ADVANCED TV WRITING

MRTS 4470 - Spring 2024   Office Hours: Mon (12pm-1 and 5pm-6)
Instructor: Josh Gilbert (josh.gilbert@unt.edu)   & by appointment via Zoom

Course Description and Goals:

Writing for series television is a unique endeavor. For those of you who have taken the 4465 TV Writing class, you already have a pretty good idea what is involved in terms of the development, structures, formats, styles, and processes that go into creating, selling and working on a narrative scripted series. (If you didn't take that class – don't worry. We will do a bit of a crash course at the beginning to get you up to speed and as a refresher for those who *did* know it before, but forgot it all over the break…)

I'll tell you honestly: this class will be the closest experience you will get to being in a working writers' room outside of being hired on an actual TV series. The reason I feel confident in saying this is because this class *IS* a writers' room… only without the pay, of course. (Not like any of you are in it for the money anyway, right?) While we won't have the benefit of being together five days a week for 10-18 hours a day - like most shows - we will be doing the same job they do.

What does that mean? Very simply: we are going to develop and write an entire season of a new show this semester. Relax, I know that sounds like a lot. You might even be thinking that it sounds impossible, but I promise you, it's not. Being part of a writers' room is a powerful thing. It means you've got a whole group of people working right along with you. And it also means you will have a room full of creative folks who can not only help you improve every scene you write but they will help you become a better writer in the long run too. It's true. Writers' rooms can work some serious magic.

Along with that, you are going to create an original pilot of your own. So, at the end of this, you'll have two brand new scripts under your belt. That said, there's a lot of writing to do. Hopefully, that doesn't scare you. After all, I assume that's why you're here. If you've never written anything before, you're going to be lightyears ahead of most other aspiring writers out there. And if you have written a script or two, you're going to have even more arrows in your quiver.

Either way, I promise, the effort will be worth it.

Materials:
You will be saving money on textbooks for this class (because there are no required books), but you will need to have access to FINAL DRAFT screenwriting software. The reason for this is because, unlike in previous writing classes where Final Draft was one of a number of options, we will all need to be on the same software platform in order to be able to access each other's work, do rewrites, etc.

Final Draft is the industry standard. If you plan on writing for film or television, this is the software you're going to be using on pretty much any job you get.

We will talk about other potential options for accessing this software on the first day of class, but for any of you who plan to either work in the industry or want to continue to write scripts in the future, buying it now is much more affordable than if you wait until after you graduate. (With the Educational discount for students, the cost is $99 – regular price is $250).

How our Class will work:

This is a small size class by design – 10 to 12 people is a good average for a working writers' room. But that makes it all the more important that <u>everyone participates in the process</u>. The series we will create, develop and write over the next 15 weeks needs everyone's voice. That's the key to any writers' room – the more involved people are, the better the group is able to build more creative ideas and make more interesting choices that couldn't have been done as easily if it was just someone working alone.

Grading:

Because this is an Advanced class, I will not be giving you dozens of assignments or testing you on memorized material or anything like that. This is a creative venture, and one that relies on everyone doing their part. Your final grade will break down into 2 areas: <u>Assignments</u> and <u>Participation</u>.

- **ASSIGNMENTS (50%)**
  You will notice on the schedule below that there aren't many assignments -- which makes each of them uniquely important. Due dates will often be given to you weeks in advance so you can budget your time and be able to work ahead, if desired. This is because DEADLINES ARE CRITICAL. That's true in this class, but more importantly, that's how it works if you want to work in this industry – as a writer, or in pretty much any other capacity. *If you don't turn scripts in on time as a professional writer, it will affect your ability to keep your job, as well as your chances of getting any other job after that.*
    o Work has to be done **on time** or (just like in a professional writers' room), you will slow everyone else down.
    o Grades on any individual assignment <u>will be reduced by one letter grade</u> if not turned in by the stated deadline and <u>will go down one additional letter grade</u> every day after that.

- **PARTICIPATION (50%)**
  Being present and on time for class half of the deal. *You have to be <u>in the room</u> to be a <u>part of the room</u>*, so don't miss out. Not that I want you to come to class if you picked up some horrible disease over Spring Break or something. I'm not a monster. But there is no real way to "make up" a session you didn't attend. So, do your best to <u>always</u> be here. If you have a good reason why you can't come, tell me. Whatever the case, I NEED TO KNOW AT LEAST 24 HOURS BEFORE CLASS if you will not be able to attend. This way we can try to work something out so that you won't lose out entirely. The main point is always **communication**.
    o **Attendance Policy**: 2 missed classes will require a conference to discuss overall grade. 3 absences reduce overall by a <u>minimum of 1 letter grade</u>, 4 or more is <u>failure of the course</u>.
    o **Lateness**: If you're late in a writers' room, they'll get someone else who wants the job more than you -- so get in the habit now. (2 lates = 1 absence.)

