ADAPTING THE BRITISH HIT FOR AMERICAN TELEVISION

UG 1509 – 001 (20200
Monday 3:30-6:10  Spring 2017  INSTRUCTOR - D.B. Gilles
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Office Hours: Tuesday & Wednesday 2:00-5:00
By Appointment  Room 911   721 Broadway

The objective of this course is three-fold:

(1) To introduce students to writing for television, specifically creating an American TV program inspired by a British hit. Many classic shows began in Britain and are adapted and developed for American tastes.

(2) To help students learn the process of writing a script for a TV program, be it comedy or hour-long drama. Students will learn how to break stories, write an outline and then a first draft of their script. The first several weeks will be devoted to two things: the changes you will make in the show you want to adapt and learning how to actually write a script for the show. Each student will write either a 30-page comedy adaptation or a 52-60-page hour-long adaptation.

(3) To instruct students about the benefits of having writing samples of their work, specifically an original pilot which will act as a calling card into the television industry.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

I expect that you will not plagiarize work from other sources and that you will be honest with each assignment in representing that the work is entirely yours.

WORK BREAKDOWN

All assignments should be written in 12 Pt. Courier.
Do not read assignments from your cell phone.

WEEK 1

LECTURE: Overview of the course and an exploration into the world (and differences) of British and American television. How most British TV scripts are written by one or two writers and American scripts have a full staff.

In the world of our class, YOU have been chosen by a network to adapt the show you’ve picked. All creative decisions will be up to you.
In Class Viewing: We’ll watch the first episode of EPISODES to give you a taste of what adaptation is all about. We will begin viewing the episodes of the British program you will be adapting. This will occur over the next 3-4 classes.

WEEK 2

LECTURE: Introduction to the writing of a TV script. You don’t just start writing. You begin by finding storylines. When you have your A, B and C (or D) storylines, you then write an outline, move on to the first draft and final draft. What about storylines for an existing show? Do you take the script and film it verbatim or do you make changes? Examples will be provided by teacher.

In Class Viewing: More watching of the British programs being adapted.

WEEK 3

LECTURE: How do you take one writer’s work and change it for another market? Which characters do you keep? Do you alter the tone or change the sex of a major character (or even the lead) et al?

In Class Viewing: More watching of the British programs being adapted.

Writing Assignment For Next Week: First 5 students chosen from last week’s class must bring in an Overview of the changes you plan on making in your adaptation.

WEEK 4

LECTURE: Deciding What And Who To Keep. Beginning of the adaptation process. Should you make your main character less attractive or more obnoxious? How many characters do you need to keep? Which character is weak? Do you have a new character that you want to inject into the show?

And what about casting? Should you cast a star or go with an unknown.

We will read and discuss the first 5 Overviews. After getting feedback each of the first 5 writers will come up with storylines and will present them to the class next week.

Writing Assignment For Next Week: Next 5 students chosen from prior class must bring in an Overview of the changes you plan on making in your adaptation.

WEEK 5

Syllabus

We will read and discuss the next 5 Overviews. After getting feedback each of the second group of 5 writers will come up with storylines and will present them to the class.

We will read and discuss the storylines from the first 5 people.

WEEK 6

LECTURE: Writing The Outline. We will read the Outline for the Pilot of The Good Wife, then we’ll watch the episode to see what was kept, altered or changed.

We will read and discuss the last 5 Overviews. After getting feedback each of the last group of 5 writers will come up with storylines and will present them to the class next week.

We will hear the storylines from the second group of 5.

We will hear the beginning scenes of the Outlines from the first group of 5.

(Ideally, a half-hour comedy should take one week to complete the Outlines and hour-long dramas should take two weeks. The reason for this is so you can devote the next several weeks to completing the script).

WEEK 7

LECTURE: Writing The First Act. Act One is all about setting up your characters and the situation they are in.

We will read and discuss the last group of 5 storylines.

We will hear the beginning scenes of the Outlines from the second group of 5.

SPRING BREAK

WEEK 8

LECTURE: Giving Information About Characters.

We will hear the beginning scenes of the Outlines from the third group of 5.

Now that everyone is writing Outlines, we will concentrate on completing them. Half-hour Outlines should have approximately 13-17 scenes. Hour-long Outlines should have approximately 30-40 scenes. COUNT THE NUMBER OF SCENES IN THE BRITISH VERSION OF YOUR SCRIPT AND DUPLICATE THAT.
Syllabus

WEEK 9
More listening to and discussion of the Outlines.

For Next Week: Keep bringing Outline pages into class. Or if you’ve started writing the script, keep bringing script pages to class.

WEEK 10
By this point we will see where everyone stands. Some of you may be ahead of the others. Some of you may be behind. That’s OK, but by having written a solid Outline you should be able to push ahead.

For Next Week: Bring script pages in.

WEEK 11
We will read pages of the script. Bring more pages in.

WEEK 12
We will read pages of the script. Bring more pages in.

WEEK 13
We will read pages of the script. Bring more pages in. Or, begin working on the rewrite based on notes you’ve received.

WEEK 14
Either turn in your first draft or your rewrite.

GRADING & ATTENDANCE
Completion of adapted script: 80%
Class participation: 20%

Do not miss classes. Attendance is taking very seriously. If there is a class that you know in advance you must miss, let the Instructor know early on.

No cell phones, iPads or laptops on during class. You can use them when we take our break.
Syllabus

**Lateness:** If you show up late a half a grade point will be deducted. On the rare occasion where you know you will be late e-mail me and inform me of this. Each absence will reduce your final grade by one step. So, if you would have received an A and I find upon reviewing my attendance records that you've been absent twice and late twice, your grade will be lowered to a B.

**Remember this:** When you miss classes you lose out on the interplay that happens.