COLLABORATIVE WRITING & THE DYNAMICS OF POWER
(TOPICS IN CREATIVE WRITING)

Instructor – Aurorae Khoo

CRWR-SHU 200 1 – Spring 2019
Wednesdays 2:45PM – 5:15 PM, PDNG_603 (and 603C)

SYLLABUS

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

We will explore the power dynamics of collaboration, especially as it pertains to groups working together on creative projects. We will use theories of organizational behavior to improve group productivity and analyze your interactions with your peers. The class is a writing workshop that will mimic a (television) writing staff.

This class will teach you how to write a short film script that can be produced and filmed. However, you will be challenged to create a group-written script and NOT an individual project.

To practice these concepts of writing, leadership, and collaboration, you will be pitching your ideas and then forming your own writing staff, where you will create a concept for a film, outline the script, write the script, and then revise it all as a group.

What are the interpersonal politics involved in a group tasked with completing a creative project? How do gender, race, age, and class affect this? How can we make a work team more efficient, cohesive, and blind to bias?

Since this course has no prerequisites, basic screenwriting concepts such as character creation, visual writing, dialogue writing, and scene structure will be covered.

You will also be watching many short films and contrasting Chinese films and television with foreign programming.

Your main assignments this semester will be:

--Studying short films.

--Pitching a concept for a short film.
--Outlining a short film as a group.

--Writing a 20-30 page short film as a group. (This mimics how US television staffs work, except those scripts are 30 pages for comedies and 60 pages for dramas.)

--The class will culminate in a public presentation of your group’s script. If there is time, you will work on your own original television show concept.

This syllabus is subject to change based on availability of guest speakers and actors for the final performance.

LEARNING OUTCOMES:
--Gain basic mastery of dramatic storytelling, screenwriting concepts, formatting, and dramaturgy.

--Write an original, entertaining, and well structured short film script.

--Turn concepts of leadership and collaboration into practice with an actual mock writing staff.

--Cast, produce, and direct actors to perform your script for an invited audience.

RECOMMENDED READING:


REQUIRED READING:

Film scripts (available online or distributed by instructor)

Organizational Behavior Management Articles (distributed by instructor)
ASSIGNMENTS:

There will be in-class and take-home writing assignments, which will be read and discussed in class. Please have Xerox copies for each member of the class and the instructor, and be sure to keep a copy of everything you turn in.

All writing must be neatly typed and legible. Please be sure to put your name, the name of the assignment, the date, and number your pages.

You will be required to write in standard script format that is PERFECT, and that means no misspellings, typos, or grammatical errors. Always proof your work!!! This standard of excellence is no joke and not to be taken lightly. It is demanded in the professional world.

If English is your second or third language, I highly recommend you go to the Academic Resource Center EACH WEEK and have a writing tutor help you with your homework, as the basic mechanics of your writing must be FLAWLESS.

WARNING: This writing course has a heavy workload. So pace yourself and don’t wait to finish your assignments the night before they’re due. Give yourself ample time to REWRITE and PROOF. Write every day. Again, this is what professional writers do.

All work is expected to be turned in on time. Paper copy to the instructor, not by e-mail. Consistently late work drops a grade. If it is impossible to make a class, find out the assignment from your classmate.

GRADING CRITERIA:

Completion of assignments, creative content, professional presentation and growth during the semester are of great importance. The assignments are cumulative and build upon one another.

Also important is your participation and promptness. That means if you don’t ATTEND CLASS, you deny yourself the opportunity to hear your classmates’ feedback. Even worse, you rob your classmates of your input. The class will be
run like a professional “writers’ room.” So there will be constant, interactive discussions with only occasional lectures.

Specifically, your grade will be based on these factors:
-- Take-home assignments (40%)
-- In-class assignments and participation (20%)
-- Final project: from concept, to outline, to actual script, to rewrite, (to public presentation) (40%). You can’t write the final assignment the weekend before it’s due. Throughout the semester, you will go through the script writing or outline writing process.
-- Late homework will be penalized a half-letter grade. If homework is excessively late it may or may not be accepted. It is up to the instructor’s discretion. In addition, you may not receive detailed feedback on the assignment.

ATTENDANCE POLICY:

Because this class is so dependent on in-class assignments and participation, you are only allowed one excused absence (that’s an e-mail BEFORE class, preferably at least 24 hours in advance) and one unexcused absence.

-- A third absence (i.e. no participation) lowers your final grade by a half letter.
-- A fourth absence lowers your final grade a full letter.
-- A fifth absence will result in dismissal from the class.
-- Be aware, two late arrivals or early dismissals (15 minutes or more) equal an absence.