Policy on A.I.
While technology can be an exciting and fascinating thing, it can also be detrimental. Until there are ways to regulate, organize and be transparent about the use of artificial intelligence, it will be a major issue for the entertainment industry at large, and a particularly destructive one (creatively and financially) for writers.

<u>For that reason, the use of generative AI tools (such as ChatGPT, etc.) are not permitted. Any use of AI tools for assignments will be considered a violation of UNT's Academic Dishonesty Policy.</u>

Course Schedule and Assignments:

This schedule is subject (but not likely) to change. Any alterations will be discussed in class and/or updated on Canvas as well as through email.

Week 1 -   Topics: Introductions, TV Writing Refresher, New Ideas

Week 2 -   Topics: Class Show, Individual Series

Week 3 -   Topics: Pilot and Season 1

Week 4 -   Topics: Continuing Series, Individual Pilots
                  ASSIGNMENT: Individual Pilot Outlines

Week 5 -   Topics: Episode Break (2-4)

Week 6 -   Topics: Episode Break (5-8)

Week 7 –   Topics: Episode Break (9-12)
                  ASSIGNMENT: Series Episode Assignments

Week 8 -   ---*SPRING BREAK*---

Week 9 -   Topics: Individual Pilots Discussion

Week 10 -   Topics: Cohesive Tone and Characters, Room Notes (1-3)
                  ASSIGNMENTS: Tradeoff Rewrites + Individual Pilots

Week 11 –   Topic: Tracking Character Arcs, Room Notes (4-6)

Week 12 –   Topic: Elevating Side Stories, Room Notes (7-9)

Week 13 –   Topic: Nuts and Bolts of Production Notes, Room Notes (10-12)
                  ASSIGNMENT: Tradeoff Network Note Rewrite

Week 14 -   Topic: Table Reads
                  ASSIGNMENT: Final Episode Rewrites

Week 15 -   Last Class

Class Policies:
Every TV script that's ever been sold and/or produced has been subject to notes. Lots of them. That's how it works in Hollywood, and that's how it works in this class. So aside from your own writing, you will also be required to offer constructive, beneficial assessments of your fellow classmates' material. But unlike many Network executives, producers, stars and other fellow writers you may deal with in the future, this class will be a friendly and encouraging place. (Keep in mind - they're all going to have a chance to give you notes as well - so be honest, but be kind.)

Use of Student Work
A student owns the copyright for all work created for their <u>original</u> series and neither the University nor any other student is entitled to its use without the writer/creator's permission.

For the Class Created/Written Series, scripts and development materials may be used by future Media Arts classes for possible production. In such a case, all credits will include the original creators'/writers' names on the show and any individual episodes produced.

Academic Dishonesty Policy:
As described above, the use of generative AI tools (such as ChatGPT, etc.) are not permitted. Any use of AI tools for assignments or in-class work will be considered a violation of UNT's Academic Dishonesty Policy: *According to UNT Policy 06.003, academic dishonesty occurs when students engage in behaviors including, but not limited to cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, forgery, plagiarism, and sabotage. A finding of academic dishonesty may result in a range of academic penalties or sanctions ranging from admonition to expulsion from the University.*

Acceptable Student Behavior:
Student behavior that interferes with an instructor's ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom/Zoom session/discussion and the instructor may refer the student to the Dean of Students to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct. The University's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including discussion groups, etc. deanofstudents.unt.edu/conduct.

ADA Statement:
UNT makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide a student with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding one's specific course needs. Students may request accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. For additional information see the ODA website at disability.unt.edu

Retention of Student Records Policy:
Student records pertaining to this course are maintained on the Canvas online system in a safe electronic environment for one year. Students have the right to view their individual record; however, information about students' records will not be divulged to other individuals without proper written consent.

