

COMM 202-201 – Story for Film and TV (REVISED SYLLABUS 1-26-15)

SOC 015, M 7:00 p.m.-9:30 p.m. Instructor Joseph Kuhr

E-mail: JKuhr@luc.edu

Office: Lewis Towers 900

Office hours: Mondays 5:00-6:30 p.m. or by appointment

Course Objective

This course is designed to develop students' creative writing ability and specifically to prepare students to write for the screen. Students will be instructed in the styles, formats and approaches for writing motion picture scripts (i.e. writing for live-action and animated TV and film). During the semester, students will be required to complete several writing assignments, in-class exercises and group projects designed to expose them to the craft of writing for film and TV, with the goal of creating several short, polished scripts. At the conclusion of the course students will be able to:

- develop effective, narrative scenes and characters.
- write a spec TV script.
- write a short, fictional narrative web series bible, pilot and additional episodes.
- write treatments and outlines for screenplays
- effectively evaluate, analyze and critique narrative screenwriting.

Texts and Readings

Required • *The Complete Screenwriter's Manual: A Comprehensive Reference of Format & Style*

by Bowles, Mangravite and Zorn.

• *Writing the Pilot* by William Rabkin

• Scripts and materials placed on Sakai.

Optional • *The Revolution Was Televised* by Alan Sepinwall

Materials and Software

Required • Adobe Story screenwriting software (available for free download for desktop:
<https://story.adobe.com/en-us/>)

OR Final Draft screenwriting software.

• Microsoft Word OR Open Office.

Computer Use:

Please be aware that occasional software bugs, virus presence, human error and/or hardware failure can result in damaged, corrupted or deleted files. Consequently, it is your responsibility to back-up your project files during and after each use and to deliver readable, uncorrupted files in the required format. Computer failure is not a valid excuse for lost work or missed assignments.

Grading & Evaluation

Attendance policy: This class relies heavily on group workshops. Consequently, attendance and participation is important and will be included as part of your final grade. Any more than 3 absences, excused or unexcused, will reduce your participation grade by 5 points per absence. In addition, in-class work missed due to absence cannot be “made up.” It will be the student’s responsibility to obtain notes or missed work from their classmates.

Late Work: Students are expected to complete all of the assigned projects and readings on time. Late projects will automatically be penalized 4 points per day (see below). No projects will be accepted more than one week (5 business days) after the original due date.

Grading & Evaluation:

Your final grade will be based on your participation in classroom discussions, workshops and exercises, and the quality of your writing assignments. Emphasis will be placed on completing polished, finished pieces, formatted to industry standards; consequently, many of the assignments will build on previous work and students are expected to apply what they’ve learned in group or individual critique to each subsequent assignment.

You can earn up to 200 possible points in this class. Grading for the entire semester will be based on how many total points out of 200 you receive.

Written assignments will receive a score between 1-20, using the grading rubric below, with (unless otherwise noted) 0-5 points assigned to each criterion in the rubric (0 = poor or unacceptable; 5 = excellent or near perfect):

Grading Rubric

- Deadline – full points if delivered on time, 1 point subtracted for each day late.
- Format – formatted to industry standards (margins, style), meets assignment goals & criteria.
- Writing – spelling, grammar, punctuation, organization, clarity.
- Impact – originality, creativity, emotional impact, cinematic power, etc.

20 points will also be allocated to class Participation & Attendance. If you do not do the assigned reading ON TIME you will not be able to fully participate, which will impact your Participation score. To determine whether you have done the reading, from time to time the instructor will give “stand and deliver” pop-quizzes – not for grades, but for GLORY!

Your final grade will be calculated using the following formula:

Writing Assignments: 20 points each, 180 points total

Participation & Attendance: 20 points

Assignments

The meat of this course consists of completing the following assignments:

- The Observation Screenplay.
- The Action Script.
- The Rewrite.
- Original Web Short: Pitch & Treatment.
- Original Short: Final Draft.
- The Character Sketch.
- The Scene.
- The Spec Script.
- Original Web Short: First Draft.

All written assignments must be typed, formatted correctly (as per assignment description) and delivered electronically in the required format (Word doc, text file, Final Draft or Adobe Story files) via e-mail (you will receive an “I got it” confirmation within 24 hours). On workshop days, 4 or 5 students will be selected in advance to have their work critiqued and evaluated in class. Students **MUST** bring a working laptop or tablet to class in order to read their fellow students’ assignments. Students whose writing is scheduled to be work-shopped or table-read must deliver their assignment 2 hours in advance (5 p.m. Monday). Students can only switch workshop days with permission of the instructor.

