INTRODUCTION TO SCREENWRITING
Spring 2024
T 3:30pm – 6:15pm (via Zoom)

Matthew Paul Olmos
Online Office Hours By Appointment
Matthew.Olmos@sfasu.edu
DRAM-4364-001

Overview: This is an introductory course in screenwriting.
We will look at the craft of dramatic writing and writing for the screen through various exercises, readings, as well, the process of writing original work.

We will read and watch various films, and other forms of dramatic writing, throughout the semester as examples of specific craft, and discuss the writers’ use of dramatic tools.

GENERAL OUTLINE
This course will consist of work in three major areas:
1) Dramatic writing concepts, ideas, and terms.
   We will discuss, engage, and illustrate our understanding of basic dramatic writing tools through exercises, which will be completed both in and out of class. Some will be shared with the class for the sake of discussion, others will be emailed to the instructor directly.
2) Readings/Watching.
   You will read and watch assigned films outside of class and come ready to discuss them in detail; this means there will be no discussion about if you liked them or not; rather thoughtful responses about both the ideas within the work and the techniques being used by the writer to explore them.
3) Writing and workshopping of your dramatic writing and screenplays.
   The goal of this course is to give you the tools to write screenplays of your own.
   You will be sharing your work with the class and leading discussions about your process.

You must be present in each class — present in terms of your written work, present in terms of your participation and listening to your peers, and present by responding to the conversation.

The best presence is to be impacted by something we discuss in class, and to respond in your own work.
At the end of the semester, you will have at draft of a short film (or longer) screenplay.
READING AND VIEWING
All reading assignments will be shared as PDFs unless otherwise noted. (Please do not distribute the PDFs outside of this course)
All viewing assignments will be available to stream online or rent.
*Assignments subject to change

Essays
Liz Lerman “Critical Response Process”
José Rivera “36 Assumptions on Playwriting”

Screenplays
A Quiet Place - Scott Beck & Bryan Woods
Flamin’Hot by Lewis Colick and Linda Yvette Chávez
Like It Used To Be – Bernardo Cubria
The Whale – Samuel D. Hunter
Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri – Martin McDonagh
Get Out – Jordan Peele
The Death of Eva Sofia Valdez - Cherise Castro Smith
The Farewell – Lulu Wang

Films
A Girl Walks Home Alone At Night - Ana Lily Amirpour.
Fruitvale Station – Ryan Coogler
Loving – Jeff Nichols
Mosquita y Mari – Aurora Guerrero
The Big Sick - Emily V. Gordon and Kumail Nanjiani
The Babadook – Jennifer Kent
The Whale – Samuel D. Hunter
Triangle Of Sadness - Ruben Östlund

DATES
1) Jan 23 – syllabus/discussion/freewrite
2) Jan 30 – dramatic concepts/exercises
3) Feb 6 - dramatic writing concepts/exercises
4) Feb 13 – workshop
5) Feb 20 - workshop
6) Feb 27 - workshop
7) Mar 5 - workshop
8) Mar 12 – spring break, no class
9) Mar 19 - workshop
10) Mar 26 - workshop
11) Apr 2 - workshop
12) Apr 9 – workshop
13) Apr 16 - workshop
14) Apr 23 – workshop
15) Apr 30 – last class
16) week of May 6 – finals week – Final Screenplay Due

As all classes are a unique community, reading and viewing assignments will likely change after we’ve had a chance to see where everyone is at in terms of their knowledge of dramatic writing. All reading/viewing assignments will be assigned with at least one week notice.

**GRADING**

- Attendance/Participation 40%
- Writing Exercises & Readings 30%
- Final Screenplay 30%

**ATTENDANCE**

**IS CRUCIAL TO THIS COURSE**

-TWO unexcused absences will result in a lowering of your final grade.

Attendance and punctuality are non-negotiable when working in dramatic writing. You are, as a group, building a creative community that depends greatly on each other for the development of your work. If one of you is absent—or not fully, generously present— you affect the learning and work of the entire class. Students should arrive on time and be ready to actively think aloud with your fellow writers.

Two unexcused absences will lower your final grade by a level (e.g. A to A-).

If there are circumstances that will cause you to miss more than two classes, please speak with me, so we can discuss how best to maintain your engagement with the course. Missing part of the class twice will count as an absence.

Excused absences or lateness must be agreed upon with me, via email, 24 hours BEFORE class. Letting me know you will be absent does not guarantee the absence will be excused. Excused absences will only be allowed due to extreme illness or emergency. Participation in theater productions or other college activities is not a valid excuse to miss class.
Be on time. Not only will late arrivals affect your grade (as will leaving early, or having long absences in the middle of class), but they are disrespectful to your fellow students and instructor, and detrimental to the community we are working hard to create.

