FTV 131: INTRODUCTION TO TV WRITING
UCLA FILM AND TELEVISION SUMMER INSTITUTE

COURSE DESCRIPTION & GOALS

This course will dive into the process of writing a television series. By the end of the course, you will:

1. Complete a TEASER and FIRST ACT of a TV pilot
2. Complete an OUTLINE for the rest of the pilot episode
3. Complete a SERIES DOCUMENT overviewing your series
4. Be able to PITCH the core of your series in 5 minutes or less

The course will study the current landscape of television, with an in-depth look at how projects are purchased, developed, and produced. You will become familiar with some of the major “buyers” and their specific mandates.

You will examine the different avenues of “breaking in” with a specific eye toward writing an excellent original pilot.

This course will explore your own tastes, experiences, and interests in order to help you develop a pilot and series that reflects your unique perspective.

Throughout the course, you will be reading and watching several noteworthy television pilots in order to analyze some current “best practices.” These pilots will be treated as texts for the course and will integrate discussions accordingly.

You will learn the fundamentals of dramatic story structure and be able to analyze the structural elements in your favorite shows and your own work.

You will also gain experience workshopping material. This includes giving and receiving feedback. You will learn how to respectfully provide notes, receive a note, pitch story ideas, and punch-up scenes.
REQUIRED READINGS

SCRIPTS
Black-ish by Kenya Barris
Breaking Bad by Vince Gilligan
Emergence by Michele Fazekas & Tara Butters
Friday Night Lights by Peter Berg
Insecure by Issa Rae
Killing Eve by Phoebe Waller Bridge
Stranger Things by The Duffer Brothers
Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt by Tina Fey and Robert Carlock

BOOKS
The Power of Film by Howard Suber
TV Writing on Demand by Neil Landau
The TV Showrunner’s Roadmap by Neil Landau

SUGGESTED BOOKS
Bird by Bird by Anne Lamott
Story Maps: TV Drama by Daniel Calvisi
TV Outside the Box by Neil Landau
Writing the TV Drama Series by Pamela Douglas

HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS
• All assignments MUST be to the Professor. Late assignments will lose 15% points per day late.
• The assignment listed at the bottom of each CLASS will be DUE the day of the FOLLOWING CLASS. For example, the assignment listed at the bottom of CLASS 1 will be due no later than one hour before the beginning of CLASS 2.

READING/VIEWING ASSIGNMENTS
• The READING/VIEWING assignment listed at the bottom of each CLASS will be DUE the day of the NEXT CLASS. For example, the assignment listed at the bottom of CLASS 1 will be due no later than one hour before the beginning of CLASS 2.

COURSE SCHEDULE
CLASS 1: INTRO AND FORMAT
• Icebreaker
• Rules/syllabus
• Fundamental elements of a dramatic TV series
• What’s a logline?
• In-class character exercise

READING/VIEWING:
*Breaking Bad* pilot.
*TV Writing on Demand*, Intro and Chapter 1

ASSIGNMENT:
**Part 1:** Write a LOGLINE for the story of your life (must include the word “BUT”).
**Part 2:** Write TWO loglines for potential series you are interested in developing (must include the word “BUT”). Be prepared to share these loglines in class.
**Part 3:** Write a paragraph about what you hope to get out of this course.

CLASS 2: CHARACTERS AND CONFLICT
• What makes a great CHARACTER?
• What do we mean by CONFLICT and STORY ENGINE?
• Power of Paradox

READING/VIEWING:
*Friday Night Lights* pilot.
*TV Writing on Demand*, Chapter 7

ASSIGNMENT:
**Part 1:** Pick three characters from *Friday Night Lights* and answer how they are introduced and what is their main problem?
**Part 2:** Write THREE ORIGINAL CHARACTER BIOS for characters you’d be interested in exploring.
**Part 3:** Using screenplay formatting, write the dialogue of an argument between two characters. (More parameters will be given during class). 2 pages.

CLASS 3: DRAMATIC STRUCTURE
• Tentpoles of structure
• Pitching your series

READING/VIEWING:
*Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt* pilot

ASSIGNMENT:
**Part 1:** Complete the first half of KNOW THY SERIES handout.
Part 2: Be prepared to PITCH the gist of your SERIES. You are allowed to use the notes from the handout.

CLASS 4: PITCHES/BISOCIATION
- Let’s hear your pitches
- How to take a note
- What is BISOCIATION?
- What’s funny? Bisociation and comedy

READING/VIEWING: 
- *Killing Eve* pilot
- *The Power of Film*: “Bisociation”; “Paradox.”

