3390 Topics in Production
Topic: Narrative Structures and Story

**Professor’s information:**
Name: Lorena Padilla
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Office: 222 Umphrey Lee Center
Office Hours: Tuesday 11am-12pm or by appointment

**Required Text:**
Story Structure Architect, Victoria Lynn Schmidt

**Required Materials**
Each student must have NOTEBOOK and bring it to class everyday- as we will be doing a great deal of writing ideas in class.

A cell phone with a camera, because we will be shooting creative exercises with them.

The most important thing you need to bring to class is a desire to discover how films and TV shows work from a narrative perspective.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

You will learn how films and episodic content use the shots, the montage and the mise-en-scene to tell believable, dynamic and personal stories.

You will make short exercises with your phone to understand better how the rules of storytelling work.

You will also be learning about how to pitch your story and encourage people to go on board with your project.

Class time will consist of lectures, exercises, watching films, and giving and receiving feedback.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES/LEARNING OUTCOMES**

1. **Understanding basic story structure**
There are age-old formulas to creating good stories and they are open to interpretation as well as important to learn. In this intro course, you will learn the rules of storytelling for film, and how to use them to tell your own stories.

2. **The relation to shot to shot**
The cinematographic language is so rich, that even though everything has been said or told, maybe no one has said it like you. We will learn the rules in order to use them in our advantage.
3. Giving and receiving constructive criticism
Critique is one of the most important skills to learn as an artist who is part of a larger community. You will cultivate critique skills, both of giving and receiving. You will be able to speak articulately and profoundly about other's work as well as consider your classmate's commentary on your work in ways that will improve your skills.
IMPORTANT POINTS

1. **Workshopping guidelines**—it is absolutely necessary for the success of this class that during workshops each member of the group feels safe to speak, express thoughts and/or feelings, and at the same time is committed to intellectually and creatively challenging themselves and their classmates. This means that each member of this group needs to respect all other members—speak constructively and be thoughtful when commenting. On the other end—students receiving critique should never take it personally. Sometimes people will like your work and sometimes people will not. An openness to ideas which may differ from yours is crucial.

2. **Computers, tablets, cell phones, etc. are not allowed to be used during class time.** If you are seen using these devices during class for non-class activities, you will be asked to leave the class and you will receive an absence.

3. **What happens in the classroom stays in the classroom.** Because I want this class to cultivate your abilities in creative expression, it is important that you feel comfortable to experiment and work from your own experience if that is a creative motivator for you. With this in mind, **please keep any work shared in class confidential.** If one of your classmates writes something which for them is personal content, please do not share information about this outside of the classroom.

4. **Readings**—I will not be going through readings step by step in class, but rather referencing what you have read during our class discussions. I expect you to keep up with the readings and please feel free to ask me any questions or clarifications pertaining to them.

5. **Communication:** You are responsible for all information on this syllabus whether or not we specifically go over it in class. Throughout the semester, I may make changes to the schedule and due dates as I feel it is necessary. These possible changes, as well as other class information, will be communicated via email. Hence you **must have a working email, and should check it at least once a day.** Updated versions of the syllabus, assignments, grading rubrics, and so on (as well as equipment reservation and other necessary documents) will be posted regularly to Canvas; since I may not update Canvas every day, though, the latest emailed information will be considered the final word if it differs from the website or handed-out info.

6. **Assignments:** All assignments are **COLLECTED** on the due date; **late assignments will receive zero credit, NO EXCEPTIONS.**

7. **Attendance policy:** My attendance policy is simple: you can miss or be tardy to **two** classes. No need to say why, and no grade penalty. Your third miss or tardy, regardless of reason, will drop your participation grade by 50%, and your fourth will result in a zero for this part of the grade.

**MY EXPECTATIONS FROM YOU**

1. **Effort**
   As stated in the course description, I do not expect that all of your projects will be “perfect”, as so much of this class is about trying out new ideas. Effort, an open mind, and a willingness to step out of your comfort zone however, is incredibly important.

2. **Creativity/risk-taking**
   What makes a good director or artist? A unique, creative way of artistically expressing oneself which can hit an audience in their heart on some level. Finding your creative “voice” is something that takes years. It will also change over the period of your life— it is a fluid and thrilling relationship that you are beginning with yourself to discover what this creative voice looks and sounds like— and who it is speaking to. In this class, I expect and hope you will start this exploration.

