ENGLISH 411/511--Screenwriting
CRN: 27389/27390

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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 10-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 10 minutes (roughly 10 pages). 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 and Films:
Story Sense by Paul Lucey
Writing Short Films, 2nd edition, by Linda Cowgill
(Both of these texts are available at the UO Bookstore)
The Verdict
Witness
Thelma and Louise
Sleepless in Seattle

Expectations and Requirements:
1) Attendance
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, exercise, healthy food; stay away from sick roommates and friends. 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 the texts offer extremely useful advice about writing. You are expected to read all the assigned 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 view films outside of class, some features and some short films. All students must watch: The Verdict, Witness, Thelma and Louise, and Sleepless in Seattle. These films are discussed at length in the Lucey text and will be cited in class for examples. They can be rented or purchased. I will try to show as many short films in class as time permits. Some films you will asked to view at home on YouTube.

4) “Study films”
You will choose one study film for the duration of the term. I have compiled a list of some good films for this purpose. You need not choose a film from this list, but you must clear your choice with me. You will view this film on your own a number of times and will use it as the basis for several analytical assignments. By the end of the course you will know this film deeply and understand its methodologies. It is probably advisable to purchase your study film, as you will need frequent access to it.

4) Writing
The writing assignments will mostly be to prepare you for the writing of your short film script (10 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 as a prose treatment—due Week #5; the detailed beat sheet—due Week #7; and the final script itself—due Monday of Exam Week). You will sometimes be asked 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) it is recommended that you schedule a conference with me during office hours to discuss the idea. Screenwriting is a highly collaborative process and you will benefit from input from me and from your classmates.

6) Pitch
After you hand in your beat sheet (Week #7) some portion of each class will be devoted to hearing each class member give a 5-minute “pitch” of his/her screenplay.
Grading Rubric:
--Screenplay, including treatment, beat sheet, and final draft 50%
--Writing exercises, visual storytelling exercise, and film analyses 30%
--Participation: active presence, attentive body and mind, presentations, 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 homepage (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: subject to change)

Week #1--Class introduction
Mon. Jan. 9
NO CLASS. INSTRUCTOR OUT OF TOWN.
Read syllabus and do assignments described on Blackboard to prepare for Wednesday’s class.

Wed. Jan. 11
Due/Do:
--Read syllabus and Ch. 1 in both texts, Cowgill and Lucey
--Watch short film “Lunch Date” on YouTube
--Bring in 5 hard copy images that tell a story (introduce character and problem, show conflict, climax, resolution)

Discuss:
--Course/syllabus/study films
--Short films vs. features
--Importance of the visual (making emotion visual)
--Share 5 images
--“Lunch Date”
--Getting ideas

Week #2--Topic: 3-Act Structure/Story Structure
Mon. Jan. 16
NO CLASS—MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY

Wed. Jan. 18
Due/Do:
--Choice of study film
--Read Ch. 2 in both texts
--View The Verdict
--Bring in 3 germ ideas including: a character with a problem, and something standing in the way of solving the problem (think small, as in “Lunch Date”)

Discuss:
--Overview of 3-act story structure
--Story as a single dramatic event
--Share 3 ideas in small groups

Week #3—Oct. 12--Topic: Story Structure (cont’d)
Mon. Jan. 23
Due/Do:
--View Witness
--Read Cowgill Ch. 4/Lucey Ch. 8

Discuss:
--Suspense plot/emotional plot (Witness, The Verdict)
--Develop 3-act structure of germ ideas

Wed. Jan. 25
Due/Do: TBA
Discuss:
--View and discuss “Life Lessons”
--Review “structural analysis” assignment (to be done with study film)

**Week #4—Topic: Character**

Mon. Jan. 30
Due/Do:
--Writing: *Structural analysis of your “study film”*
--Reading: Cowgill, Ch. 3, /Lucey, Ch. 5
--Viewing: *Thelma and Louise* (feature film)

Discuss:
--Creating strong, interesting film characters
--Emotion/backstory/desires and needs/psychological imperatives
--Relationship between character and plot

