COURSE INFORMATION

FILM 3315: Screenwriting
CRN: 32875
Term: Maymester 2024
Delivery Method: In-person
Meeting Day and Time: Mondays-Fridays, 9:00 am – 2:00 pm
Location: Cotton Memorial Bldg, Room 306

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

Ramon Villa, Lecturer
Email: rvilla2@utep.edu
Phone Number: (915) 747-5129 (leave a message)
Office Location: Rm. 303A
Office Hours:

- Face-to-Face: By appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This intensive two-week workshop will equip you with the fundamental tools and discipline to write compelling dramatic scenes for the screen. We will explore the core elements of effective screenwriting, including story structure, character development, dialogue crafting, and visual storytelling. Through in-class exercises, discussions, hands-on writing assignments, and dedicated writing time, you will gain the practical skills needed to translate ideas into captivating moving images. Aiming for minimal production requirements, you will complete two short screenplays, allowing you to experiment with various film styles and storytelling approaches.

COURSE OBJECTIVES AND UNIVERSITY LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

Student Learning Objective	Outcome
Apply constructive criticism to improve your own and your peers' writing - This directly involves collaboration and working together to improve.	Teamwork Skills
Understand the basic principles of dramatic structure and scene construction - This requires analysis and understanding of complex concepts. *Develop strong characters with clear motivations and emotional arcs* - This involves in-depth character analysis and understanding of human behavior. *Utilize visual storytelling techniques to create a sense of place and atmosphere* - This involves creative problem-solving and understanding how visuals impact storytelling.	Critical Thinking Skills
Craft natural and engaging dialogue that advances the story and reveals character - Dialogue is a fundamental aspect of communication in screenwriting.	Communication Skills

Students will be able to identify and analyze how screenwriters and filmmakers utilize character development, plot, and dialogue to address social issues, challenge stereotypes, and promote awareness. Students will be able to develop characters with nuanced backgrounds and motivations that reflect the complexities of the real world, contributing to more inclusive and representative storytelling.	Social Responsibility

REQUIRED MATERIALS

Scripts and excerpts of films we discuss in the course will be supplied by the instructor.

Software: Any free screenwriting software like Studio Arc Pro. You will sign up for a free 7 day trial on the second week, so make sure you have a credit card you can use.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

Assignments for this course are assessed according to rubrics. You can find these rubrics by clicking on the appropriate link in Blackboard.

Grade Distribution:

100-90 = A 89-80 = B 79-70 = C 69-60 = D 59 and Below = F

- 20 points: Active participation in class discussions and exercises
- 20 Points: Daily/Weekly short writing assignments
- 15 Points: First ten pages of a feature film
- 15 Points: Short Film Script
- 10 Points: Peer review participation

Grading:

- A: Excellent execution of all course requirements, demonstrating a strong understanding of concepts and a clear writing voice.
- B: Above average understanding of concepts, good execution of writing assignments, and active participation.
- C: Satisfactory understanding of concepts, completion of all assignments with an average quality, and participation in class discussions.
- D: Minimal understanding of concepts, incomplete or below-average quality assignments, and limited participation.
- F: Failure to meet course requirements, including excessive absences or uncompleted assignments.

Active participation: To foster active participation, students should come prepared to class, ready to analyze how characters in assigned films interact with and challenge societal norms. Encourage students to ask insightful questions, share their analyses, and build upon their classmates' ideas to create a respectful and collaborative learning environment.

Daily/Weekly short writing assignments: To excel in the short writing assignments, students should demonstrate a deep understanding of screenwriting concepts covered in class by effectively applying them in their own original work. Their writing should offer insightful analysis that goes beyond the surface level, showcasing a clear understanding of character motivations, plot development, and visual storytelling techniques. Additionally, students should strive for clear, concise writing with proper grammar, punctuation, and organization.

First 10 pages of a feature film: This assignment challenges you to craft a captivating opening for your feature screenplay, showcasing strong story structure, compelling characters with natural dialogue, vivid visual descriptions, and adherence to standard screenplay format.

