Course Objectives:
The intent of this course is to learn the basics of writing for the screen. We will examine the various elements of a good screenplay including: visual storytelling, 3-act structure, characterization, dramatization, dialogue, screenplay formatting, etc. Students will spend time viewing and analyzing both feature films and short films in the interests of understanding how a screenplay is put together. Writing exercises will be done in preparation for the creation of a final script for a 20-30-minute film, due at the beginning of exam week.

The emphasis in this class is on dramatic screenwriting with an eye towards what Hollywood expects from a good screenplay. You will not be writing experimental films, art films, or documentaries in this class. Though we may make some references to television, you will not be writing scripts for television which poses different challenges. Because we are in an academic setting, your scripts should avoid gratuitous violence, explicit sex scenes, vulgarity, sexual or racial stereotypes. You will be writing a script for a short film of 20-25 minutes. You may write comedy, thriller, action-adventure, drama, science fiction, or fantasy, but whatever you chose to write will contain sound dramatic structure and rich characterization.

Required Texts:
Story Sense by Paul Lucey
Writing Short Films, 2nd edition, by Linda Cowgill
(Both of these texts are available at the UO Bookstore)

Expectations and Requirements:
1) Attendance
Because this class meets only once a week, attendance is mandatory. If you must miss a class due to sickness or emergence, please contact me in advance, and take responsibility for making up what you have missed. If you hope to work in the film industry, stamina (both physical and mental) is imperative. The hours are long and if you offer excuses for your work you will be quickly shunted aside. Begin now by keeping yourself fit. Have a flu shot; get enough sleep, enough exercise, healthy food; stay away from sick roommates and friends, etc. If you do get sick, however, please stay home to facilitate your speedy recovery and so as not to infect others. It is your responsibility to make up any work you miss.
2) Reading
Both of these texts offer extremely useful advice about writing. You are expected to read all the material and be prepared to discuss it in class. If I sense the reading is not being done, there will be quizzes (you are forewarned!).

3) Viewing
You will be expected to do some viewing of films outside of class. The short films I will ask you to view can be found on YouTube. The feature films can be rented.

4) “Study films”
You will choose one study film from a short list I have compiled. You will view this film on your own and will use it as the basis for several analytical assignments. You may or may not have seen the films on this list, but they are all well-regarded by the movie industry. Do not ask to use a study film that is not on the list. They have been chosen because, in addition to being well-respected in Hollywood, they also have things to teach nascent screenwriters. Some of these films you may not like and some you may find dated, but this does not matter, as they all have things to teach you, and it is very likely that you will find at least one film on the list that you will like very much. You will be asked to do a presentation based on your study film at least once in the quarter. It is probably advisable to purchase your study film. They are available from Amazon for $10-15. A couple of them can be streamed from Netflix, and all are available on DVD from Netflix.

4) Writing
The writing assignments will mostly be to prepare you for the writing of your short film script (for a film of 20-25 minutes). The writing of a short film is an excellent way to hone your screenwriting skills before you attempt to write a feature screenplay. Furthermore, you might like your short film script enough to make it into a film which you can use as a “calling card” in the film business. Three (3) of the writing assignments relate very specifically to the short script (the idea written in prose—due Week #4, the detailed beat sheet—due Week #7, and the final script itself—due Monday of Exam Week). You will also be asked, on occasion, to do some in-class writing. All scene exercises and the final script must be in perfect screenplay format.

5) Conference
After you hand in the idea for your film script (Week #5) you must schedule a conference with me during office hours to discuss the idea.

6) Pitch
During the second to last class (Week #9) each class member will give a 5-minute “pitch” of his/her screenplay.

**Grading Rubric:**
--Screenplay (including: 1) prose description 2) beat sheet, and 3) final draft): 50%
--Writing exercises, visual storytelling exercise, and film analyses: 30%
--Participation (active presence, attentive body and mind, presentation, pitch): 20%
University Policies:

Academic Misconduct
Academic misconduct is defined in detail in the University Student Conduct Code (conduct.uoregon.edu). Academic misconduct includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, knowingly furnishing false information, and fabrication. All work submitted in this course must be the student's own and produced exclusively for this course. Students should not give or receive (or attempt to give or receive) unauthorized help on any assignment or examination without express permission from the instructor. Students should properly acknowledge and document every single source of information (e.g. quotations, paraphrases, ideas) and use only the sources and resources authorized by the instructor. The instructor will not stop a student suspected of committing academic misconduct from starting or completing an assignment or examination. The instructor has the right to apply an academic sanction (one example is a grade penalty) if the student at any time admits to academic misconduct. Students who admit to or are found responsible for academic misconduct more than once will likely be suspended from the University. The instructor must report all credible allegations or admissions of academic misconduct to the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards. The University encourages students to discuss academic integrity with the instructor. Students can learn more about plagiarism at www.libweb.uoregon.edu/guides/plagiarism/students.