Guest speakers will join us subject to availability.

**** The instructor reserves the right to revise or change anything in this syllabus. Work created in/for this course can be re-used and shared by the instructor with other students/classes.***

Assignment Descriptions

• ***The Observation Screenplay***– go to an off-campus public location, sit in one spot for at least a full hour, and record in writing what you observe (see and hear). Describe the physical location, the “characters” who inhabit it, the actions they take and the words (dialogue) that you overhear. Record your observations as accurately and succinctly as possible. Feel free to focus on particular behaviors, people, events or conversations that you find interesting, but don’t worry at this point about structure, order or story. Simply record your observations freehand, stream of consciousness style. Try to be as objective as possible in your observations. DO NOT invent, judge, conclude or use metaphor to replace or supplement accurate description. DO NOT write in first person or describe what you’re thinking. DO make sure you observe at least two people. When you’re done, transcribe your observations into a 2-5 page properly formatted screenplay with scene headings, description, action, characters and dialogue. Avoid adding to, supplementing or embellishing your original observations. Your Observation Screenplay should be 2-5 pages in length, completed in Final Draft or Adobe Story and delivered in one of those two formats via e-mail. Note: the Observation Script will be evaluated based on three criteria: 1) Deadline, 2) Writing, and 3) Format. For this exercise only, Deadline is worth five points, writing is worth 7 points and Format is worth 8 Points.

• ***Character Sketches and Backgrounds*** – focus on 2 characters from your Observation Exercise. Create character backgrounds and sketches for the two characters inspired by your observations of them. Feel free to embellish, invent and exaggerate as you feel fit, considering what would make a film or scene including these characters have the most dramatic or comedic impact. Make sure that your sketches include information covering: their look; their background; important relationships in their lives; their goals; obstacles (internal/external) to achieving their goals; their fatal flaws and/or best characteristics; their hobbies and quirks; etc. Each character sketch should be roughly 1-2 type-written pages long, completed in Word or Open Office, and delivered electronically as a doc or txt file via e-mail. Note: the Character Sketches will be evaluated on three criteria: 1) Deadline, 2) Writing and 3) Impact.

• ***Action Scripts*** – take one or both of the characters developed in your sketches, place them in the original location from your Observation Exercises, and add conflict and action. Write a fictional scene in which your character confronts an obstacle or conflict WITHOUT using any dialogue (i.e. your script should consist only of scene headings, description and action). Think about how to imply character information simply thru action. Remember, the script should take place during one time and place (1 scene) and only contain description of what the audience sees and hears—there can be no description of what a character is thinking, no voice-over and NO DIALOGUE or descriptions of what a character says (i.e. no references to dialogue either). The scene should be roughly 2-3 pages in length, completed in proper screenplay format using Final Draft or Adobe Story and delivered electronically via e-mail.

• ***The Scene*** – write a full scene, with a clear beginning, middle and end, inspired by your original Observation Exercise and/or Character Sketches. If you’d like, you can simply flesh out your Action Script with dialogue OR you can write an entirely new scene. The scene should be 2-5 pages in length, completed in proper screenplay format using Final Draft or Adobe Story, and delivered electronically via e-mail.

• ***The Rewrite*** – using the scene you were provided in class, complete a revision, rewrite or polish of said script, punching up the action and dialogue. Try to maintain the general action and spirit of the original scene, keeping the principle character(s) intact, but feel free to add, embellish, remove, edit, restructure and otherwise revise the original. Be sure to address and fix the writing and formatting mistakes of the original. The scene should be 2-5 pages in length, completed in proper screenplay format using Final Draft or Adobe Story, and delivered electronically via e-mail.

• ***The Spec Script*** – after doing some background research (the assigned reading and screening) develop an idea for an episode of the television show *Modern Family*. Combining ideas and working with your assigned group, write a full-draft of a spec script that follows industry and show standards for format, style and length, contains a storyline for each family, and fits the tone and content of the show. You will complete a portion of the first draft individually, but your entire group will be responsible for the final draft of the script. The final draft should be 22-30 pages in length, completed using Adobe Story, and delivered electronically via e-mail. Note: the Spec will be evaluated based on four criteria: 1) Group Work, 2) Writing, 3) Format and 4) Impact.