ZOOM PROTOCOL
-You are expected to be fully on-camera for the duration of class; no exceptions.

-Any student not professionally on-camera during class will have their Attendance/Participation grade lowered. Please be respectful of your fellow students and their work by being fully present, as if we were all in a classroom together. Just as you wouldn’t lay in bed in classroom, or have a conversation with your roommate in a classroom, you cannot do so here.

ASSIGNMENTS
-All writing must be formatted professionally (this will be covered in class) and on time; ANY late writing will result in lower grade.

-Lack of participation in the class discussions, not reading/viewing the assigned works, will result in a lower grade.

All writing must be original. Plagiarism or the use of any material that is not written by the enrolled student in the course will result in a failing grade in the entire course and disciplinary action.

EMOTIONAL TRIGGERS
As this is a creative writing course, we may encounter emotional triggers.
If at any point you are uncomfortable because of a triggered response, you may leave the Zoom classroom, and send me an email, so I understand the situation.
You are in no way required to remain in a class where you are experiencing emotional triggers.

This class engages material covering a diverse range of race, color, religion, national origin, ancestry, sex, age, marital status, familial status, sexual orientation, and disability.
While I encourage you to formulate and express your thoughts and opinions throughout the semester, discriminatory remarks will not be tolerated and may constitute disruptive behavior under the student code of conduct.

Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) supported in this course:
1. The student will be able to form and articulate a critical analysis and evaluation of a work of film.
2. The student will demonstrate an understanding of the component areas of cinematic creation, process, study, and their interrelationships.

3. The student will demonstrate intermediate to advanced competence in one or more cinematic specialization(s).

**Student Learning Outcomes for this course (with supported PLOs):**

Students will be able to:
1. analyze the themes/structure of a screenplay (1),
2. write a screenplay in standard format (1, 2, 3), and
3. understand the process of creating a work for the screen (1, 3).

**Academic Integrity (A-9.1)**

Academic integrity is a responsibility of all university faculty and students. Faculty members promote academic integrity in multiple ways including instruction on the components of academic honesty, as well as abiding by university policy on penalties for cheating and plagiarism.

**Definition of Academic Dishonesty**

Academic dishonesty includes both cheating and plagiarism. Cheating includes but is not limited to (1) using or attempting to use unauthorized materials to aid in achieving a better grade on a component of a class; (2) the falsification or invention of any information, including citations, on an assigned exercise; and/or (3) helping or attempting to help another in an act of cheating or plagiarism. Plagiarism is presenting the words or ideas of another person as if they were your own. Examples of plagiarism are (1) submitting an assignment as if it were one's own work when, in fact, it is at least partly the work of another; (2) submitting a work that has been purchased or otherwise obtained from an Internet source or another source; and (3) incorporating the words or ideas of an author into one's paper without giving the author due credit.

Please read the complete policy at [http://www.sfasu.edu/policies/academic_integrity.asp](http://www.sfasu.edu/policies/academic_integrity.asp)

**Withheld Grades Semester Grades Policy (A-54)**

Ordinarily, at the discretion of the instructor of record and with the approval of the academic chair/director, a grade of WH will be assigned only if the student cannot complete the course work because of unavoidable circumstances. Students must complete the work within one calendar year from the end of the semester in which they receive a WH, or the grade automatically becomes an F. If students register for the same course in future terms the WH will automatically become an F and will be counted as a repeated course for the purpose of computing the grade point average.
**Students with Disabilities**
To obtain disability related accommodations, alternate formats and/or auxiliary aids, students with disabilities must contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), Human Services Building, and Room 325, 468-3004 / 468-1004 (TDD) as early as possible in the semester. Once verified, ODS will notify the course instructor and outline the accommodation and/or auxiliary aids to be provided. Failure to request services in a timely manner may delay your accommodations. For additional information, go to [http://www.sfasu.edu/disabilityservices/](http://www.sfasu.edu/disabilityservices/).

Students with documented disabilities who need course adaptations or accommodations please make an appointment with me as soon as possible.

**Mental Health and Wellness**
SFA values students’ mental health and the role it plays in academic and overall student success. SFA provides a variety of resources to support students' mental health and wellness. Many of these resources are free, and all of them are confidential.

**On-campus Resources**
**SFA Counseling Services** [www.sfasu.edu/counselingservices](http://www.sfasu.edu/counselingservices)
Rusk Building, 3rd Floor 936.468.2401

**SFA Human Services Counseling Clinic** [www.sfasu.edu/humanservices/139.asp](http://www.sfasu.edu/humanservices/139.asp)
Human Services, Room 202 936.468.1041

**Crisis Resources:**
Burke 24-hour crisis line: 1.800.392.8343
Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1.800.273.TALK (8255)
Crisis Text Line: Text HELLO to 741-741