4893 Producing for Film

The goal of this course is to acquaint the student with the overall film/video making process thru the lens of the producer - how to take a film idea from conception to completion:

* We will examine in depth the world of the producer (whose role so often overlaps that of the director) as s/he finds and sells a concept, budgets, schedules, assembles a crew, oversees postproduction, and markets his/her project.
* We will learn how the producer operates in the “Hollywood” system – from dealing with agents and managers to finding talent and developing screenplays.
* We will explore the role of the executive/producer in Hollywood and take a hands-on approach the learning the story development process including the following areas:
  + Script Coverage
  + Story Notes
  + Finding and pitching intellectual properties

Texts:

Required: **Producing and Directing the Short Film and Video** by Peter Rea and David Irving (Fifth Edition); *also, The MPE Motion Picture, TV, and Theatre Directory for Services and Products (free, courtesy of your instructor)*

Required for graduate students: **Screenplays TBD**

**Recommended Reading:**

Save the Cat! by Blake Snyder

Story by Robert McKee

Syd Field, *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting* (Dell Publishing Company, 1984)

The Writer’s Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers 3rd Edition by Christopher Vogler

**Short Films:**

<https://www.studiobinder.com/blog/best-short-films/>

<https://nofilmschool.com/Best-Short-Films-of-All-Time-on-YouTube>

<https://www.shortoftheweek.com/>

**Grade: (**Note that final grades for this class will deploy the university’s plus/minus system.) Quizzes (3) 30%

Coverage (1) 10%

Story Notes (1) 10%

In class/written pitches (4) 20%

Proposal: 30%

Your **final grade** as computed above may be **raised** or **lowered** up to **12** percentage points based on the quality, timeliness, and consistency of such "ungraded" class work as:

* your participation in class discussion;
* your proposal project script summary
* your assigned budget items report;
* your preliminary proposal;
* and, especially, the execution of all aspects of your final project.

Note that missing class, arriving late, or leaving early all tend to diminish the quality of one's class participation. Please note further that missed crew assignments or lackadaisical fulfillment of crew assignment responsibilities will very quickly lower one's final grade the full 12 points. Such behavior will also result in your peers treating you as an outcast.

The only reason laptops should be used during class is if you have bought the text on line and I ask you to refer to it during lectures. If you have a special need to take notes on your laptop, see me tonight for special permission to do so. The only reason you should be checking your phone during class is if there is some current emergency requiring you to do so. You must notify me the day of such an emergency either by email or in person before class begins. Failure to comply with these policies will result in a poor evaluation of your class participation, and thus lower your overall grade in the class.

Class schedule and assignments are subject -***and likely*** -to change at the discretion of the professor. It is the student's responsibility to be aware of all such changes as announced in class, even if the student should be absent on the day such announcements are made. Students are also expected to check their university email on a daily basis for any communications I may need to make to the class outside of our regular meetings.

In addition to the reading assignments listed below, expect a few additional assignments from sources outside the text.

**Script Coverage Assignment**

The class will do a complete set of coverage on a script assigned by the professor.

Coverage guidelines:

A coverage report consists of a grading grid, a log-line, and a comments summary on the front page, and a story synopsis and a comments section. The synopsis should hit all the major story points: set-up, inciting incident, end of Act I, beginning of Act 2, midpoint, end of Act 2, beginning of Act 3, climax, resolution (without calling them by name). Synopsis should be between 1 to 1.5 pages long. Comments should address theme, characters, plot and structure, dialogue, and commerciality. Comments should be between 1 to 1.5 pages long. Coverage are due (3) weeks after they are assigned at 9 AM (on the day of class) on Turnitin.

**Script Story Notes Assignment**

Each student will be responsible for creating a full set of story notes on the script assigned by the professor. A PDF copy of script will be available on the class website. Story notes are due (2) weeks after they are assigned at 9 AM (on the day of class) on Turnitin.

Story Notes guidelines:

1. Opening paragraph should discuss the strengths of the script no matter how few.

2. Second paragraph should discuss the goal of the rewrite. What the group hopes to accomplish.

3. Third paragraph introduces general points to consider.

4. Every succeeding paragraph discusses a specific note, starting with the most important note.

5. Use bullet points for specific notes.

Story note samples will be available on the class website.

**Original Idea**

For four weeks students will submit a new and original movie idea based on or inspired by the genre outlined in the class (such as magazine article, life story, public domain, or an original idea…).

* Each pitch should be a brief but clear overview of the story, preferably structured into three acts – each act at least 1 paragraph – and be no longer than one page.
* The paper is due the morning of class each week, 9 AM on Turnitin. Please include a link to the underlying material (if applicable) in the paper.

### 2020 Class Schedule

1/22 Overview

* Intro and Overview of Class
* Overview of Syllabus
* Screening: Apple commercial with Spike Jonze and Behind the scenes
* Screening: Jay Frasco’s short film
* Lecture:
* The story development process. Finding concepts to sell (scripts, books, remakes, life rights…). Who to send them to (agents, lawyers, and managers…) attaching writers, packaging ideas to sell…
* Keeping Up with Hollywood (a brief intro to the major news outlets of “the biz”: Variety, the Hollywood Reporter, Deadline Hollywood, …)
  + This will set up a weekly “Monday morning meeting” where we discussed what happened in Hollywood since our last class (box-office, script or package sales, casting/directing attachments to projects, and general Hollywood insider info)
* The business of the “studio system”
* The Heroes Journey structure from Christopher Vogler’s, The Writer’s Journey, Mythical Structure for Writers.