Documented Disability
Appropriate accommodations will be provided for students with documented disabilities. If you have a documented disability and require accommodation, arrange to meet with the instructor within the first two weeks of the term. The documentation of your disability must come in writing from the Disability Services in the Office of Academic Advising and Student Services. Disabilities may include (but are not limited to) neurological impairment, orthopedic impairment, traumatic brain injury, visual impairment, chromic medical conditions, emotional/psychological disabilities, hearing impairment, and learning disabilities. For more information on Disability Services, please see http://ds.uoregon.edu.

In Case of Inclement Weather
In the event the University operates on a curtailed schedule or closes, UO media relations will notify the Eugene-Springfield area radio and television stations as quickly as possible. In addition, a notice regarding the University's schedule will be posted on the UO main home page (in the “News” section) at http://www.uoregon.edu.

If an individual class must be canceled due to inclement weather, illness, or other reason, a notice will be posted on Blackboard and via email. During periods of inclement weather, please check Blackboard and your email address rather than contact department personnel. Due to unsafe travel condition, departmental staff may be limited and unable to handle the volume of calls from you and others.
WEEK BY WEEK
(NB: viewing selections subject to change)

Week #1—Sept. 28
Topic: Class introduction
Discuss:
--Syllabus/class requirements
--Visual storytelling
--Differences between feature films and short films
--View: “The Red Balloon”

Week #2—Oct. 5
Topic: 3-Act Structure/Story Structure
Due:
--5 images that tell a story
--Reading: Cowgill, Ch. 1, 2, 4 & Appendix A/ Lucey, Ch. 1, 2, 8
--View: “Lunch Date” (YouTube) and The Verdict (feature film)
Discuss:
--Overview of story structure
--Exercise in pairs/ Discuss “Lunch Date” and The Verdict
--Basics of screenplay format

Week #3—Oct. 12
Topic: Plotting
Due:
--View: “Ray’s Male Heterosexual Dance Hall” (YouTube) & Witness (feature)
--Reading: Cowgill, Ch. 5 & script for “Ray’s”/ Lucey, Ch. 3 & 4 (p. 109-114)
Discuss:
--Discuss films viewed
--Techniques for plotting
--Plotting exercise in pairs

Week #4—Oct. 19
Topic: Character
Due:
--Writing: Structural analysis of your “study film”
--Reading: Cowgill, Ch. 3, /Lucey, Ch. 5
--View: Thelma and Louise (feature film)
Discuss:
--Character: strong interesting characters and how to create them
--View: “Life Lessons” & “Peel” and discuss in terms of character

***Week #5—Oct. 26***
Topic: Character
Due:
--Writing: Analysis of characters in your “study film”

IDEA FOR YOUR FILM SCRIPT (1-2 page prose description)
Discuss:
--Character and its relationship to plot
--View: student-chosen excerpts from study films related to character
--Discuss and critique student short film ideas
Week #6—Nov. 2
Topic: Scene Structure/Sequences
Due:
--Reading: Cowgill, Ch. 6, 9/Lucey, Ch. 4
--Writing: Character biography of the protagonist of your script
Discuss:
--How to structure a scene, openings, exposition
--View and analyze: student-chosen scenes from some of the study films
--In-class writing: scene exercise

***Week #7—Nov. 9—***
Topic: Creating Drama, Energy, Momentum
Due:
--Writing: BEAT SHEET for your short film
--Reading: Cowgill, Ch. 7/ Lucey, Ch. 7
Discuss:
--How to keep stories energized in the middle
--Be ready to offer examples from your study film

Week #8—Nov. 16
Topic: Dialogue
Due:
--Reading: Cowgill, Ch. 10/Lucey, Ch. 6
--Writing: Analysis of dialogue in your “study film”
Discuss:
--Guest lecturer for part of class
--Elements of good dialogue
--View: student-chosen examples of good dialogue from study films

Week #9—Nov. 23
Topic: Stage Directions/Pitches
Due:
--Reading: Lucey Ch. 9 & p. 326-330 (on pitching)
--Writing: Dialogue exercises
--Pitches
Discuss:
--Writing good stage directions
--Listen and critique student pitches

Week #10—Nov. 30
Topic: Rewriting
Due:
--Reading: Cowgill, Ch. 11/Lucey, Ch. 11
Discuss:
--Subtext, rewriting, problem-solving
--In-class exercise: rewriting

***Exam Week—Mon. Dec. 5***  FINAL SCRIPT DUE in my office by 4:00 p.m.