Student Perceptions of Teaching Effectiveness (SPOT):
Student feedback is important and an essential part of participation in this course. The student evaluation of instruction is a requirement for all organized classes at UNT. The survey will be made available during weeks 13 and 14 to provide students with an opportunity to evaluate how this course is taught. Students will receive an email from "UNT SPOT Course Evaluations via *IASystem* Notification" (no-reply@iasystem.org) with the survey link. Students should look for the email in their UNT email inbox. Simply click on the link and complete the survey. Once students complete the survey they will receive a confirmation email that the survey has been submitted. For additional information, please visit the spot website at www.spot.unt.edu or email spot@unt.edu.

Technical Assistance
Part of working in the online environment involves dealing with the inconveniences and frustration that can arise when technology breaks down or does not perform as expected. Here at UNT we have a Student Help Desk that you can contact for help with Canvas or other technology issues.

UIT Help Desk: UIT Student Help Desk site (http://www.unt.edu/helpdesk/index.htm)
Email: helpdesk@unt.edu   **Phone**: 940-565-2324
In Person: Sage Hall, Room 130   **Walk-In Availability**: 8am-9pm. **Laptop Checkout**: 8am-7pm
Telephone Availability: Sun: noon-12am, Mon-Thurs: 8am-12am, Fri: 8am-8pm, Sat: 9am-5pm

For additional support, visit Canvas Technical Help (https://community.canvaslms.com/docs/DOC-10554-4212710328)

Student Support Services
UNT provides mental health resources to students to help ensure there are numerous outlets to turn to that wholeheartedly care for and are there for students in need, regardless of the nature of an issue or its severity. Listed below are several resources on campus:

- Student Health and Wellness Center (https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-health-and-wellness-center)
- Counseling and Testing Services (https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services)
- UNT Care Team (https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/care)
- UNT Psychiatric Services (https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-health-and-wellness-center/services/psychiatry)
- Individual Counseling (https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services/services/individual-counseling)

Other student support services offered by UNT include:
- Registrar (https://registrar.unt.edu/registration)
- Financial Aid (https://financialaid.unt.edu/)
- Student Legal Services (https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-legal-services)
- Career Center (https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/career-center)
- Multicultural Center (https://edo.unt.edu/multicultural-center)
- Counseling and Testing Services (https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services)
- Pride Alliance (https://edo.unt.edu/pridealliance)
- UNT Food Pantry (https://deanofstudents.unt.edu/resources/food-pantry)

Academic Support Services:
- Academic Resource Center (https://clear.unt.edu/canvas/student-resources)
- Academic Success Center (https://success.unt.edu/asc)
- UNT Libraries (https://library.unt.edu/)
- Writing Lab (http://writingcenter.unt.edu/)

Sexual Assault Prevention
UNT is committed to providing a safe learning environment free of all forms of sexual misconduct, including sexual harassment sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. Federal laws (Title IX and the Violence Against Women Act) and UNT policies prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex, and therefore prohibit sexual misconduct. If you or someone you know is experiencing sexual harassment, relationship violence, stalking, and/or sexual assault, there are campus resources available to provide support and assistance. UNT's Survivor Advocates can assist a student who has been impacted by violence by filing protective orders, completing crime victim's compensation applications, contacting professors for absences related to an assault, working with housing to facilitate a room change where appropriate, and connecting students to other resources available both on and off campus. The Survivor Advocates can be reached at SurvivorAdvocate@unt.edu or by calling the Dean of Students Office at 940-565- 2648. Additionally, alleged sexual misconduct can be non-confidentially reported to the Title IX Coordinator at oeo@unt.edu or at (940) 565 2759.

Prohibition of Discrimination, Harassment, and Retaliation (Policy 16.004)
The University of North Texas (UNT) prohibits discrimination and harassment because of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, or any other characteristic protected under applicable federal or state law in its application and admission processes; educational programs and activities; employment policies, procedures, and processes; and university facilities. The University takes active measures to prevent such conduct and investigates and takes remedial action when appropriate.

Transmission and Recording of Student Images in Electronically-Delivered Courses
No permission is needed from a student for their image or voice to be transmitted live via videoconference or streaming media, but all students should be informed when courses are to be conducted using either method of delivery.

Any potential Zoom sessions may be recorded by the instructor in case anyone needs to revisit the material or discussion but will only be available to students who are enrolled in the class, and will be deleted when the course is over. To protect everyone's privacy, if you are in this class, you must agree to abstain from recording or taking screenshots of our Zoom calls, Canvas discussion board threads, or in-person discussions, etc.

If you have any other questions on anything, please let me know. Always happy to chat, so don't hesitate to reach out at any point.

Thanks and see you soon!