Short Film Script: The short film script assignment challenges you to craft a concise and compelling narrative, featuring well-developed characters and engaging dialogue, all while demonstrating mastery of visual storytelling and screenplay formatting.

Peer review participation: To excel in peer review, students should provide thorough, insightful feedback that helps their classmates improve their screenplays. Actively participate in discussions by asking clarifying questions and responding thoughtfully to feedback. Demonstrate respect for others' ideas by offering constructive criticism and maintaining a professional tone. These points cannot be made up, so students are expected to stay active in the course by engaging in discussion and completing assignments.

TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS

Some course content is delivered via the Internet through the Blackboard learning management system and One Drive. Ensure your UTEP e-mail account is working and that you have access to the Web and a stable web browser. Google Chrome and Mozilla Firefox are the best browsers for Blackboard; other browsers may cause complications. When having technical difficulties, update your browser, clear your cache, or try switching to another browser.
You will need to have access to a computer/laptop. Check that your computer hardware and software are up-to-date and able to access all parts of the course.

IMPORTANT: If you encounter technical difficulties beyond your scope of troubleshooting, please contact the UTEP Help Desk as they are trained specifically in assisting with technological needs of students. Please do not contact me for this type of assistance. The Help Desk is much better equipped than I am to assist you!

COURSE COMMUNICATION: How we will stay in contact with each other

Here are the ways we can keep the communication channels open:

- Office Hours: I will have office hours by appointment for your questions and comments about the course. You can request a virtual meeting and I will send you a Zoom link. Please contact me about me about the days and times available.

- Email: UTEP e-mail is the best way to contact me. I will make every attempt to respond to your e-mail within 24 hours of receipt. When e-mailing me, be sure to email from your UTEP student e-mail account and please put the course number in the subject line. In the body of your e-mail, clearly state your question. At the end of your e-mail, be sure to put your first and last name, and your university identification number.
- Announcements: Check the Blackboard announcements frequently for any updates, deadlines, or other important messages.

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION

Our class meetings are in-person at Cotton Memorial Bldg, Room 306, everyday Monday-Friday from 9:00 am to 2:00 pm, beginning May 13th through May 24th.

Active participation in the course is essential for your own learning and the overall success of the course. It helps to create a collaborative and supportive learning environment where everyone can benefit from shared insights and diverse perspectives. Your participation grade will be determined based on the following:

- **Engaged Presence:** Regularly attending scheduled class sessions and actively contributing to discussions, workshops, and exercises.
- **Preparedness:** Completing assigned readings and viewings of screenplays and film excerpts before/during class, demonstrating a clear understanding of the material through thoughtful questions and comments.
- **Meaningful Contributions:** Sharing your insights, analysis, and interpretations of the material, and building upon the ideas of others in a constructive and respectful manner.
- **Active Listening:** Demonstrating respect for your peers' perspectives, asking clarifying questions, and offering thoughtful feedback during peer reviews and workshops.
- **Additional Activities:** Completing any other activities or assignments specified in the daily modules, such as brainstorming sessions, character development exercises, or scene writing prompts.

By actively engaging in all aspects of the course, you will not only enhance your own learning but also contribute to a vibrant and enriching learning community for everyone involved.

Because these activities are designed to contribute to your learning each day, they cannot be made up after their due date has passed.

EXCUSED ABSENCES AND/OR COURSE DROP POLICY

According to UTEP Catalog, “At the discretion of the instructor, a student can be dropped from a course because of excessive absences or lack of effort. A grade of “W” will be assigned before the course drop deadline and a grade of “F” after the course drop deadline.” See Policies and Regulations in the UTEP Undergraduate Catalog for a list of excuse absences. Therefore, if I find that, due to non-performance in the course, you are at risk of failing, I will drop you from the course. I will provide 24 hours advance notice via email.

