

# Course Descriptions

## **MWSS 500 Dramatic Storytelling (3)**

During this residency, students are introduced to the foundational elements of all dramatic stories and will begin short writing projects. Topics include archetype characters, the hero's journey, story purpose, and essential building blocks of storytelling - theme, character, want, need and traditional structure. Guest lecturers, seminars, screening and exercises will further encompass this residency. Lastly, students will map out their writing goals for the program.

## **MWSS 515 Genre, Form and Style (3)**

Part history, part genre and part form, this course engages in the history, form and style of writing for the screen and stage. Students will explore classical and contemporary screen and stage works to look at the spectrum of genres, styles, approaches and forms of works. Prerequisites: MWSS 500.

## **MWSS 520 Dramatic and Cinematic Theory (3)**

Throughout history, the human race has been drawn to and lived through its stories. Cultural and societal norms are played out in stories for the screen and stage. Students in this course will research and create theories that can be used to explain the phenomena of story.

## **MWSS 530 Writing for Screen and Stage I (4)**

Students develop and rewrite a short script and a short play. Students focus on the creation of shorter dramatic stories to understand the tenants of telling successful brief narratives. A study of 1-minute and 10-minute plays, webisodes, and short films will accompany the course. The art of pitching, story concepts, and loglines, etc. are introduced. Students start the rewrite process based on comments from advisors and fellow students. Prerequisites: MWSS 500.

## **MWSS 545 Engaging the Audience (3)**

An in-depth analysis of dramatic and cinematic structure, formulas, principles and storytelling will be the focus of the course. Students will study a wide range of successful films, shows and theatrical works and discover the common elements that they share as well as the different approaches each can take. Students will employ narrative devices to further develop scenes, sequences, acts and stories. Prerequisites: MWSS 515.

## **MWSS 550 Writing for Screen and Stage II (4)**

Students develop and complete a full-length feature screenplay or stage play. Students are expected to formulate and execute a draft with feedback from their advisor and selected classmates. Student will meet creative milestones throughout the semester. Prerequisites: MWSS 530.

## **MWSS 555 History of American Screenwriting (2)**

In this semester-long course, students will explore the history of American screenwriting from the silent era to the present. At the same time, students will read pivotal screenplays and view important films written by the men and women who pushed the art of screenwriting forward.

## **MWSS 600 Exploring Creativity (3)**

During this residency, students will engage in activities to develop skills, disciplines and a plan for ensuring creativity in stories and in life. Course introduces the habits of creative historical figures and current artists and writers as well as allows students to develop roadmaps to ensure their productive creativity. Students will also workshop stories, attend seminars, plays and, interact with a number of guest lecturers. Lastly, students will work closely with advisors and fellow students to assess, pitch and develop stories for their thesis projects.

## **MWSS 605 Knowledge Sharing for Storytelling (3)**

(Optional.) In this optional course, students engage in numerous on-line modalities for teaching the art and craft of screenwriting and playwrighting. Students explore a variety of pedagogical approaches to knowledge sharing and

building writing-centered cyber communities. Students pick a specific area of study within their specialization which they will explore and research and, ultimately, share the product of their investigation with the class as a learning module or presentation. Prerequisites: MWSS 550.

**MWSS 620 Thesis I – Writing for the Screen and Stage (5)**

Students in conjunction with their thesis advisor will develop and complete a first draft of a feature, a stage play or other collection of other works. Students will be expected to employ the devices and materials introduced in the program to start work on drafting professional ready writing sample(s).

**MWSS 630 Writing Landscapes (3)**

This course is an overview of a variety of forms including situation comedies, hour dramas, podcasts, web series, comic books, interactive media, and gaming. This course outlines the fundamentals of style, content and format specific to each and looks to provide information on avenues for careers and employment in the field. Students will engage with a number of writers working professionally in specific areas.

**MWSS 635 Contemporary American Playwriting (2)**

Students will engage with a diverse selection of important voices in modern playwriting and playwriting theory. From Eugene O'Neill to Susan-Lori Parks, from David Mamet to David Henry Hwang, from Edward Albee to Paul Vogel and beyond, all writers hoping to master the craft of writing for screen and stage must read and learn from the artists that have come before. Over the course of one semester, students will read plays and in-depth interviews by a selection of the most relevant, innovative and diverse dramatists working in America today.

**MWSS 650 Thesis II – Rewriting for the Screen and Stage (6)**

In this course, students take the project they developed in Thesis I and guide that project through an extensive outlining and rewrite process to ensure their final thesis projects are developed to their highest quality professional level. Prerequisites: MWSS 620.

**MWSS 660 Elective in Media Writing (6)**

In this course, students take the knowledge acquired in Writing Landscapes and apply it to a project in a medium outside of their thesis subject(s). Students will appraise the media writing landscape and originate material to further diversify their writing portfolios. Prerequisites: MWSS 630.

**MWSS 665 Thesis Presentation (1)**

This course will serve as the capstone presentation of the portfolio of work students have created throughout the program. Material will be presented in a public forum by professional actors and open to the public. Lastly, students will hone their polishing skills and will receive final critiques of their thesis projects. Prerequisites: MWSS 650.

**MWSS 670 Past, Present and Future (1)**

Students take assessment of their work in the program, provide a response to the notes supplied from the readings as well as pitch projects for future work on once the MFA program is completed. Prerequisites: MWSS 650.

**MWSS 690 Classroom Practicum (0)**

Students from the MWSS program will be introduced to a wide-range of instructional methods and strategies they can deploy should they embark on a teaching career. The Practicum will allow students to work closely with the assigned course instructor and give the students the opportunity to observe class protocol from an instructional perspective while also engaging in a variety of pedagogical activities and responsibilities for use in the modern classroom. While students participating in the Practicum will, when requested, have input into grading, the sole responsibility for student grades belongs to the teacher of record. Beyond learning cinema-specific teaching skills, students will be exposed to general teaching responsibilities including but not limited to FERPA issues and ADA guidelines. On ground Practicum opportunities can only be provided to students in the Pittsburgh area. Online Practicum opportunities will be available to all students.

**MWSS 695 Internship or Teaching Practicum (3)**

This optional course provides students the opportunity to intern with a production company, theater or similar or the ability to gain credit for teaching experience.

**MWSS 698 Independent Study (3)**

This optional course provides students the opportunity to develop an independent study with program mentors in a specialized area of writing for the screen and stage.