1/29 The Script

* Text: Chapter 1. The Script pp. 9-27
* Discussion: Monday morning meeting
* Screening: Short Film from **Vogue and Reese Witherspoon**
* Lecture:
  + The Heroes Journey archetypes from Christopher Vogler’s, The Writer’s Journey, Mythical Structure for Writers

2/5 Finance and Breakdowns

* Text: Chapter 2. Finance pp. 33-43
* Chapter 3 Breakdowns pp. 47-53
* Discussion: Monday morning meeting
* Screening: God of Love (watch doc and short film and discuss)
* **Lecture: Script Coverage and how to do it. Give out script coverage assignment.**

2/12 Scheduling

* Text: Chapter 4. Scheduling pp. 65-77
* Discussion: Monday morning meeting
* Screening: Rocket Jump - Breakdowns
* Guest lecturer: TBD (watch doc and short film and discuss)

2/19 Budgeting and Insurance

* Text: Chapter 5. Budget pp: 81-100
* Insurance: Appendix C. pp. 395-397
* Discussion: Monday morning meeting
* **QUIZ #1**

2/26 Crew and Actors

* Text: Chapter 6. Crew pp: 103-117 and Chapter 7. Actors pp: 119-132
* Discussion: Monday morning meeting
* Lecture: Story Notes and how to create them/give out story notes assignment.
* Screening: Rocket Jump Series - Safety on the Set
* Safety Text: Appendix B. pp. 385-391
* **Project Due: Script Coverage Assignment**

3/4 Location and Art Direction

* Text: Chapter 8. Location pp. 146-151 and Chapter 9. Art Direction pp: 153-170
* Discussion: Monday morning meeting
* Screening: Rocket Jump Series
* Guest Lecturer: TBD

**3/11 Spring Break**

3/18 Crew and Actors

* Text: Chapter 6. Crew pp: 103-117 and Chapter 7. Actors pp: 119-132
* Discussion: Monday morning meeting
* Safety Text: Appendix B. pp. 385-391
* ***Discuss Final Proposal Project***

3/25 Location and Art Direction

* Text: Chapter 8. Location pp. 146-151 and Chapter 9. Art Direction pp: 153-170
* Discussion: Monday morning meeting
* Lecture: Story Notes and how to create them/give out
* story notes assignment.
* Screening: Rocket Jump Series - Safety on the Set
* **QUIZ #2**

4/1 Camera and Sound

* Text: Chapter 10. Camera pp. 206-221 and Chapter 11. Sound pp: 227-238
* Discussion: Monday morning meeting
* Lecture: The Pitch -- key elements of a great pitch. How to pitch your ideas to buyers, financiers, writers, directors, managers and agents.
* Give out Pitch assignment #1

4/8 Production on Set, Post Production

On Set Text: Chapter 12. On Set pp. 243-247, 257-271, Text: Chapter 13. pp. 277-310

* Discussion: Monday morning meeting
* Screening: Foley Artists: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UO3N_PRIgX0>
* Pitching in class – original idea or documentary
* **Project Due: Story Notes assignment due.**

4/15 Pix Finishing, Distribution and Music Clearance

Distribution/Exhibition

Text: Finishing p. 333, 335, 346, Chapter 14. pp. 311-335

Appendix C pp. 393-394

Text: Chapter 16. 349-364

* Discussion: Monday morning meeting
* ***GIVE OUT and DISCUSS FINAL***
* Pitching in class –life story or torn from the headlines

4/22 **QUIZ #3**

Pitching in class – the adaptation

4/29 Pitching in class – public domain

5/6 Proposal Presentations (appropriate attire required) during final exam Session as scheduled by the university *(note:* ***mandatory attendance by all students****)*

* *Grad Proposals Also Due 5/6*

**Final Proposal Assignment**:

Each student will create a proposal for a short film based on the script TBD (requirements detailed on 3/18 entry above) on 5/6.

The **finished written proposal**, due on **5/6** must include the following:

• a two page introduction to the project that gives a brief treatment of the story, describes the style and tone of the proposed film and sells its potential appeal to specific audiences and/or its commercial viability

• a complete script

• a detailed line-item budget (assume you are paying for everything\*\*)

* thorough, complete breakdown sheets for every scene

• precise location lists and the names of the people from whom you would need location clearances

• a detailed pre-production, production, and post-production schedule. (further details of these and any additional requirements for this proposal will be made in class).

\*\*Also note that equipment, services, or items that are being donated (by this university or any other entity) or performed gratis must be accounted for with appropriate “In-Kind” line-item budget figures.

**Additional Proposal Assignment for Grad Students**:

**Proposal Assignment Requirements for Graduate Students**

Each of you will use this assignment to create the proposal you will be submitting to the entire graduate production faculty for your first independent project, which you will shoot and finish next Fall. This will be for a very short film or documentary, not much more than five minutes long. In addition to fulfilling the requirements listed above, there are two important additional requirements for this proposal:

1. You need to list the exact dates you intend to shoot and the equipment you wish to check out on those dates; and,
2. You need to include a list of your crewmembers – by position and name, and with the film/video production course work those crewmembers have to their credit. If you recruit someone from outside the department/university to work on your film, explain why s/he is qualified for the role they will play. This will constitute ½ of your proposal grade with the other ½ being the proposal noted above.

**The final due date for this proposal is MARCH 18. (If you are proposing a documentary project, see me at the conclusion of the second class to discuss the different nature of some of your proposal requirements. Your oral presentations at the end of the semester will be based on this short proposal.**