSTRUCTOR(S)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Section / Format / Term</th>
<th>Contact Email</th>
<th>Contact Phone</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wiseman, Howard M.</td>
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SPECIAL FEATURES

Technical requirements for taking the course: The course expects students to participate via video conferencing, (“live” on Zoom) each week. You will need to have a computer with webcam in addition to a proper microphone and stable high-speed internet (or a smart device with these features). Attendance and participation are critical for success in this course. Letters of Accommodation should be submitted to the instructor well before classes begin.

Technical Tips: A way to determine Internet connection and speed: there are online tests such as Speedtest, https://www.speedtest.net/ that can be run. Useful links describing computing information, resources and help for students:

- Computing for Students Website https://student.computing.yorku.ca/
- Student Guide to eLearning at York University http://elearning-guide.apps01.yorku.ca/
- Learning Skills Services https://lss.info.yorku.ca/online-learning/

Location: Every Thursday at 2:30-5:30. The course is remotely delivered “live” via Zoom with a Zoom portal located on the course’s 3120 Moodle page.

Passport York is required to have access to Moodle and required by the Moving Image Library for the streaming of films on Criterion on Demand and Kanopy, two of our major sources of feature film screenings.
A lecture (or lectures) will be delivered “live”/synchronously followed by Q and A, discussions of readings/assignments, some reading of assignments “live” in class, and small story development groups. We will hold “live” first-act readings of students’ screenplays in class in the winter order as we explore dialogue and tone. The 3120 Moodle site will post various materials and links related to each week but only as a resource, not as a substitute for class attendance.

Note: There will be no class interactions or activities on campus.

SPECIAL FEATURES: Writing a screenplay is like creating a living world. A concept takes hold: intangible, ephemeral, the spark. But to develop it, one needs an instinctive or gut understanding of the dynamics a story world requires, the tools to shape that world, and the will to persevere in the writing. Perhaps the most important ingredient is the passion which brings the world to life, hiding all traces of its fabrication, inspiring the filmmaking team's deepest commitment and capturing the audience's belief. It takes more than one screenplay to begin to master this process, but much can be achieved with commitment to this course and to your own development as a screenwriter.

This course’s focus is not on the entire process of writing a screenplay, but on its most difficult and crucial aspect: story development. We will examine in depth the writer’s conceptual toolkit. We will treat the classroom as a collaborative writers’ room, (hence the “live component”) while still privileging the individual process of inspiration.

The course will require you to engage with several of your own stories and the stories of peers over 24 weeks. Each student will develop three story concepts to an elementary stage. Then, students will individually develop their own feature film story from a complete first act to a detailed outline, and finally, an in-depth feature film treatment, the focus of the second term.

TOPICS AND CONCEPTS

TOPICS & CONCEPTS: The course will proceed through four stages:

1) We will examine the tools of story structure as applied by feature film screenwriters. Students are expected to gain a proficient understanding of key tools of character, structure, themes, ethical underpinnings, culture, landscape, and what lies beneath the surface of your story.

2) Students will submit three story concepts. We will work with these collaboratively to test their viability, identify issues and strengths, and to deepen our understanding of the tools of structure.
   - Each student will fully develop a story concept of their choice.
   - Each student will take this story from concept to a complete act one in screenplay form.
   - Each student will then create a detailed 10 page outline and finally a 20-25 page prose treatment.

It takes breakthrough to become a screenwriter, constant breakthroughs which take hard work and persistence through internal obstacles and periods of uncertainty. This is the writing process. Your full and patient immersion in this course will be worth the work of many screenplays written independently.

LIST OF LEARNING OUTCOMES AND EXAMPLES OF

Learning Outcomes:
1) To understand the essential building blocks of a story that can sustain a feature-length film: character, plot turning points; theme; action and structure;
2) To understand the tools that a writer uses to develop the elements of their story into a coherent, meaningful narrative
3) To develop this story in the industrial forms of a 12-page outline and then a 25-page treatment
4) To collaborate in developing the first phases of potential story-lines, exploring possible directions and story potential
5) To provide appropriate and constructive feedback to peer writers
6) To pitch stories to an audience, distilling the essence of its action and its appeal, and refining its focus for the writer

GRADED ASSESSMENT

Evaluation

Evaluation is based on assessment of both creative and technical components in the assignments. The “studio” assignments reflect in-class and Moodle contributions to collaborative story analysis and development.

Under no circumstances is it acceptable in this course to write stories based on material from other produced sources (whether stage, film, TV, prose, or newspaper articles, etc.) other than your own original material—except for the one assignment on adaptation where source material will be provided. Otherwise this course focuses on developing your own original story into feature film treatment form. For further information on basing your stories on pre-existing material, please see paragraph on Academic Honesty and Plagiarism.

Grading Breakdown

Sept. 17 Class 2
Adaptation Outline (2 pgs.) and Original Story ideas - 3 x 1 paragraph

Sept. 24 Assignment #1 Due
Adaptation Exercise 10 pages minimum 10%

Oct. 1 Class 3
3 x 2 paragraph feature ideas for pitching in your story groups

Oct. 8 Class 4 Assignment #2 Due
Two Story Proposals for Feature Screenplays: 2 x 4 pages each -1.5 spacing 15%

Nov. 10 Class 8
Scene by Scene description of Act One of your movie

Nov. 26 Class 10 Assignment #3 Due
Your Own Original Act One Screenplay Pages - minimum/maximum 24-28 pgs. 25%

Winter

Class 1-6 Feedback on Pages/Live Script Readings in Class

Feb. 25 Class #7- week after reading week
ASSIGNMENT #4 Original Step Outline: 10 pgs. min./maximum (1.5 spacing) 15%

Mar. 11 Class 9 Story Editing Report: 5 pgs. min./max. 5%
Assignment #5 Revised Step Outline (for group)

Mar. 25 Class 11 Assignment #6 Final
Feature Film Treatment: 24-28 pages minimum/maximum 20%

Participation 10%

Required Text:
“The Anatomy of Story”/John Truby
“The Hero’s Journey”/Chris Vogler
“The Virgin’s Promise”/ Kim Hudson

Recommended Text:
“The Screenwriter’s Bible” (format and craft)/ David Trottier
“The War of Art” / Pressfield
“Save The Cat”/ Blake Snyder
“Aristotle’s Poetics for Screenwriters”/Tierno

Additional readings and/or film viewings may be assigned or recommended during the course.

Last date to drop a fall term (F) course without receiving a grade: November 6, 2020
Last date to drop a winter term (W) course without receiving a grade: March 12, 2021
Last date to drop a full year (Y) course without receiving a grade: February 5, 2021

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

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Additional information:
  - Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities
  - Grading Scheme and Feedback Policy

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.
  - Manage my Academic record

http://www.registrar.yorku.ca/enrol/dates/index.htm

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 which regularly meet Friday evenings or on Saturday and/or Sunday at any time, and courses offered in the compressed summer terms.

Final course grades may be adjusted to conform to Program or Faculty grades distribution profiles.

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

Moodle @ York University