***A word to the wise: Just because I don’t say anything doesn’t mean these policies are lax or your class conduct isn’t being noted.***

If you turn in all your work, if that work is on time, if it is competent, and if you consistently add to our class discussions, then you will earn no less than a “B.” I do not easily or frequently give out “A” grades. This is reserved for students who accomplish all of the above and whose work is of high quality.
CONSULTATION:
Office hours by appointment Wednesdays 12:30-2:30PM, PDNG 928, e-mail: ak155@nyu.edu. Other times to meet are the hours after class. If that doesn’t work, we’ll arrange something else.

DISABILITIES STATEMENT:
If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need accommodations for this class, it is your responsibility to contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu) for further information. Students who are requesting academic accommodations are advised to reach out to the Moses Center as early as possible in the semester for assistance.

Please note that accommodations are not retroactive, and that accommodations based upon disability cannot be provided until you have presented your instructor with an accommodation letter from Student Disability Services. Your cooperation is appreciated.

CLASS SCHEDULE:
WEEK 1 – 2/13/19
--Introductions. Discuss syllabus. Discuss the writers’ room and the workshop method of critique.
--Keeping a binder for class.
--The difference between screenplays and prose.
--Watch an award-winning short film.
--Screenplay format.
--Where do we get ideas from?

--In-class writing exercise: meditation on a character.
--Break class into TWO GROUPS for presentations.

ASSIGNMENT:
--Take your in-class writing exercise, the meditation on a character, and write a scene for that character. Use screenplay format to write a brief scene, 2 pages. (Consult “The Hollywood Standard” book, if you have questions on screenplay format.)

--Watch more award-winning short films.
---Everyone: Get screenwriting software.
---Get a binder for this class.
---Buy a highlighter.
---OPTIONAL: Read “Tools” pg. 1-29, pg. 46 section on “Conflict.”

WEEK 2 – 2/20/19
---Discussion of protagonist, character motivation, objective, obstacles, antagonist.
---Review how to critique in the workshop format.
---Present your character meditation scene to the class. (2 pages)
---How to write up a short film idea.

ASSIGNMENT:
---Half the class prepares a presentation about your favorite TV show from your home country currently on the air. How is this different from US programming? (15 min per person)
---Half the class prepares a presentation about an outstanding short film from your home country. How is this different (or not) from Western film? (15 min per person)
---Write up 1 original short film idea appropriate for a 20-30 minute short film.

---OPTIONAL: Read “Tools”
Pg. 33-36 Time and the Storyteller
Pg. 37-39 The Power of Uncertainty
Pg. 43-45, Protagonist and Objective
Pg. 47-49 Obstacles
Pg. 49-51 Premise and Opening
Pg. 55-57 Theme
Pg. 58-59 Unity
Pg. 63-65 Characterization
Pg. 66-68 Development of the Story
Pg. 68-70 Dramatic Irony
Pg. 88-89 Visuals
Pg. 91-94 The Dramatic Scene

WEEK 3  – 2/27/19
---Student presentations on favorite television shows and short films. How are these different from U.S. programming? (2 hours)
---Go over original short film ideas.
--How to pitch a short film. This will determine semester group project.

ASSIGNMENT:
--E-mail your original short film idea to your classmates by Saturday 11:59PM.
--Read your classmates’ short film ideas.
--Prepare a five-minute pitch of your short film.
--Read Organizational Behavior Management article on power on politics (posted on NYU Classes).

WEEK 4 – 3/6/19
--Pitch your short film idea. (40 min)
--Put in requests for which writing staff you want to work on. How to hire a writing staff?
--Talk about pitches and short film ideas. How storytelling can serve you in the business setting.
--Lecture on power and politics from Organizational Behavior Management perspective. How do these theories play out in a writing staff? How about any group collaborating on a project?

ASSIGNMENT:
--Continue watching short films.
--Read the short film script “De’Sha.”
--Chosen showrunner puts together mood board, sample actors, and film clips for their original short film. Up to 15 minute presentation.

WEEK 5 – 3/13/19
--Reveal showrunner, who chooses their second in command.
--Showrunner does mood board presentation of their short film, which is class’ semester group project.
--How to write a “beat sheet” and a “detailed outline” (1 hour)

ASSIGNMENT:
--Showrunner turns in their revised short film summary to their staff.
--Write a logline, theme, character goals, and “beat sheet” (brief outline) for your showrunner’s short film.
--OPTIONAL: Read visual writing handouts.

