

REVISED 04-10-2008



**Mission Statement:** The mission of the College of Communication and the Arts is to impart knowledge and understanding of the human communication process within the context of a Judeo-Christian world view and to help students to develop advanced critical thinking and communication skills.

*SSW 685 MAD (Online)*  
**SEMINAR: NARRATIVE ADAPTATION**  
*SUMMER SEMESTER 2008*  
*DISTANCE COURSE*

*MASTER'S STUDIES PROGRAM*  
*DEPARTMENT OF CINEMA-TELEVISION*  
*SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATION AND THE ARTS*

**Professor: Kevin R. Crawford, M.Div., M.F.A.**

*Telephone:* (757) 647-9003 (Email to schedule appointments)

*Fax:* (757) 496-4628 (Call first)

*E-mail:* [Kevicra@regent.edu](mailto:Kevicra@regent.edu)

*Class Lecture Postings:* Monday and Thursday Afternoons (by 5:00 pm Eastern Time Zone)

*Office Hours.:* (By appointment)

**PERSONAL NOTE**

A long time ago, I came to the realization that a script is more than just ‘a blueprint to a film.’ To truly be a successful manifestation of the form, a script needs to be a work of art in and of itself. It requires the same strict integrity of a poem or novel. A great script demands formal and structural elegance no matter how you approach the page.

Since the “golden era” many of the greats – Alfred Hitchcock, David O. Selznick, and Irving Thalberg – sought to balance the Hollywood “equation” with pre-sold products and loyal audiences. Indeed, early Hollywood studios understood this as they made it their practice to constantly search out other media to locate stories – the publishing galley, off-Broadway, true events, documentaries, poems, or a variety of other storytelling events.

Whether one considers the classical period or Hollywood today, the acquisition, use and packaging of pre-sold products adapted for film remains the key to balancing a large part of the industry equation.

Students of the screen cannot hope to be equipped to compete in today’s rough and tumble

industry, or to join the ranks of A-list professionals working in Hollywood without a firm grasp of the art of narrative adaptation. The business of film can be extremely painful, and amazingly joyful. As a professional in this business you will be stretched beyond your limitations of patience and endurance, and yet you will come out on the other side an accomplished leader.

My prayer for you this semester is that you will not only have a better grasp of the art of narrative adaptation, but that you will be all the more inspired to write and create something worthy of professional pride.

## COURSE DESCRIPTION AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES

What do *Sin City*, *Casablanca*, *Uncle Vanya*, and *The Pelican Brief* all have in common?

Whether comic books, novels, plays, or vintage films of yesteryear, the Hollywood “machine” has always been keenly interested in the acquisition, use and packaging of pre-sold products adapted for film. *Oscar* is given out for best adaptation to the screen from another medium. So, there is ample reason for us to study how narrative adaptation really works.

This course explores the ways prose fiction, stageplays, and screenplays are written. Through a variety of screenings, course exercises, and deep reading, it further examines what constitutes an adaptable piece of prose and, further, how that material can be transformed into teleplay, stageplay, or screenplay format. Weight will be given to translation paradigms affecting prose fiction – that is, the movement from novel to film.

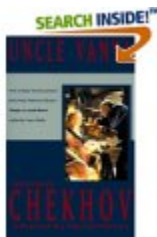
We will further break down each medium into its conventions and apply those conventions to the creation of a **Treatment**, **Step Outline** and **Sample Scenes** to match a full length stageplay, teleplay or screenplay.

We will end with a discussion of copyright, securing the option agreement, and other deal-making strategies for film adaptation.

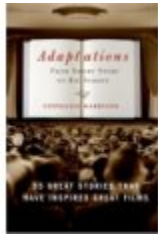
## FAITH & LEARNING

Throughout the course we will consider how the Christian writer fits into the above system. This as all courses in the School of Communication & the Arts is ultimately concerned with how the committed Christian can blend his/her faith with what they learn here. Especially of concern is how the issues raised by this course are to be considered in comparison to you own *a priori* world-view. You will be urged to consider all readings, screenings and discussions in light of your own Christian faith.

## REQUIRED TEXTS



- Chekov, Anton. Trans. David Mamet. *Uncle Vanya*. Grove/Atlantic, 1989. ISBN-13: 978-0802131515.



- Harrison, Stephanie. *Adaptations: From Short Story to Big Screen*. Crown Publishing Group, 2005. **ISBN-13:** 978-1400053148.



- Martin, Kirk L., *The Gravel Drive*. Cantwell-Hamilton Press, 2003. **ISBN-13:** 978-0971614512.



- Seger, Linda. *The Art of Adaptation: Turning Fact and Fiction into Film*. Owl Books, Henry Holt & Co, 1992. **ISBN-13:** 978-0805016260.

