JACK HEIFNER  
Office: GFA 215  
Office hours: by appointment  
Telephone: 468-1343  
jheifner@sfasu.edu

THR 464-001 SCREENWRITING  
THR 564-001 Spring Semester 2016  
TR 11:00 am to 12:15 pm

Required texts: William Goldman, WHICH LIE DID I TELL?  
Sidney Lumet, MAKING MOVIES

COURSE DESCRIPTION:  
Principles and techniques of writing for the screen with emphasis on standard structures, formats and practices currently used by major American studios.

GENERAL OUTLINE OF THE COURSE:  
This is a beginning course for students interested in writing for film and television. The main emphasis will be on writing screenplays, but television writing will also be included. The student who successfully completes this course will be able to write film treatments and outlines, deliver oral pitches for movies and series, and understand the basics of writing a screenplay and sit-com script. The business angles for selling projects to producers, the proper form for the presentation of professional work, as well as the vocabulary used in the film and television industry will also be covered. The course is directed towards the person who wants to write and sell their work professionally.

The course will consist of work in four major areas and these areas will overlap:

The first area will be directed towards helping the student think creatively and develop ideas for movies and sit-coms. Writing exercises will be assigned in order to get the student “writing.” The exercises will be done both in and out of the classroom, and the results will be shared with the class. Discussion is encouraged. (Approximately 25% of total class time.)

The second area will focus on the vocabulary and form used in screenplays and, in some respect, the vocabulary and form used for sit-coms, soap opera and television movies. One of the objectives is for the student to understand the guidelines and restrictions set by the industry. (25%)

The third part is an analysis of movies. Why do certain ones work and others do not? Why are some movies successful? Both required texts will be discussed since both give the student an inside look at the movie business from the point of view of two award
winning professionals. Discussion of the business of selling scripts and the “ins and outs” of the entertainment industry will be covered. The texts must be read and questions from the texts will be included on quizzes and on the final written exam. (25%)

The fourth aspect of the course is the actual writing of a movie script. During the semester the student will also be asked to write outlines and treatments, plus give oral presentations (known as “pitches”) for movies.

The goal of the class is to get the student writing and to understand how movie and television scripts are developed. At the end of the semester, the student will have written at least one partial or completed movie script. (25%)

Grading will be based upon the completion of writing projects, class participation, mid-semester and final projects, quizzes and one written exam. The mid-semester project will be the pitching of a motion picture, as well as the writing of a treatment for such. The final project will be the actual writing of a script (either the same mid-semester project or another).

All written work must be handed in to the instructor on the date assigned. All assignments done out of the classroom must be typed and in the form used by professional writers. (This form will be covered in class.)

The mid-semester project pitch will be presented orally. This is in addition to the written treatment.

The class has two divisions: 464-001 is for undergraduates and 564-001 is for graduate students. The class work will be identical except that the graduate students will have a longer screenplay due at the end of the semester. The final script will be a partial movie script of at least 30 pages for students registered in 464-001 and 90 pages for students in 564-001 who never had the class as an undergraduate student. If the graduate student had the class as an undergraduate, then their screenplay must be approximately 120 pages. Those graduate students who have taken the class in the past do not have to retake the quizzes and the final exam (unless they wish to). Their final script will count for 60% of their grade instead of 40%. The script from all students is due approximately 3 weeks before the end of the semester.

Grading will be based on the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom participation, discussion &amp; attendance</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading &amp; writing assignments &amp; quizzes</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written exam</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-semester project (pitch and treatment)</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final project (30/90 pages of an original script)</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Or for graduate students who have taken the class</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>before, the final script of 120 pages is</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hard copies of homework and reports must be given to the instructor. Nothing submitted via email will be accepted.

Students are advised not to fall behind on assignments. **Projects are due on the date assigned. Late assignments will result in a lowering of your grade.**

Tardiness will result in a lower grade.

Missing assignments or assignments that are not typed will affect your final grade.

**All work 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.

Please note that attendance is crucial to this course and excessive absences will result in a lowering of your grade. **A total of 7 excused or unexcused absences will result in a student receiving a failing grade.** In addition, excessive absences (over two) will affect your final grade. (See the School of Theatre Attendance Policy.)

**Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) supported in this course:**
1. The student will be able to analyze a script in ways that are necessary to a theatre practitioner or scholar/critic.
2. The student will demonstrate an understanding of the component areas of theatrical creation, process, production, performance, and study, and their interrelationships.
3. The student will demonstrate intermediate to advanced competence in one or more theatre specialization(s).

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

Students will be able to:
1. analyze the structure of a screenplay (1),
2. understand the purpose of a screenplay and its relationship to other aspects of filmmaking (1, 3),
3. write a script in standard format (1, 2, 3), and
4. present a story idea using a "pitch," outline or treatment (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

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/.

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