

## WEST LOS ANGELES COLLEGE

9000 Overland Boulevard Culver City CA. 90230 [www.wlac.edu](http://www.wlac.edu)

### SYLLABUS

Cinema 5: Section 7614 “**INTRODUCTION TO SCREENWRITING**”

Instructor: L. Casser Email – [casserl@wla.edu](mailto:casserl@wla.edu)

**Fall 2015** Location: Culver City High School: AVPA

Class Hours: Mondays 3:15 – 7:55PM

Office Hours: Mondays 2:45 – 3:15 (by appointment)

### COURSE SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES:

This course will use lecture, readings from successful screenplays, screenings, and classroom writing exercises to teach the student how to craft a dramatic film narrative for movies or television. The student will gain an understanding of how the screenplay evolves from concept to script. In addition to learning screenplay structure and development, the course will review basic narrative elements of such as character and plot. The student will be introduced to the elements of dramatic writing, how to create conflict, construct scenes and write dialogue. The course will explore the specific demands and special requirements of visual storytelling, and introduce the student to professional techniques for writing for the film industry.

### STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

DEFINE and DISCUSS key screenwriting concepts

ANALYZE scenes and scripts according to their dramatic and cinematic potential

CREATE and REVISE short scenes and scripts that demonstrate an understanding of key storytelling principals as they relate to film and television.

This course will also facilitate the following **INSTITUTIONAL LEARNING OUTCOMES:**

COMMUNICATION

CRITICAL THINKING

AESTHETICS

### CLASS POLICIES

**Because this course includes lab hours, you must be present for writing exercises and workshops.**

Attendance is mandatory. Up to three (excused) absences are allowed. After that, you could be dropped. Students are expected to attend every class meeting, to arrive on time and stay throughout the class period. Excessive absenteeism will lower your grade, as well as walking in and out of class. 3 tardies = 1 absence. Students may be dropped from class for excessive tardiness. When you arrive in class, make sure you are prepared to work, have any necessary supplies, and assignments that are due. Check your messages before class, then put all electronic devices away. No texting during class!

Walking in and out of class is rude and disruptive. If you need to leave early, or have some other problem, you need to notify me in advance. **Break time is included in class hours and will be scheduled according to the convenience of the class. You may contact me E-mail at [casserl@wla.edu](mailto:casserl@wla.edu).** If you have a problem, I encourage you to communicate with me in a timely manner, through e-mail, or you may set up a time during designated office hours. **Please check your E-mail at least once a week for communications from me or the college regarding class issues or other updates! (make sure WLAC E-mail does not get sent to spam!)**

## College Policies:

### Academic Integrity (Plagiarism)

In accordance with code 9803.28, academic dishonesty is prohibited and will not be tolerated in this class. Violations of academic integrity include, but are not limited to, the following actions: cheating on an exam, plagiarism, working together on an assignment, paper or project when the instructor has specifically stated students should not do so, submitting the same term paper to more than one instructor, or allowing another individual to assume one's identity for the purpose of enhancing one's grade. Academic dishonesty of any type, such as cheating or knowingly furnishing false information, by a student provides grounds for disciplinary action by the instructor or college. In written work, no material may be copied from another without proper quotation marks, footnotes, or appropriate documentation.

- Plagiarism will result in a zero for the assignment, possible dismissal from the class and disciplinary action from the college. You will not receive credit for any essay missing previous drafts, citations and/or a Works Cited page.

### Student Conduct

According to code 9803.15, disruption of classes or college activities is prohibited and will not be tolerated. Refer to the catalog and the Standards of Student Conduct in the Schedule of Classes for more information.

### Recording Devices

State law in California prohibits the use of any electronic listening or recording device in a classroom without prior consent of the instructor and college administration. Any student who needs to use electronic aids must secure the consent of the instructor. If the instructor agrees to the request, a notice of consent must be forwarded to the Vice President of Academic Affairs for approval (WLAC College Catalog).