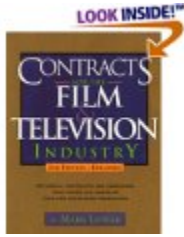


**Note:** Students will also receive (by email attachment) a digital (.pdf) file copy of my 2005 screenplay adaptation of Kirk L. Martin's *The Gravel Drive* on/about the third week of May, or after the class roster has been settled. Students are encouraged to have read both the novella and the screenplay by the start of class on June 2, 2008.

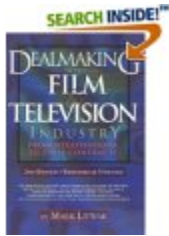
## RECOMMENDED TEXTS



- Krevolin, Richard. *How to Adapt Anything into a Screenplay*. Wiley, 2003. **ISBN-13:** 978-0471225454.



- Litwak, Mark. *Contracts for the Film & Television Industry*. Silman-James Press, 1999. **ISBN-13:** 978-1879505469.



- ---. *Dealmaking in the Film and Television Industry From Negotiations Through Final Contracts: 2nd Edition Expanded and Updated*. Silman-James Press, 2002. **ISBN-13:** 978-1879505667.



- Riley, Christopher. *The Hollywood Standard: The Complete and Authoritative Guide to Script Format and Style*. Michael Wiese Productions, 2005. **ISBN-13:** 978-1932907018.

## PREREQUISITES

None, although **SSW 510 - Story Structure for Stage and Screen** works as a nice preparatory course for all writing courses we offer.

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## COURSE PROCEDURES

It is each student's responsibility to keep up with the required readings and screenings, and to enter into classroom discussions *twice* weekly. You will be graded on the parts of the screenplay, stageplay, or teleplay you submit, as well as the various shorter and research-oriented assignments. Also, your participation will be graded.

Distance students will need to interact regularly with the discussion board forums by posting scenes and commenting on the readings, scenes of other classmates, or comment on comments by classmates.

All e-mails submitted to me should have the number of this course in the subject line. For instance, Bob James submitting his first scene should use the subject line: SSW 685-Scene1. Further, the scene attached itself should have the title: SSW 685\_BJames\_Scene1. This will

avoid me looking for a scene from “Bob James” which is simply called “scene”.

To facilitate class discussion, students should post a copy of their assignments in **MS Word Document (.doc)** or **Rich Text File (.rtf)** formats, or in **Screenwriter 2000 (.scw)** or **Final Draft (.fdr)** format (as appropriate).

**Please don't send me files in other formats than those listed above – including .pdf files.**

Emailed attached assignment will be returned in like kind. That is, I will return an attached .doc or .rtf file that is marked up with the Word Comment function. For the .scw and .fdr formats I use the note function of both of these programs.

Unless otherwise instructed, **please post all of your assignments** in the Group Discussion Board for the class and/or instructor to comment upon. You are also asked to **submit copies** of all work to the professor, by email attachment, for grading and feedback purposes.

### **SUPPLIES – IMPORTANT!**

Each student must have access to a **computer** and **software** that can save in the Rich Text Format, Word Document Format, Final Draft, or Movie Magic Screenwriter Format. Losing computer access, a crashed computer or hard drive or anything of this sort is not only troublesome but will not excuse lack of participation in the course. Also, all monetary burdens for paper and photocopying are borne by the student. Students are responsible for their own work. Having someone else type/format your work will be considered unethical.

Since this is a distance learning course you will also need to secure a membership with **NetFlix online** (<http://www.netflix.com/>) or your local **Blockbuster Video** in order to meet the required screenings.

**Important Note:** It is the student's responsibility to keep up with all assigned screenings – that is, you are encouraged to rent, buy, borrow, or otherwise obtain access to materials to be viewed in a *timely* manner. (See Course Schedule **page 9** for details.)

With over 7 million members worldwide, **NetFlix** offers full access to a library of over 90,000 DVD titles from classics to new releases to TV series. From more than 100 shipping points nationwide they can normally reach 95% of their members ***within one-business day*** delivery. In addition to receiving **DVDs by mail, you can also choose to watch movies online** instantly. This new feature is included in your Netflix membership at no additional charge.

As noted above, students will receive (by email attachment) a digital **(.pdf) file copy** of my **2005** screenplay adaptation of Kirk L. Martin's *The Gravel Drive* on/about the third week of May, or after class enrollment has settled. Students are encouraged to download this attachment and read both the novella and the screenplay by the start of class on June 2, 2008.

### **SUBMISSION OF ASSIGNMENTS**

All work will be due when announced in class and/or this syllabus. I reserve the right to deduct grade points from late assignments, as per below. The last of your assignments will be accepted no later than **Friday, August 1, 2008**.

