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MAR 415.01: Short Form Screenwriting

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MEDIA ARTS 415: SHORT FORM SCREENWRITING

COURSE SYLLABUS – FALL 2014

11:10 am – 1:30 am Tuesday - McGill Hall 227

INSTRUCTOR: Jason Gutzmer

jason1.gutzmer@umontana.edu (406)880-2247

office hours by appointment.

Course Description:

Story-telling is one of if not the oldest art form. It is how we have made meaning of our world for centuries and the story for film is no different. Much of our shared human world vision comes from a common language and that language has been shaped by the archetypes, story structures, and the elements of craft that each culture uses to tell stories. Film scripts are the foundation of the most dynamic art form we have today.

This course will use a lecture/workshops model driven by your work. Over the short semester you will develop several short scripts, and at least one polished shooting script. You will read and critique the work of your peers and analyze professional scripts that have been made into films.

At the end of the semester you should have well crafted scripts with three dimensional characters and good story structure that can be made into short films.

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION

Attendance is mandatory. You are part of a workshop and this is your job, your peers are counting on you. The more you put into the assignments and workshops, the more you'll get out of the class and the farther along you'll be at the end of it. Let's make the most of our time together. Think of our class meetings as work meetings. You must be prepared and professional. Participation does not mean merely attending class, it means engaging constructively and thoughtfully in class conversations.

Don't miss class and don't be late. If you must miss a class, let me know ahead of time. You are allowed one unexcused absence. Further unexcused absences will affect your final grade.

BOOKS

Howard, David & Mabley, Edward: *The Tools of Screenwriting, A Writer's Guide to the Craft and Elements of a Screenplay*. This book is easily ordered off Amazon. Chapters of it will be available through Moodle.

Munroe, Roberta Marie: *How Not to Make a Short Film: Secrets from a Sundance Programmer*. Chapters will be available through Moodle.

SCRIPTS AND FILMS

We will read scripts and watch films as part of class assignments. A good way to improve your screenwriting is to read as many scripts as possible. Immerse yourself in screenplays this semester. The Mansfield Library has some holdings. Many more screenplays are available online at sites such as SimplyScripts.com. They may not always be the final version, but you'll still learn a lot from them. You can also, of course, purchase copies.

ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING

Students in MAR 415 will compose three scripts and several smaller works as detailed below. The scripts must be new, not work composed for or used in other MAR classes.

You should bring your very best work to class, writing that has been carefully conceived, labored over, and edited. Your grade will be determined in large part by the quality and timeliness of the work you produce.

Deadlines. If an assignment is late, it will be marked down 10%. You will receive a ZERO on any assignment submitted more than one week late. See the schedule that follows for specific dates. Be sure to meet all deadlines. Do not miss class on a day your work is to be critiqued.

Grading. Your grade will be influenced by your participation in class, including the quality and professionalism of your critiques. Read your classmates' work thoroughly, and come ready with notes, reactions and questions. Bring all student work to class for discussion.

Assignments and their point value: (Out of 100 possible points.)

Premise and Synopsis, Script #1: 5

Script #1 (6 – 10 pages): 20

“Premise Plus” for Script #2: 10

Script #2 (12 – 16 pages): 20

Script #3 (new script OR a continuation of an earlier script, 8 – 12 pages): 20

Significant Revision (pick one script): 15

Attendance and Participation: 10

Scripts will be assessed on the following:

- Facility with storytelling techniques: Character development. Motivation. Exposition. Conflict.
- Facility with special concerns of screenwriting: Visual writing. Dialog. Sound.
- Facility with screenplay format.

- Facility with editing. (Spell check. Proofread.) Hitting the requested length.
- Punctual delivery.
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Readings

You are responsible for reading all assigned work. Come to class ready to discuss it in an active and productive way.

A WORD ABOUT CRITIQUES

Critiques should be focused on constructive notes designed to help the writer move to the next level with his or her script. When preparing your notes on someone else's script, ask yourself: What's working in this piece? What's not? Then try to articulate both things as clearly as you can to the writer. Again, professionalism is key.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

See the student handbook for your responsibilities. You must turn in original work. No adaptations are permitted in this class unless you are adapting your own work and I have approved the adaptation in advance.

PRIVACY

What is said in class meetings should not go outside the class. We will strive to treat each other with professional respect and courtesy.

NOTE: All students in this course must use Final Draft (<http://www.finaldraft.com/>) or Celtx (<http://celtx.com/>) software.