For more information refer to the attached link:

[http://www.wlac.edu/academics/pdf/WLAC\\_12-14Catalog\\_Policies.pdf](http://www.wlac.edu/academics/pdf/WLAC_12-14Catalog_Policies.pdf)

## Campus Resources

As stated earlier in this syllabus, if you are having problems, don't let them snowball. Come and talk with me and check out some of the campus resources available to you.

### Office of Disabled Student Programs and Services (DSP&S)

Student Services Building (SSB) 320 | (310) 287-4450.

West Los Angeles College recognizes and welcomes its responsibility to provide an equal educational opportunity to all disabled individuals. The Office of Disabled Students Programs and Services (DSP&S) has been established to provide support services for all verified disabled students pursuing a college education. DSP&S students may qualify for: priority registration, registration assistance, special parking permits, sign language interpreters and assistive technology (WLAC College Catalog).

### Instructional Support (Tutoring) & Learning Skills Center

Heldman Learning Resources Center (HLRC) | (310) 287-4486

## TEXTS AND SUPPLIES:

### **THE SCREENWRITER'S WORKBOOK by Syd Field**

The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers by C. Vogler

PRODUCED SCREENPLAYS (screenplays will also be assigned throughout the course and will be supplied or available for free at [www. dailyscript.com](http://www.dailyscript.com))

COMPUTER, SCREENWRITING SOFTWARE, USB Memory Stick (recommended)

## EVALUATION:

Evaluation by instructor is based on student's attendance, punctuality, class participation and completion of in-class and assigned writing exercises, presentations and assignments. At a minimum, by the end of the course, and equivalent to a final exam, students will be expected to have completed the first act (30-40 pages) of a feature length screenplay, to be accompanied by a beat sheet or treatment outlining the story to fade-out, OR, a completed, well- structured, three-act screenplay for a dramatic short film (12–20 pages).

### BREAKDOWN POINTS

In class writing exercises and presentation (Lab/Workshop) 15 points

Logline: 10 points

Outline: 15 points

Treatment: 20 points

Screenplay: 40 points

90-100=A 80-90=B 70-80=C 60-70=D 59 and below =F

All writing assignments, except those designated as in class writing exercises, **MUST BE TYPED.**

**Assignments must be turned in by the designated date to receive full credit.** DO NOT e-mail me your assignments. They **WILL NOT** be accepted when submitted online.

## COURSE CONTENT:

This is a course in creative writing, adapted to the specialized field of writing for filmed entertainment. Screenwriting is a rigorous craft as well as an art. In addition to student writing, the course will consist of lecture, discussion, script analysis and screening films and scenes from films. Reading and analyzing scripts, and screening films will assist the student in understanding effective story structure, scene development, dialogue and characterization. Lecture will include discussion of basic elements of dramatic writing; unity, conflict, theme, plot and subplot. Students will become familiar with professional screenwriting techniques such as Syd Field's Paradigm, character arcs, beat outlines, treatments and scene cards used in mapping out the screenplay. This course is designated as a laboratory course, and time will be provided for classroom writing exercises and workshop. Classroom writing exercises and assignments are designed to assist the student in conceptualizing and shaping his/her own script, as well as providing practice in creating effective characters, developing the plot, scene construction and writing dialogue. Later in the semester, students will form into smaller writer's groups (workshops) to critique and support one another as they develop their concepts and their scripts progress. The instructor will be available to consult individually with students at all stages of students' works-in-progress.

## COURSE TOPICS AND DATES:

Note: This syllabus and class schedule is subject to change if circumstances warrant it. Check your email for changes screenings, due dates, etc.

**Weekly homework includes reading from the required text, writing, reading screenplays and screening films as assigned!**

Mon. 9/14

Introduction: Storytelling; art and craft. Terms: i.e. story, plot, genre, etc.

