

English 254A – Short Film Writing and Production

American University of Beirut
FAS – Department of English
Spring 2022-23
Fisk 309

Professor: Doyle Avant
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Class meetings: Tue/Thu 3:30 – 4:45 p.m.

Office hours: Tue/Thu 5-6 p.m. or by appointment.
Email me to arrange a time.

CATALOGUE COURSE DESCRIPTION

A course that varies in content and focuses on a topic not currently covered in the creative writing curriculum. *Prerequisite: Consent of instructor. May be repeated for credit for a maximum of 6 credits. Annually. 3 cr. Annually.* (Humanities I)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is a writing and production workshop in which we will conceive cinematic story ideas, develop and write well-crafted original screenplays, plan the various stages of production, shoot the scripts, edit the footage and – finally – present a series of fully realized short films (2-10 minutes, depending on the assignment).

This course will be a supportive and challenging community that will experiment and take creative risks together. We will learn to make films *by making films*.

COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES

After completing the course, students should be able to:

1. respond (both critically and creatively) to a selection of short and feature films viewed in class and at home.
2. understand and re-create formal written elements of screenwriting: character, story, objective, obstacle, escalation, climax, resolution.
3. generate scene ideas and workshop them
4. develop scene idea into well executed script
5. develop / write a final film project through revisions/workshop
6. master professional script format using scriptwriting software

7. direct actors for film
8. understand and execute strategic shot design: cinematography
9. prepare and execute professional production plan in which you get the most out of your actors and production crew – in the most efficient use of time.
10. understand and execute an array of video editing strategies
11. understand and execute an array of sound design strategies
12. in sum: conceive of, write, rewrite, plan, direct and edit a silent short, a creative compelling and substantive scene (3-4 min.) and short film (7-10 min.)

COURSE RESOURCES

1. Required readings will be posted on Moodle.
2. Required films will be screened (partially) during class meetings. Students watch the remainder of each film at home. Films will be made available on USB.
3. *Some* camera, sound equipment will be available.
4. The students' phones (or DSLR cameras) and computers will be the principal technical means of production.

Software Resources

Fade-In (script writing)

iMovie^[L]_[SEP]

Adobe Premiere

Final Cut Pro

Audacity (sound design)^[L]_[SEP]

HandBrake

VLC^[L]_[SEP]

READINGS AND VIEWINGS

will include the following (subject to change) – as well as several short films:

Traffic

The Lives of Others

The Camera

Code 46

City of God

Beautiful

Fasateen

Good Will Hunting

Hello Caller

Mystic River

Erin Brockovich

Screenplays (various)

COURSE POLICIES

1. You are expected to attend *all* class meetings.
2. If you are unable to attend class, it is *your responsibility* to inform the instructor *prior* to the class meeting. Absences will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis.
3. Reading and viewing assignments are to be completed *before* the class meeting for which they are assigned.
4. Written and all other assignments should be handed in *on or before* the due dates.

Participation

As previously mentioned, a significant part of this class will be collaborative, so everyone's participation is crucial and will constitute a significant part of your final grade.

Participation includes coming to class having done the required readings and viewings^[1] and being prepared to discuss them in depth. It also includes having read your fellow students' film treatments and screenplays and being ready to actively engage in workshops. Having no opinion or ideas to contribute to the conversation is not an option – and I will assume that this means you haven't done the reading/viewing.

Once we move into production mode – everyone's ability to do her/his work with rigor will be even more crucial – as you will be part of team that depends on your duties to be executed in a timely and professional manner.

Phones and Computers

We will be using our computers and phones extensively during class meetings for^[1] ONE PURPOSE ONLY: MAKING MOVIES. Not emailing, texting, whatsapp-ing or whatever-ing. If you use them for other things I may end up owning your iPhone and/or counting you absent. If you want to know what time it is, they've invented this really cool thing called *the watch*.