• ***Original Short Web Series: Pitch & Show Bible*** – working with your assigned group, complete a treatment for an original pilot and additional episodes for a web series, containing no more than 3 principle characters, 3 principle locations and 5 total scenes. Plan on the Pilot running 5-7 minutes. The total number of episodes will be assigned so that there is one episode per person in your group. Your bible should include a 1-2 sentence logline, basic story and plot information, brief (1-2 paragraph) character sketches, notes about the visual style, and information about the broader story arc (what might happen in future episodes) following the examples provided in class. To help clarify your vision, refer to films, TV shows or Web Series, the actors you'd like to see in the roles of your principle characters, and information about your intended audience. Be prepared to pitch your idea in class, using visual references where applicable. You will work together as a group, and your entire group will be responsible for the Pitch and Bible. Your pitch should be approximately 5 minutes long. You will also submit a full Bible, which should be 4-5 pages long, written using Word or Open Office and delivered as a txt or docx file via e-mail. Note: the Original Short Web Series Pitch and Bible will be evaluated based on four criteria: 1) Group Work, 2) Writing, 3) Format and 4) Impact.

• ***Original Short Web Series Pilot and Additional Episodes: First Draft*** – working with your assigned group, complete a first draft of your pilot and additional episodes (approximately 5-7 pages long per episode). Make sure that each episode has a clear beginning, middle and end (but also leaves us wondering what happens next), has no more than 3 major characters and locations, has a clear point of view and tone, and is written in proper screenplay format. The script should be completed using Final Draft or Adobe Story, and delivered in one of those two formats via e-mail. Note: the Original Short Web Series Pilot and additional episodes first drafts will be evaluated based on four criteria: 1) Group Work, 2) Writing, 3) Format and 4) Impact.

• ***Original Short Web Series Pilot and Additional Episodes: Final Draft*** – working with your assigned group, revise, polish and punch-up your pilot and additional episode scripts, taking into

account the critique and suggestions made by your peers and by the instructor. Think about how to make these scripts both more readable and more impactful. Solve the plot holes, and eliminate any unnecessary action, dialogue or description. Also, clarify the language and fix punctuation, typos, spelling or formatting mistakes. The script should be completed using Final Draft or Adobe Story, and delivered via e-mail by the final day of class before 5:00 p.m. Note: the Original Short Web Series Pilot and additional episodes final drafts will be evaluated based on four criteria: 1) Group Work, 2) (Re)Writing [i.e., how did you address the notes], 3) Format and 4) Impact.

Course Schedule and Assignment Deadlines

- Week 1
1/12 Syllabus and schedule review. Signing Releases. Intro to story and to visual writing. Assigning workshop days. *This American Life* visual writing exercise. Formatting & Adobe Story. Observation Screenplay explained, including putting observations into screenplay form.
Assignment Due Week 3: The Observation Script.
Reading for Week 3: *L.A. Confidential* and character guide (Sakai)
- Week 2
1/19 MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY. CLASS DOES NOT MEET.
- Week 3
1/26 Workshop 1: Observation Screenplay – Isaac, Edwards, Brophy, Galate, Cabrera. Creating and developing characters. In-class character sketches.
Assignment Due Week 4: The Character Sketch.
Reading for Week 4: Writing Action (Part 1, Section 2 of Bowles, Mangravite, Zorn *Screenwriter’s Manual* called Instructions pp. 31-49 of the old edition, check new edition for corresponding pages) and *The Batman: “Team Penguin”* (Sakai).
- Week 4
2/2 Workshop 2: Character Sketches – Araujo, Fogarty, Morrison, Grogan, Jones. Adding action and conflict. In-class writing exercise: story in pictures.
Assignment Due Week 5: The Action Script.
Reading for week 5: *In the Bedroom* (Sakai) and William Rabkin *Writing the Pilot* pages 1-52.
- Week 5
2/9 Workshop 3: Action Scripts – Marchione, Bush, Curtin, Freed, Hicar. Writing dialogue. Exploring subtext and exposition. In-class: bad dialogue.
Assignment Due Week 6: The Scene.
Reading and Viewing for week 6: Read *Despicable Me* and read and view episodes of *Fifi, Cat Therapist*, to be determined (Sakai)
- Week 6
2/16 Peer Evaluation Workshop: Evaluating The Scene. Writing is rewriting. Collabo-writing. Story Structure. GUEST: MIKE BLUM, creator of Dreamworks animated web series FIFI, CAT THERAPIST
Assignment Due Week 7: The Rewrite.
Reading for week 7: Mamet Memo (Sakai) and Rabkin, *Writing the Pilot* pages 52-89
- Week 7
2/23 Workshop 4: Rewrites – Herkert, Gray, Wood, Valo. In Class: View Chaplin’s “A Dog’s Life” and discuss.
Assignment Due Week 8 (10/16): The Spec Idea
Screening & Reading for Week 8: read and watch 2 *Modern Family* episodes (scripts on Sakai, video on Hulu, Netflix or ABC.com).