ASSIGNMENT: 
- Part 1: FINISH the KNOW THY SERIES handout.

CLASS 5: ELEMENTS OF A SCENE
- Review KNOW THY SERIES handouts
- Discuss MAJOR STORY TURNS

READING/VIEWING: *Emergence* pilot

ASSIGNMENT: 
- Write TEN potential A story ideas for episode 2 of *Emergence*. Write FIVE potential B story ideas. Be prepared to pitch these in class.

CLASS 6: THE WRITERS ROOM
- Writers room simulation activity.
- Breaking a story.
- Room behavior.

READING/VIEWING: 
- *Black-ish* pilot
- *TV Showrunner’s Roadmap*, Intro and Chapters 1 & 2

ASSIGNMENT: 
- Complete the BEAT SHEET handout.

CLASS 7: WORKSHOP
- Workshop BEAT SHEETS
- Notes and feedback
READING/VIEWING:
TV Showrunner’s Roadmap, Chapters 3 & 4
Insecure pilot

ASSIGNMENT:
Revise BEAT SHEETS

CLASS 8: TONE/VOICE/REWRITES
• Writing that leaps from the page
• Writing habits
• Craft vs. Voice

READING/VIEWING:
Choose a pilot that is a COMP for your series and be prepared to discuss

ASSIGNMENT: Write your TEASER

CLASS 9: WORKSHOP
• Workshop TEASERS
• Notes and feedback

READING/VIEWING:
Stranger Things (Montauk) series bible

ASSIGNMENT:
Part 1: Revise TEASER
Part 2: Start ACT ONE

CLASS 10: TV LANDSCAPE
• Networks vs. Cable vs. Streaming
• How shows get made. How shows get cancelled.

ASSIGNMENT:
Part 1: Be prepared to give short 2-5 minute pitch about your series.
Part 2: Start your SERIES DOC

CLASS 11: BREAKING INTO THE BIZ
• Practice pitches
• Receive feedback
• Guests TBD
ASSIGNMENT:
Polish your FINAL TEASER, FIRST ACT, BEAT SHEET, and SERIES DOC.

CLASS 12: REVIEW
• Individual meetings (schedule TBD)

ASSIGNMENT:
Polish your FINAL TEASER, FIRST ACT, BEAT SHEET, and SERIES DOC
(DUE by end of the day SUNDAY)

STATEMENT OF GRADING
Attendance and participation are mandatory. All written assignments including need to be carefully proofread. You will be marked down for careless errors.

Participation: 20%
Assignments: 20%
Beat Sheet: 20%
Teaser and First Act: 20%
Final Pitch: 20%

OTHER CLASS POLICIES
No electronic devices out unless we are reading someone’s pages and you need to use your device to read. But devices go away when we are discussing.

This course aims towards creating a positive creative community. A huge part of being in a workshop is learning how to provide useful supportive feedback for your peers without simply poking holes in their stories. Disrespect to your classmates will not be tolerated.
FTV 104: SUMMER INSTITUTE SYMPOSIUM

Course Description

This course is a speaker series featuring guests from various aspects of the film, television and digital media business. In today’s entertainment industry, aspiring Writers, Producers, Animators, and Filmmakers need to have an in depth understanding of the business issues that influence creative decisions. Additionally, aspiring executives, agents and attorneys need to understand how the creative process works to guide their business decisions and their success.

Each week during the course, we will focus on various areas within the entertainment business. Students will have the opportunity to hear from a diverse group of entertainment professionals and ask questions pertaining to their careers. The goal is for students to gain understanding of the relationships, experience and knowledge that must be achieved to build a career in this business.

1. Course Requirements
Course work consists of attending weekly class meetings, participating in a meaningful manner in Class Discussions and in Q&A sessions with Guest Speakers, and writing a brief Summary Paper at the end of the course evaluating the panels.

2. **Weekly Class Topics**

Class One: The Ins and Outs of the Development Process

Class Two: Agents & Managers on the State of the Business Today

Class Three: Branding and Distribution in the Digital Age

Class Four: Creative Collaboration Across Disciplines

Class Five: Reality TV, Talk Shows, and Documentary Filmmaking

Class Six: Diversity and Change in an Evolving Media Landscape

(For additional detail and guest speakers please see the attached weekly course schedule. Weekly topics subject to change based on guest speaker availability.)

3. **Summary Paper**

At the end of the course students are required to write a paper summarizing their thoughts on the Guest Speaker panels and how the panels have influenced their view of the industry and their own career aspirations.