3. **Willingness to be in a community and collaborate**
   Your professional networking starts in undergrad— with your professors and your classmates.

4. **Class participation**
   This class is all about talking, writing, and participation! I expect you to talk, ask questions, try new things, help your classmates with their projects, dig deep into your own minds and ask yourselves interesting questions, and above all, let me know immediately if there is something that you do not understand in the class materials and I will make sure to go over it with you. **The communication flow between you and I is key to the success of this class!**
UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Policy on Academic Dishonesty: Students who violate University rules on academic dishonesty (the SMU Honor Code) are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. An “F” in the course will be the recommended penalty in most cases of academic dishonesty, including any instance of cheating, plagiarism, or otherwise handing in work that is not your own. Since such dishonesty harms the individual, all students, and the integrity of the University, policies on academic dishonesty will be strictly enforced. For further information, please visit the Honor Council web site at http://www.smu.edu/honor council

Disability Accommodations: Students needing academic accommodations for a disability must first register with Disability Accommodations & Success Strategies (DASS). Students can call 214-768-1470 or visit http://www.smu.edu/Provost/ALFC/DASS to begin the process. Once registered, students should then schedule an appointment with the professor as early in the semester as possible, present a DASS Accommodation Letter, and make appropriate arrangements. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and require advance notice to implement.

Religious Observance: Religiously observant students wishing to be absent on holidays that require missing class must notify the professor in writing by the third class session, and should discuss in advance acceptable ways of making up any work missed (see University Policy No. 1.9).
**Excused Absences for University Extracurricular Activities:** Students participating in an officially sanctioned, scheduled University extracurricular activity should be given the opportunity to make up class assignments or other graded assignments missed as a result of their participation. It is the responsibility of the student to make arrangements with the professor, prior to any missed classes, to make up the work. (University Undergraduate Catalog)

**GRADING**

**A NOTE ON SUBJECTIVE GRADING:** Filmmaking is an art. And as with all arts, people may and will disagree on the caliber/brilliance/etc. of a particular project. In a classroom setting, however, ultimately the grading process requires me to qualitatively evaluate your art. If you are uncomfortable having your art graded, or with the fact that this process is inherently subjective, then you should not take this class.

**Your final grade will be assessed out of 100 percent, using the following scale:**

- **A+** = 97.0 and above
- **B+** = 87.0 to 89.9
- **C+** = 77.0 to 79.9
- **A** = 93.0 to 96.9
- **B** = 83.0 to 86.9
- **C** = 73.0 to 76.9
- **A-** = 90.0 to 92.9
- **B-** = 80.0 to 82.9
- **C-** = 70.0 to 72.9
- **D** = 63.0 to 66.9
- **D-** = 60.0 to 62.9
- **F** = below 60.0

**The breakdown of assignments is as follows:**

1. Participation/critique - 10%
2. Four creative exercises - 40%
3. Pitch Project - 25%
4. Final project - 35%

**Short Descriptions of Each Graded Item**

More detailed information will be provided in class and on Canvas.
## Class Schedule

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Homework</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Syllabus</td>
<td><em>Why digital storytelling?</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Plot, montage and dramatic structure</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Dramatic line and conflict</td>
<td><strong>EXE 2.</strong> This Fluid Moment.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Hero’s journey</td>
<td>EXE 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Story</td>
<td>EXE 2</td>
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<td>Three act structure</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Time and montage: in media res, in extrema res, premonition, flash back, flash forward</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Roller Coaster, Slice of Life, Branch and Rashomon structure.</td>
<td><strong>EXE 3.</strong> Stand Turning</td>
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|   | Construction of suspense: mystery, surprise and enigma.  
|   | *Cliffhanger*  
|   | Lean Forward Moment | EXE 3 |
| 5 | The Art of Pitching | EXE 4. Eating my Feelings |
| 6 | Complex TV  
|   | From HBO to Netflix | EXE 4 Eating my feelings |
| 7 | Pitch Project |
| 8 | Videoclip as compressed storytelling. | . |
| 9 | Film Crew and casting |