## **INSTRUCTOR'S POSTED POLICY FOR RECEIVING LATE OR MISSED WORK**

Work not submitted *within* four (4) days of the assignment due date (whether it was due to class absence or other reason) will normally be given a grade of “0.” Unless *prior* arrangements have been made with the Professor, there is a grade reduction of 10% points per day through the fourth day. At the Professor’s discretion, late work may be received for full credit under extenuating circumstances. Timely communication with your Professor is of paramount importance, if the student is experiencing setback or difficulty.

## **ONLINE ATTENDANCE**

Twice per week I will post a lecture and/or discussion questions (Monday and Thursday afternoons normally by 5:00pm). Your participation grade comes largely from your participation in the weekly discussions. Use the syllabus as a guide for what to expect. (See below.)

Your discussions and assigned posting are due as follows:

- Please respond to *ALL* **Monday** posts and assigned work **by Thursday**, midnight of the same week.
- Please respond to *ALL* **Thursday** posts and assigned work **by Sunday**, midnight of that weekend.

In addition to posting your own Original work, students must also offer a **Response Post** to at least two (2) other student's **Original Posts** (bi-weekly) during the course. These posts should be 50-150 words in length and should be posted no later than Thursday or Sunday midnight as indicated above.

Student comments should be respectful and supportive even when given in defense of an opposing view. Beyond giving/receiving “creative” feedback, one of the goals of this course is to provide students with the opportunity to learn how to give and receive criticism appropriately; or in other words, how to “take notes” as we call it in this business. The ideal post will be courteous even when critical of a fellow writer’s creative choices.

Please know that I monitor *all* discussion threads each week and I may enter the discussions, at any time. However, when I choose not to enter the discussion by writing my own post, be assured that it is not because I have not read your posts. I *always* monitor discussion threads, whether my name appears in them or not, in order that by the end of the course I have a firm grasp of the quality of your discussion contributions. Also, Blackboard allows me to call up a quantitative review of each individual’s contributions to threaded discussions, so it is a relatively easy matter to determine this gross quantitative aspect of your achievement by course end. I’m saying here that it is important that you keep up on discussions and that they will be monitored by me.

Your participation will be a significant part of your course grade. Besides, it is frustrating when the rest of the course members must go back to old discussion threads just because one or two persons did not keep up on reading or bother to make discussion responses when they were due.

## **ACADEMIC HONESTY**

Each student's work should be their own. That is, every document submitted should be the work of the student who submits it. Adaptation is the translation of story from one medium to another with recognition and credit to the original source. Plagiarism, on the other hand, is illegal and discovery of such will result in failure of the course.

Recycling of old scripts, treatments, and assigned work done for academic credit in another course is discouraged *without* express permission from the professor. If such permission is granted, the student must submit a first draft copy of the original material, and provide evidence that the work has undergone significant revision/alteration in order to be considered for credit in this course.

## **COURSE EVALUATION**

During the final weeks of class, each student will have the opportunity to evaluate both the instructor and the course, itself, on-line.

## **INCOMPLETE GRADES**

Students desiring an incomplete must submit their request to the course instructor and academic dean prior to the end of the term. An incomplete grade will be given in a regular course only for legitimate deficiencies due to illness, emergencies or extraordinary reasons acceptable to the professor, including equipment breakdown and shortages, and not because of neglect on the student's part. Incompletes require the final approval of the school dean or his/her authorized representative. A regular grade will be given by the instructor if all requirements for the course are submitted by the end of the following academic term. The instructor will submit the new grade to the Registrar's Office no later than two weeks after the beginning of the subsequent term. If all work is not submitted by the end of the term following the granting of the incomplete, a grade of FX (NP on pass/fail courses) will be posted automatically unless a Request for Extension of Incomplete has been approved and submitted to the Registrar's Office. The FX shall be counted as an F in the computation of the GPA. Any student desiring reinstatement to the course after an FX or NP has been posted must register for the course in a subsequent term and pay the full current tuition for the course. In progress grades can only be given for independent studies, internships, practica, portfolios, theses and dissertations.

## **SCREENINGS**

We are all adults in this school. Any film or video we show is purely for educational and instructive purposes to develop critical abilities – rather than for entertainment. For this reason, some screenings may carry a PG-13, or even an R-rating. If the student feels s/he cannot watch a particular film, a suitable alternative will be assigned. Please email your instructor well in advance of this.

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## **GRADING:**

*Participation*                      *20% of grade*

This involves keeping up with the readings and screenings, and engaging fully in the discussions.

*Short Scene*                      *10% of grade*

This is the short scene that you will be submitting early in the semester as a “formatting” exercise.