4. **Grading**

66%: Participation in Class Discussions

Guest Panels 33%: Summary Paper

*The use of laptops are strictly prohibited during sessions with guest speakers and will adversely affect your grade. Our guests are volunteering their time, it’s important that we make the most of their visit.*

**Lecture and Discussion Topics**

**Week One: The Ins and Outs of the Development Process**

In this class session, students will learn about the development process from both the creative perspective of the writer and producer as well as the business perspective of the executive.

- Introductory Questions regarding the Guest Speakers’ Career Paths
- Open Q&A Session between Students and Guest Speakers
- Summary Questions regarding priority Discussion Topics
Specific Discussion Topics will include: How do writers and producers come together? Where do ideas originate? How does the process of developing and producing television differ from features and how do you determine if an idea is better suited as a TV or movie? What types of writers and filmmakers are executives looking to work with? What are the elements of a successful pitch? What are executives looking for when evaluating purchasing decisions? What are the steps along the way from concept to script to screen?

Specific guest speakers for all sessions will be announced closer to the course. Recent Guest Speakers have included executives from Fox, Hulu, Netflix, TNT, HBO, ABC Studios, ITV Studios America, and Awesomeness.

**Week Two: Agents & Managers on the State of the Business Today**

In this class session, students will learn from agents and managers who represent writers, directors, producers, and department heads across physical production to learn what those representatives consider when they look at Writers, Directors, Animators and other artists as potential clients and what they feel are the challenges and opportunities in the film and television business today.

- Introductory Questions regarding the Guest Speakers’ Career Paths
- Open Q&A Session between Students and Guest Speakers
- Summary Questions regarding priority Discussion Topics

Specific Discussion Topics will include: How does one become an agent or manager and what skills are necessary for success? What is the difference between an agent and manager, what services do they provide clients, and how are they compensated? What does it mean to package a project? How do agents and managers promote diversity and inclusion in the film and television business? In what ways has the role of an agent or manager evolved over time?

Recent Guest Speakers have included agents and managers from CAA, ICM, Circle of Confusion, and Grandview.

**Week Three: Branding and Distribution in the Digital Age**

In this class session, students will learn from executives of networks and studios about the significance of branding and distribution, and how they work to support their companies individual brand as well as the impact of evolving forms of distribution on the types of content they produce.

- Introductory Questions regarding the Guest Speakers’ Career Paths
- Open Q&A Session between Students and Guest Speakers
- Summary Questions regarding priority Discussion Topics
Specific Discussion Topics will include: What do brands signify to consumer and is there a difference between a television network’s brand and that of a feature studio? How are these brands used to target specific consumers? How do brands evolve? What’s the difference between broadcast, cable, and streaming television in terms of the audience they’re looking to serve? How did the DVR change television? How has streaming impacting the television and theatrical businesses? In what ways does this new form of distribution expand or limit the types of stories being told? What does “windowing” mean to studios and theaters? What does the movie going experience look like 10 years from now?

Recent Guest Speakers have included executives from Sony, Disney, Amazon, CBS, and HBO.

**Week Four: Creative Collaboration Across Disciplines**

In this class session, students will learn about the creative process from above and below the line talent, and how collaboration across departments is vital to any successful production.

- Introductory Questions regarding the Guest Speakers’ Career Paths
- Open Q&A Session between Students and Guest Speakers
- Summary Questions regarding priority Discussion Topics

Specific Discussion Topics will include: What are the various ways one department influences another? How can creative intent evolve from conception on the page to performance on screen and the end product in post? In what specific ways does music and editing shape what we watch and influence how we feel? What’s the role of the director on set and how does it vary depending on if the production is a movie, a pilot, or episodic work? When is it appropriate to give creative input? What are the challenges of working with a cast and crew of 100+ individuals?

Recent Guest Speakers have included writers, actors, and production talent working on films and series for CBS, HBO, TNT, ABC, Hulu, Netflix, Sony, Disney and Fox

**Week Five: Reality TV, Talk Shows, and Documentary Filmmaking**

In this class session, students will learn about reality TV, documentaries, and narrative nonfiction from a variety of individuals who work across the medium.

- Introductory Questions regarding the Guest Speakers’ Career Paths
- Open Q&A Session between Students and Guest Speakers
- Summary Questions regarding priority Discussion Topics

Specific Discussion Topics will include: How does development differ from traditional scripted content? What are the various forms of distributing such series or movies? Where does financing come from? What role has the rise of true crime podcasts impacted the industry? How have streaming services impacted demand for such content? How has the increasing quality and
accessibility of high-grade consumer technology influence documentary filmmaking? Is unscripted television a cost-effective alternative to scripted? What skills and experience is necessary today to be successful in the industry?

