

Students script for the Silver Screen

BY KATEY STOETZEL
Assistant Features Editor

For students interested in screen writing, not much has been available at Truman State in terms of learning how to write for the screen. During fall 2014, a screen writing workshop will be offered for English and creative writing majors.

English professor James D'Agostino said the class has been in the works for the past few years.

D'Agostino said finding a new tenure track faculty member was an additional challenge to bringing screen writing to the classroom.

"We went into that looking for someone with a specialty in both screen writing and fiction," D'Agostino said. "And it worked out."

Dr. Jocelyn Cullity will teach the class during the fall.

D'Agostino said Cullity has been teaching at Trinity College and in a low-residency graduate program teaching screen writing at Goddard College. He said she has done a lot of work for television documentaries.

"She's worked internationally and done a documentary in Central America and in China. She has all these experiences that we are confident Truman students will be drawn to," D'Agostino said.

D'Agostino said one purpose of adding a screen writing class is to add new perspectives to the English department and attract students to other art forms.

D'Agostino said skills developed through screen writing can be used with other writing workshops, film classes and literacy classes.

"Some of our students are really savvy when it comes to film as literature," D'Agostino said. "[It's] sort of [a] visual literacy. Now there's a place in the curriculum that can develop them and challenge them as writers. It's a really exciting time in the program because of that."

Alumnus Ross Knight said he turned to the Internet to learn screen writing while he was at Truman.

Knight said he learned the format and style of screen writing online. He said he used resources such as John August's Scriptnotes podcast, communities of writers on Reddit and The Blacklist, as well as reading free scripts available to learn.

Knight said the theatre department offered play writing workshops, and although Knight said he enjoyed them, he knew the stories he wanted to tell were meant for the screen.

He said screen writing is a collaborative artistic process that involves many people, all of whom have different perspectives and objectives for a project, and requires the best writers to execute.

"This is nearly impossible to achieve by teaching yourself alone in a dark room," Knight said. "I think Truman offering a class and getting eager writers into the habit of workshopping and drafting will give these lucky students a huge leg up."

Alumnus Jeff Denight said he had the same problem, although he was more focused on playwriting.

Though playwriting classes were available, Denight said he and his classmates had to go out of their way to learn the craft, but found the experience rewarding.

"In the playwriting field, you have to find your own way," Denight said. "I really enjoyed that. It gave me a background."

Despite the rewarding nature of teaching oneself the art of playwriting and screen writing, Denight said he thinks a screen writing class will be most beneficial for students interested in writing for the screen.

Although Denight now works in publishing, and is only able to write plays on the side, he said the most lucrative career in English currently is screen writing.

"To have someone who knows the business teaching up and coming students will be extremely beneficial," Denight said.

Senior Alexandra Timmer is enrolled for the screen writing class next fall. Timmer said she is applying to graduate schools for screen writing and wanted to take a class in the form for background knowledge.

Like Knight and Denight, Timmer said she reads various screen writing books to learn the basics, but is excited for class room experience.

Timmer said within the creative writing and English majors, there are three required workshops — fiction, nonfiction and poetry. She said all three essentially take the same form and are written for the page only.

Timmer said a screen writing class will bring the chance to write for a different outlet — television.

"A visual writing class will benefit everyone — novelists, poets and short story writers. Everyone will benefit," Timmer said.

Screenwriting Format Guidelines

1. Do not use art or photography on the title page or throughout the text of the script.
2. Do not use fonts other than 12-point Courier.
3. Do not overuse bolded print or italics throughout the script.
4. Do not overuse descriptive dialogue. Show this through character's actions.
5. Do not handwrite pages.
6. Do not have typos or misspellings anywhere in the script.

Free script writing softwares:
Celtx, Scipped, ScriptBuddy

*according to oscars.org