Exercises: Logline favorite film. Narrative.

Screening: QUEST FOR FIRE (visual storytelling)

Assignment: **Read screenplay (TBA -1), write logline.** (scripts available in class)

Mon. 9/21 SCREENPLAY LOGLINE DUE.

Topic: Choosing your story: identifying concept, theme, character, premise, conflict, etc.

Developing the logline.

Exercises: Premise, “what if”. Three sentences; action and character.

Screening: SHAKESPEARE IN LOVE

Assignment: **YOUR LOGLINE due 9/28! Read Screenplay(2), write premise.**

Mon. 9/28 YOUR LOGLINE ASSIGNMENT DUE, & SCREENPLAY PREMISE.

Topic: Character Development: Backstory. Arc; revelation; change, conflict motivation, need/and or desire, conscious vs. unconscious. Archetypes.

Exercise: Identify your premise and main characters. Narrative 1<sup>st</sup> revision.

Screening: BEASTS OF THE SOUTHERN WILD

Assignment: **Bio (backstory) two main characters due 10/5!**

Mon. 10/5 CHARACTER BIOS DUE

Topic: Act Design: Arc of the story; inciting incident, acts, plot (turning) points, crisis, climax, resolution.

Exercise: Discuss characters & arc. Structure your story, set up, confrontation, resolution. **Beat sheet.**

Screening: Scenes from GET SHORTY

Assignment: **Script Outline due 10/12**

Mon. 10/12 SCRIPT OUTLINE DUE

Topic: Exposition: Scenes and Sequences; action, rising intensity, raising the stakes, levels of conflict.

Exercise: Identify key scenes and sequences. Critique Outline: narrative revision.

Screening: HIGH NOON

Assignment: **Treatment, due 11/2.**

Mon. 10/19

Topic: Writing Scenes: unit of change; levels of conflict, structure (beats), setting, dialogue.

Exercise: Write key scene your screenplay.

Screening: Scenes from ANNIE HALL

Assignment: **Read Screenplay (3), summarize.**

Mon. 10/26

Topic: incorporating image systems, action and atmosphere, non-verbal messages.

Exercise: workshops; discuss treatment, read and critique scenes.

Screening: A BEAUTIFUL MIND

Mon. 11/2 **TREATMENT DUE**

Topic: Narrative Styles: POV; single or multiple, narrator (reliable, unreliable) V.O.

Exercise: workshops; read and critique treatments

Screening: Scenes from USUAL SUSPECTS

Assignment: **Write your script! Due 12/14**

Mon. 11/9

Topic Narrative Styles Con't. LINEAR/NON LINEAR

Workshops: writing the screenplay

**ASSIGNMENT: YOUR Favorite Film Scene or Sequence Narrative Analysis/Presentation (see handout) due 11/16**

Mon. 11/16 SCENE ANALYSIS/PRESENTATIONS DUE

Topic: Mise En Scene: Location as character; Scene Analysis Presentation

Exercise: Workshop; story/script issues or problems: critiques (peer group and instructor)

Screening: ETERNAL SUNSHINE OF THE SPOTLESS MIND

Mon. 11/23

Topic: Analyzing/evaluating the screenplay (professional script coverage) Scene Analysis Presentation

Workshops: story/script issues: critiques con't.

Screening: ADAPTATION

Mon. 11/30

Topic: Writing Resources. Marketing: Festivals, Expos, Agents. Intellectual property rights (WGA registration) Scene Analysis Presentation con't.

Workshop Script: story/script issues: rewrites and revisions

Mon. 12/7

Topic: Writing for multiple platforms ie. TV/Games/Online Web based entertainment.

Scene Analysis Presentations con't.

Workshop Scripts: polish

Mon. 12/14 **SCREENPLAY DUE!**

Topic: Writing resources. Screenwriting Festivals. WGAW Registry. Development.

Screening: Documentary FROM PAGE TO SCREEN