Recent Guest Speakers have included production executives, filmmakers, producers, and agents working across the industry including projects with HBO, Netflix, Sony, Disney, and TBS.

**Week Six: Diversity and Inclusion in an Evolving Media Landscape**

In this class session, students will learn about ways filmmakers, producers and executives are working to boost diversity throughout the industry and the impact such changes or having on the types of stories being told.

- Introductory Questions regarding the Guest Speakers’ Career Paths
- Open Q&A Session between Students and Guest Speakers
- Summary Questions regarding priority Discussion Topics

Specific Discussion Topics will include: What does diversity mean and why has it been lacking for so long? In what areas has the industry improved over recent years? In what areas does it still need to do better? How do we promote diversity in all aspects of the development and production process? What is the current state of diversity as it relates to executives, agents, managers, and other gatekeepers throughout the industry? How do these gatekeepers influence the diversity that makes it to screen? What types of stories do we get to tell when fostering more diverse voices? What programs are currently in place to promote inclusion within the next generation of creative talent?

This year’s guest speakers will be a combination of writers, producers, and executives working to promote a diverse and inclusive industry.

**FOR ALL COURSES – IMPORTANT UCLA POLICIES AND INFORMATION**

Please arrive to the online class on time. If you’re going to be late/absent, please send instructor an email.

All ideas discussed in class are strictly confidential and should not be discussed with others outside of class.

Industry professionals are partially defined or rise and fall by their interactions with other Industry professionals. As such, you will be graded on your interactions in class. That means that class attendance is mandatory, as is class participation. Your feedback is invaluable to your colleagues. Therefore, you are expected to actively listen, contribute and analyze during class discussions.
ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND STUDENT CONDUCT

With its status as a world-class research institution, it is critical that the University uphold the highest standards of integrity both inside and outside the classroom. As a student and member of the UCLA community, you are expected to demonstrate integrity in all of your academic endeavors. Accordingly, when accusations of academic dishonesty occur, The Office of the Dean of Students is charged with investigating and adjudicating suspected violations. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, multiple submissions or facilitating academic misconduct. Plagiarism is a serious offense. It is the presentation of another author’s words or ideas as if they were your own. If you have any questions about documentation, quotations, and related matters, please do not hesitate to ask your instructor before submitting your work.

Please also refer to the UCLA Rules of Student Conduct at the below website:

http://www.deanofstudents.ucla.edu/Student-Conduct

STATEMENT OF EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION

University of California Diversity Statement

Adopted by the Assembly of the Academic Senate May 10, 2006

Endorsed by the President of the University of California June 30, 2006

The diversity of the people of California has been the source of innovative ideas and creative accomplishments throughout the state’s history into the present. Diversity – a defining feature of California’s past, present, and future – refers to the variety of personal experiences, values, and worldviews that arise from differences of culture and circumstance. Such differences include race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, language, abilities/disabilities, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and geographic region, and more.

Because the core mission of the University of California is to serve the interests of the State of California, it must seek to achieve diversity among its student bodies and among its employees. The State of California has a compelling interest in making sure that people from all backgrounds perceive that access to the University is possible for talented students, staff, and faculty from all groups. The knowledge that the University of California is open to qualified students from all groups, and thus serves all parts of the community equitably, helps sustain the social fabric of the State.

Diversity should also be integral to the University’s achievement of excellence. Diversity can enhance the ability of the University to accomplish its academic mission. Diversity aims to broaden and deepen both the educational experience and the scholarly environment, as students and faculty learn to interact effectively with each other, preparing them to participate in an increasingly complex and pluralistic society. Ideas, and practices based on those ideas, can be made richer by the process of being born and nurtured in a diverse community. The pluralistic university can model a process of proposing and testing ideas through respectful, civil communication. Educational excellence that truly incorporates diversity thus can promote
mutual respect and make possible the full, effective use of the talents and abilities of all to foster innovation and train future leadership.

Therefore, the University of California renews its commitment to the full realization of its historic promise to recognize and nurture merit, talent, and achievement by supporting diversity and equal opportunity in its education, services, and administration, as well as research and creative activity. The University particularly acknowledges the acute need to remove barriers to the recruitment, retention, and advancement of talented students, faculty, and staff from historically excluded populations who are currently underrepresented.