***** *Spring Break* *****

- Week 8
3/9 TV writing and the spec script. Pitch meetings, group writing, and step outlines.
In-class: pitches, assignment of groups and step outlines. If time, Kuhr delivers a sample pitch and we'll view an episode by Kuhr.
Assignment Due Week 9: The Spec – Step Outline (one storyline each)
Screening and Reading for Week 9: *Modern Family* “Toolkit” (Sakai) and more *Modern Family* episodes (Hulu or ABC.com) and read one episode of CBS’s *Elementary*, to be determined (Sakai)
- Week 9
3/16 Overlapping storylines and punching up comedy. In-class: group writing.
GUEST: ELEMENTARY’S BOB GOODMAN
Assignment Due Week 10: The Spec draft.
- Week 10
3/23 In class: group re-writing.
Table Read: *Modern Family* Spec Scripts.
Reading for Week 11: The Bannen Way (Sakai)
- Week 11
3/30 Table Read: *Modern Family* Spec Scripts cont’d.
Idea generation: pilots. Pitches, script treatments and story bibles. GUEST: THE BANNEN WAY’S MARK GANTT
Assignment Due Week 12: Pitches and Bible for Original Short Web Pilot.
Reading for Week 12: Pitch templates on Sakai, and episodes of Apt. 8 News (Sakai)
- Week 12
4/6 **NOTE: EVENING CLASSES DO MEET ON 4/6.**
Full class: Pitches and Treatments. Step outlines continued. GUEST KRIS WELLMAN, co-creator of web series APT. 8 NEWS
Assignment Due Week 13: Original Short Web Pilot (First Draft)
- Week 13
4/13 Group Workshop: First Drafts. Individual Meetings.
Assignment Due Week 14: revised step-outline & logline for Original Short Web Pilot.
- Week 14
4/20 Full class: revised outlines & loglines for Original Short.
Assignment Due Week 15: Original Short Web Pilot (Final Draft).
- Week 15
4/27 **Table Read and Workshop: Original Shorts Web Pilot.**

School of Communication Statement on Academic Integrity

A basic mission of a university is to search for and to communicate truth as it is honestly perceived. A genuine learning community cannot exist unless this demanding standard is a fundamental tenet of the intellectual life of the community. Students of Loyola University Chicago are expected to know, to respect, and to practice this standard of personal honesty.

Academic dishonesty can take several forms, including, but not limited to cheating, plagiarism, copying another student's work, and submitting false documents.

Academic cheating is a serious act that violates academic integrity. Cheating includes, but is not limited to, such acts as:

- Obtaining, distributing, or communicating examination materials prior to the scheduled examination without the consent of the teacher;
- Providing information to another student during an examination;
- Obtaining information from another student or any other person during an examination;
- Using any material or equipment during an examination without consent of the instructor, or in a manner which is not authorized by the instructor;
- Attempting to change answers after the examination has been submitted;
- Unauthorized collaboration, or the use in whole or part of another student's work, on homework, lab reports, programming assignments, and any other course work which is completed outside of the classroom;
- Falsifying medical or other documents to petition for excused absences or extensions of deadlines; or
- Any other action that, by omission or commission, compromises the integrity of the academic evaluation process.

Plagiarism is a serious violation of the standards of academic honesty. Plagiarism is the appropriation of ideas, language, work, or intellectual property of another, either by intent or by negligence, without sufficient public acknowledgement and appropriate citation that the material is

not one's own. It is true that every thought probably has been influenced to some degree by the thoughts and actions of others. Such influences can be thought of as affecting the ways we see things and express all thoughts. Plagiarism, however, involves the taking and use of specific words and ideas of others without proper acknowledgement of the sources, and includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Submitting as one's own material copied from a published source, such as Internet, print, CD-ROM, audio, video, etc.;
 - Submitting as one's own another person's unpublished work or examination material;
 - Allowing another or paying another to write or research a paper for one's own benefit;
- or
- Purchasing, acquiring, and using for course credit a pre-written paper.