DEADLINES, LATE WORK, AND ABSENCE POLICY

Assignments

- Writing assignments will be due before class ends, daily.

- For longer assignments like feature and short film, you'll have until midnight (11:59 PM) on Fridays via One Drive. No late work will be accepted.

MAKE-UP WORK

Make-up work will be given *only* in the case of a *documented* emergency. Note that make-up work may be in a different format than the original work, may require more intensive preparation, and may be graded with penalty points. If you miss an assignment and the reason is not considered excusable, you will receive a zero. It is therefore important to reach out to me—in advance if at all possible—and explain with proper documentation why you missed a given course requirement. Once a deadline has been established for make-up work, no further extensions or exceptions will be granted.

Incompletes will not be granted.

ALTERNATIVE MEANS OF SUBMITTING WORK IN CASE OF TECHNICAL ISSUES

I strongly suggest that you submit your work with plenty of time to spare in the event that you have a technical issue with the course website, network, and/or your computer. I also suggest you save all your work in a separate One Drive Word document as a backup. This way, you will have evidence that you completed the work and will not lose credit. If you are experiencing difficulties submitting your work through One Drive, please contact the UTEP Help Desk. You can email me your backup document as a last resort.

ACCOMMODATIONS POLICY

The University is committed to providing reasonable accommodations to students with documented disabilities. Students who become pregnant may also request reasonable accommodations, in accordance with state and federal laws and regulations and University policy. Accommodations that constitute undue hardship are not reasonable. To make a request, please register with the UTEP Center for Accommodations and Support Services (CASS). Contact CASS at 915-747-5148, email them at cass@utep.edu, or apply for accommodations online via the CASS portal.

SCHOLASTIC INTEGRITY

Academic dishonesty is prohibited and is considered a violation of the UTEP Handbook of Operating Procedures. It includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, and collusion. Cheating may involve copying from or providing information to another student, possessing unauthorized materials during a test, or falsifying research data on laboratory reports. Plagiarism occurs when someone intentionally or knowingly represents the words or ideas of another as ones' own. Collusion involves collaborating with another person to commit any academically dishonest act. Any act of academic dishonesty attempted by a UTEP student is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. All suspected violations of academic integrity at The University of Texas at El Paso must be reported to the Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution (OSCCR) for possible disciplinary action. To learn more, please visit HOOP: Student Conduct and Discipline.

GUIDANCE ON ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

AI allowed only with prior permission from instructor

Use of AI technologies or automated tools, particularly generative AI such as ChatGPT or DALL-E, is ***only allowed with approval from the instructor BEFORE being used***. Without permission, you will be expected to think creatively and critically to complete assignments without assistance from these tools.

If given permission to use any of these tools, students must properly cite and give full credit to the program used upon submission of every relevant assignment. For example, text generated using ChatGPT must be cited:

> Chat-GPT(version). Date of query (year/month/day). "Text of your query." Generated using OpenAI. https://chat.openai.com/

A short paragraph describing how the tool(s) was/were used for the assignment must be included.

Using AI for brainstorming

Some AI technologies or automated tools, particularly generative AI such as ChatGPT or DALL-E, can be beneficial during the early brainstorming stages of an activity, and you are welcome to explore them for that purpose. However, keep in mind that AI-generated ideas are not your own and may hinder your ability to think critically and creatively about a problem. It is also important to remember that these technologies often "hallucinate" or produce materials and information that are inaccurate or incomplete—even providing false citations for use.

That said, you are not allowed to submit any AI-generated work in this course as your own. If you use any information or materials created by AI technology, you are required to cite it like you would any other source. Consider how this will affect your credibility as a writer and scholar before doing so. Any direct use of AI-generated materials submitted as your own work will be treated as plagiarism and reported to the Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution (OSCCR).

CAMPUS RESOURCES: Where you can go for assistance

UTEP provides a variety of student services and support. Please refer to the QR code below for a listing of campus resources or visit https://www.utep.edu/advising/student_resources/student-success-resource-hub.html.