WEEK 6 – 3/20/19
--Model how to break an outline as a group.
--Showrunner of staff continues breaking your outline as a group. Instructor observes group dynamic.
--If there’s time, visual writing workshop.

ASSIGNMENT:
--Showrunner meet with your staff to work on breaking your outline as a group.
--Staff members write your detailed outlines.

--OPTIONAL: Read “Tools”
Pg. 30-31 externalizing the internal, subtext
Pg. 60-62 exposition
Pg. 81-83 Activity and Action
Pg. 84-87 Dialogue

WEEK 7 – 3/27/19
--Showrunner and staff finish breaking your outline as a group. Pitch to the “production company.”
--Instructor observes group dynamic.
--If there’s time, scene writing workshop on conflict.

ASSIGNMENT:
--Staff revises their detailed outline.

WEEK 8 – 4/3/19
--Go over revised draft of detailed outline.
--Staff gives feedback on showrunner and themselves in context of organizational behavior management.
--If there’s time, begin group writing process.

ASSIGNMENT:
--Showrunner and the group revises the outline if needed.
--Staff writes their section of the 20-30 page script based on the revised outline.
--OPTIONAL: Read Chapter 11 “Managing Conflict,” text and PowerPoint (posted on NYU Classes).

WEEK 9 – 4/10/19
--Go over interpersonal feedback on showrunner and staff (confidential). How do you manage conflict?
--Discuss how do you make your workplace better? How do you make the writers’ room / group process better?
--Staff thinks about re-organization of writers’ room. New showrunner? New second in command? Penalties for staff members not performing?
--If there’s time, discuss the readings on “Managing Conflict,” from an Organizational Behavioral Management perspective.
--Continue group writing 20-30 page script.

ASSIGNMENT:
--Stiffs revise their section of the script, based on revised outline.
--Stiffs think about reorganization of your writers’ room.
--Showrunner and staff begin their pass to unify script.
Showrunner responsible for meeting the deadline to turn hard copy into instructor.

WEEK 10 – 4/17/19
--Staff presents their first draft of their script.
--Reorganize staff if need be.
--Go over how to prepare for your public presentation.

The final performance is done in conjunction with Corey Sullivan’s “Making Theater Class,” which meets Fridays from 2:30PM-4:20PM in PDNG_828.

ASSIGNMENT:
--Showrunner and staff meet to revise script. Showrunner responsible for final pass and meeting the deadline.
--Begin preparing for your public presentation. Ex: Phineas & Ferb

WEEK 11 – 4/24/19
--Staff presents the second draft of their short film script.
--How would you make your writers’ room better? More productive?
--Assign people to bring food for the reception.

--OR FIELD TRIP or GUEST SPEAKER, TBA

ASSIGNMENT:
--Showrunner and staff meet to revise their short film script.
--Continue preparing your public presentation, cast actors, and rehearse for public performance.
WEEK 12 – HOLIDAY, NO CLASS 5/1, MEET 5/5/19
--Showrunner, staff, and actors rehearse for public performance of short film script.

ASSIGNMENT:
--Showrunner and staff continue to revise script.
--Showrunner, staff, and actors rehearse for public performance.
--Bring food for the reception after the public performance.

WEEK 13 – 5/8/19 PUBLIC PRESENTATION
--Turn in final draft of the group’s 20-30 page short film script to the instructor.
--Showrunner gives feedback on staff. Staff gives feedback on showrunner using theories of organizational behavior to frame your observations (confidential).
--Public presentation some time the week of 5/8/19. Students bring food for post-show reception. Day and time TBA.

The final performance is done in conjunction with Corey Sullivan’s “Making Theater Class,” which meets Fridays from 2:30PM-4:20PM in PDNG_828.

ASSIGNMENT:
--Write up 2 ideas for original television shows. A logline and 1 paragraph summary.

WEEK 14 – 5/15/19 LAST DAY OF CLASS
--FIELD TRIP or GUEST SPEAKER from film or television production company. (alternate date is 4/24/19)

What are the current trends in US - China co-production in film and television?

--OR learn how to create your own television show. How is the Western market or your home country different from the Chinese market?
--Go over your original television show ideas.
REQUIRED SCREENWRITING SOFTWARE

--Final Draft 10 or 11:
The industry standard. NYU will provide a license for the semester. You may also buy it online. Watch for coupons on NYU Classes.

***It helps if your entire staff is on the same software. If you are all on Final Draft, I can type into your drafts.***

SOURCES FOR TELEPLAYS

--Free scripts
www.simplyscripts.com

www.script-o-rama.com

--Scripts for purchase
www.scriptcity.com