The above list is in no way intended to be exhaustive. Students should be guided by the principle that it is of utmost importance to give proper recognition to all sources. To do so is both an act of personal, professional courtesy and of intellectual honesty. Any failure to do so, whether by intent

or by neglect, whether by omission or commission, is an act of plagiarism. A more detailed description of this issue can be found at <http://luc.edu/english/writing.shtml#source> .

In addition, a student may not submit the same paper or other work for credit in two or more classes. A student who submits the same work for credit in two or more classes will be judged guilty of academic dishonesty, and will be subject to sanctions described below. This applies even if the student is enrolled in the classes during different semesters. If a student plans to

submit work with similar or overlapping content for credit in two or more classes, the student should consult with all instructors prior to submission of the work to make certain that such submission will not violate this standard.

Plagiarism or any other act of academic dishonesty will result minimally in the instructor's assigning the grade of "F" for the assignment or examination. The instructor may impose a more severe sanction, including a grade of "F" in the course. All instances of academic dishonesty must be reported by the instructor to the appropriate area head and to the office of the Dean of the School of Communication.

The office of the Dean of the School of Communication may constitute a hearing board to consider the imposition of sanctions in addition to those imposed by the instructor, including a recommendation of expulsion, depending on the seriousness of the misconduct. In the case of multiple instances of academic dishonesty, the Dean's office may convene a separate hearing board to review these instances. The student has the right to appeal the decision of the hearing board to the Dean of SOC. If the student is not a member of the SOC, the dean of the college in which the student is enrolled shall be part of the process. Students have the right to appeal the decision of any hearing board and the deans of the two schools will review the appeal together.

Their decision is final in all cases except expulsion. The sanction of expulsion for academic dishonesty may be imposed only by the Provost upon recommendation of the dean or deans. Students have a right to appeal any finding of academic dishonesty against them. The procedure for such an appeal can be found at:

http://www.luc.edu/academics/catalog/undergrad/reg_academicgrievance.shtml .

The School of Communication maintains a permanent record of all instances of academic dishonesty. The information in that record is confidential. However, students may be asked to sign a waiver which releases that student's record of dishonesty as a part of the student's application to a graduate or professional school, to a potential employer, to a bar association, or to similar organizations.

(The School of Communication policy is based entirely on and is consistent with the Academic Integrity Policy of the College of Arts & Sciences.)

Students with Disabilities: Any student with a learning disability that needs special accommodation during exams or class periods should provide documentation from Services for Students with Disabilities confidentially to the instructor. The instructor will accommodate that student's needs in the best way possible, given the constraints of course content and processes. It is the student's responsibility to plan in advance in order to meet their own needs and assignment due dates.

Student Bill of Rights (and Responsibilities)*

1. You are not required to agree with the instructor. (You are required to learn at least some of what the instructor has to teach.) **Hence:** You are free to express ideas other than mine, but in your work for this class it is discourteous to ignore me.

2. You have the right to feel what you feel when you feel it. (You are responsible for what you do with those feelings.)
3. You have the right to believe whatever you believe. (You have the responsibility to check if your beliefs correspond to the world, and whether they correspond with the worlds of other people, including people who may not agree with you. If such "reality checks" consistently contradict your beliefs, you have the responsibility to rethink your beliefs.)
4. You have the right to express your beliefs. (You have the responsibility to allow others to express their beliefs and to listen. You have the responsibility to express your beliefs with integrity and consideration for others' feelings, with honesty and compassion.)
5. You have an absolute right to be treated fairly and with the respect due a human being. (You have the responsibility to be fair and respectful in your treatment of others.)
6. You have the right to take from a course what you want from it. You have the right to get a lower grade in a course than you might if you worked harder. (You have the responsibility to recognize that instructors often have their own values and goals and may attempt to get you to get from the course what they think you should get from it.)
7. You have the right to argue with the instructor and with your classmates; you have the right to argue flippantly or passionately, as an exercise or game or with commitment. (You have the responsibility to argue with respect, courtesy, and integrity.)
8. You have the right to receive constructive praise and constructive criticism and the right to resent any criticism - especially if it is correct. (You have the responsibility to recognize that people who only praise your work might not be taking it seriously.)

*Courtesy of Professor Emeritus Richard Erlich of Miami University.