Attendance

Come to class and be on time. In the film production business there is zero tolerance for flakiness. Treat this course like a dream job you're *thrilled* to have. You will lose participation points – and the good will of your fellow classmates – if you regularly arrive late. 3 late arrivals = .5 points. Arriving 25 minutes late 3 times = 1 absence.

Missing class sessions for anything other than documented medical reasons will constitute an unexcused absence.

Life is full of the unexpected, so you can miss one class session without excuse or explanation. After that, unexcused absences cost you .5 points per absence. Missing 1/5 of class sessions can result in your being dropped from the course or, if the drop period is over, receiving a failing grade. This is the last thing I want to do, so come to class.

Assignments

Complete all assignments and readings before class. Late assignments will be penalized by one letter grade (10 points) per day. Every assignment will be submitted as:

1) a hard copy and (I may do away with the hard copy) 2) an e-copy via Moodle.

If you are having difficulty with a deadline – talk to me or email me about it well in advance. It is almost always better to turn in something imperfect on time than something perfect two or three days late.

All your other classes

Please note that I will **not** excuse you from class to take quizzes, exams, or to do so-called "mandatory" presentations for your other less important courses..

I promise not to schedule mandatory sessions during your other course meeting times.

Your other professors are not allowed to require you to be anywhere Tuesdays and Thursdays from 3:30 – 4:45 – or any other time you have class meetings.

I am well aware that many professors routinely dis-respect you and violate this very clear AUB policy.

If they try to violate this policy, please bring it to my attention – well in advance – and I will diplomatically work something about with him or her that will not get you in trouble or jeopardize your grade in that class. You are empowered.

On the other hand, if you inform about this rule-breaking professor at the last minute and miss class, you will be counted as absent.

STUDENT ASSESSMENT

Grades will be based upon total points received from:

Engaged Participation in discussion and workshops	15%
Assignments (written responses, screenplays, production plans, scene/film)	60%
Final Film	25%

Grading Policy: The assessment will be **criterion-based**.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Attend all class meetings
2. Actively engage in all critique/workshops.
3. Actively engage in discussion of all readings and viewings
4. Conceive, write, direct and edit a Scene (film – 3-4 min.)
5. Conceive, develop, write, direct and edit a short film (7-10 min.)

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Academic Integrity:

Please refer to AUB Student Code of Conduct:

<http://www.aub.edu.lb/pnp/generaluniversitypolicies/Documents/StudentCodeConduct/StudentCodeConduct.pdf> , in particular section 1.1, which concerns academic misconduct including cheating, plagiarism, in-class disruption, and dishonesty. Please be aware that misconduct is vigorously prosecuted and that AUB has a zero tolerance policy. Course policy is that **credible evidence of cheating will result in course failure.**

Unique Learning Needs of Students with Disabilities:

AUB strives to make learning experiences as accessible as possible. If you anticipate or experience academic barriers due to a disability (including mental health, chronic or temporary medical conditions), please inform me immediately so that we can privately discuss options. In order to help establish reasonable accommodations and facilitate a smooth accommodations process, you are encouraged to contact the Accessible Education Office: accessibility@aub.edu.lb; +961-1-350000, x3246; West Hall, 314.

Non-Discrimination

AUB is committed to facilitating a campus free of all forms of discrimination including sex/gender-based harassment prohibited by Title IX. The University's non-discrimination policy applies to, and protects, all students, faculty, and staff. If you think you have experienced discrimination or harassment, including sexual misconduct, we encourage you to tell someone promptly. If you speak to a faculty or staff member about an issue such as harassment, sexual violence, or discrimination, the information will be kept as private as possible, however, faculty and designated staff are required to bring it to the attention of the University's Title IX Coordinator. Faculty can refer you to fully confidential resources, and you can find information and contacts at www.aub.edu.lb/titleix . To report an incident, contact the University's Title IX Coordinator Trudi Hodges at 01-350000 ext. 2514, or titleix@aub.edu.lb . An anonymous report may be submitted online via EthicsPoint at www.aub.ethicspoint.com