Wed. Feb. 1
Due/Do:
--Writing: character analysis of *study film characters*

Discuss:
--How character is *shown* (view clips as examples), be prepared to cite examples from *study films*
--In-class exercise: take germ idea and develop central character’s psychological imperative and backstory

*** **Week #5—Topic: Plotting***

Mon. Feb. 6
Due/Do:
--Writing: *IDEA FOR YOUR FILM SCRIPT* (1-2 page prose treatment)
--Writing #2: a *non-dialogue scene* with your main character which introduces him/her and shows something important about him/her
--Reading: Cowgill, Ch. 5&6/Lucey, Ch. 3

Discuss:
--Techniques for plotting (reversals, raising stakes, foreshadowing, torqueing, etc.)
--Screenplay format

Wed. Feb. 8
Due/Do:
--Put non-dialogue scene already written (Writing #2 from Mon. Feb. 6) into proper screenplay format
--Bring 2nd copy of your *treatment* (for use in class)
--Review your *study film* and list some of plotting techniques used

Discuss:
--Plotting techniques used in your *study films*
--Brainstorming re better plotting for film ideas based on techniques discussed on Monday

**Week #6—Topic: Scene Structure/Sequences**

Mon. Feb. 13
Due/Do:
--Reading: Cowgill, Ch.9/Lucey, Ch. 4
--Writing: *Character biography for the protagonist of your script*
Discuss:
--Components that make up a film (bits/beats/scenes/sequences)
--How to structure a scene (button, make-point, 3-act structure)
--View examples

Wed. Feb. 15
Due/Do:
--Writing: hand write favorite scene from your study film and identify “button,” climax, “makepoint”
--Bring in favorite scene from your study film, be prepared to show/discuss
Discuss:
--View and discuss selected scenes from study films
--In class writing: scene exercise
--Discuss requirements for beat sheet

***Week #7—Nov. 9—Topic: Creating Drama, Energy, Momentum***
Mon. Feb. 20
Due/Do:
--Writing: BEAT SHEET for your short film
--Reading: Cowgill, Ch. 7&8/ Lucey, Ch. 7
Discuss:
--Techniques for keeping drama and energy alive
--Pitches

Wed. Feb. 22
Due/Do:
--Find an example of a “dramatizing technique” in your study film and be prepared to share/discuss it (write about it briefly to hand in)
--Write briefly about how you can employ one of these “dramatizing techniques” to your own film
Discuss:
--Use of dramatizing techniques in your own film scripts
--Pitches

Week #8—Nov. 16—Topic: Dialogue
Mon. Feb. 27
Due/Do:
--Reading: Cowgill, Ch. 10&11 /Lucey, Ch. 6
--Writing: Analysis of dialogue in your “study film” (be prepared to share examples)
Discuss:
--Elements of good dialogue
--View/read examples
--Pitches

Wed. Feb. 29
Due/Do:
--Continue refining/revising beat sheet
Discuss/Do:
--Exercise for exploring subtext (estate sale)
--Pitches
**Week #9—Nov. 23-- Topic: Screen Directions**

**Mon. Mar. 5**
Due/Do:
--Reading: Lucey Ch. 9
--Begin writing draft of script
Discuss:
--Writing good screen directions
--Examine examples
--Exercise: write opening screen directions for your short film
--*Pitches*

**Wed. Mar. 7**
Due/do:
--Continue writing draft of script
Discuss:
--*Final pitches*

**Week #10—Nov. 30-- Topic: Rewriting**

**Mon. Mar. 12**
Due/Do:
--Complete draft of your script and bring to class
--Reading: Cowgill, Ch. 11/Lucey, Ch. 11
Discuss:
--Rewriting, problem-solving, common pitfalls
--In-class exercise

**Wed. Mar. 14**
Due/do/discuss:
--Bring script questions & problems to class
--Discuss where to go from here in the film industry

***Exam Week—Mon. Mar. 19***

*FINAL SCRIPT DUE* in my office by 4:00 p.m.