*Research Tools*                      *10% of grade*

These include the reading notes, annotated character lists and 3-Act Breakdown for your script.

*Treatment*                      *20% of grade*

This is the short-story version of your proposed screenplay. Most adaptations are sold at the treatment level.

*Sample Scenes*                      *20% of grade*

These are key moments from your script that illustrate (1) Faithful adaptation, (2) Key Scene adaptation and (3) Basic Idea adaptation from the source.

*Step Outline for the Script*      *20% of grade*

This is an outline for your screenplay.

*Total: 100%*

Here is the grading scale for the course.

GRADE	PERCENTAGE SCORE	Q. POINTS
A	94-100	4.0
A-	90-93.9	3.67
B+	87-89.9	3.33
B	83-86.9	3.00
B-	80-82.9	2.67
C+	77-79.9	2.33
C	73-76.9	2.00
C-	70-72.9	1.67
D+	67-69.9	1.33
D	63-66.9	1.00
D-	60-62.9	0.67
F	00-59.9	0.00

**Course Schedule Begins on the Next Page:** (Please print this next section out and keep it in front of you throughout the semester. Use this to order your *NetFlix* que, etc.)



**Key:** Chekov = *Uncle Vanya*

Harrison = *Adaptations*

Martin = *The Gravel Drive*

Seeger = *The Art of Adaptation*

Handout = These will be posted on Blackboard for downloading along with my bi-weekly lectures and other notes.

DATES	TOPIC	READINGS & ASSIGNMENTS
Week 1A Monday, June 2	Introduction to the Course; highlights from the syllabus, what is the difference between prose fiction, the stageplay, the teleplay, and the screenplay; Christianity and the adaptive process; Define “theatre” “television” “film”; Discuss Main problems of adaptation	<b>Readings:</b> Seeger: Introduction <b>Homepage:</b> Create a “homepage” using the form under the “user tools tab.” Post your picture and an introductory message. Like a “face-book” page, your blackboard homepage should give your classmates a snapshot of who you are, and where you are in the “writer’s journey,” etc. (Btw: The photo is not an option.) I trust I will see everybody up there by the end of this week.
Week 1B Thursday, June 5	Types and Directions in Adaptation Format: The “Look” of a Screenplay; Narratives & Narrativity: What Goes Into the Making of a Screenplay, etc.	<b>Readings:</b> Harrison: Introduction; Part One: The Directors (pp. 1-14); Rear Window (pp. 67-94) Seeger: Part One Handout: Script Format <b>Viewings:</b> <i>Rear Window</i> (1954)
Week 2A Monday, June 9	Characters and Plot in Adaptation	<b>Readings:</b> Seeger: Part Two; ch. 10 <b>Due:</b> Select source material and be prepared to defend your choice on Monday of next week

<p>Week 2B</p> <p>Thursday, June 12</p>	<p>Choosing the Right Source</p>	<p><b>Readings:</b></p> <p>Martin: <i>The Gravel Drive</i> (whole book)</p> <p><b>Screenplay:</b></p> <p><i>The Gravel Drive</i> (Made for TV Film)</p> <p><b>Due:</b></p> <p>Comment on the novel adaptation of <i>The Gravel Drive</i>; in your opinion, does it succeed? Do you agree with the choices made by the screenwriter? What unique problems were present in the translation of Kirk Martin's novella to screen – i.e., journal format, story spine, action, plot, etc.?</p>
<p>Week 3A</p> <p>Monday, June 16</p>	<p>Characters—Who will make the cut?</p>	<p><b>Readings:</b></p> <p>Harrison: <i>The Killers</i> (pp. 421-429)</p> <p><b>Viewings:</b></p> <p><i>The Killers</i> (1946)</p> <p><b>Due:</b></p> <p>Post your choice of source material to be adapted. Summarize the project, including your overall approach; defend your selection of this material in light of your reading of Seger, et al. (1-4pgs.)</p>
<p>Week 3B</p> <p>Thursday, June 19</p>	<p>The Spine of the Story – Why Was It Adapted in the First Place?</p>	<p><b>Readings:</b></p> <p>Harrison: “Your Arkansas Traveler” (pp. 38-66)</p> <p><b>Viewings:</b></p> <p><i>A Face in the Crowd</i> (1957)</p> <p><b>Due:</b></p> <p>Post a 3-Act Breakdown of your source material (1-4pgs.)</p> <p>Post Annotated Character List with “defenses”</p>

<p>Week 4A Monday, June 23</p>	<p>Adapting a play The Step Outline/Treatment Variation on the Theme</p>	<p><b>Readings:</b> Handout: The Treatment and the Step Outline <i>Uncle Vanya</i> (whole play)</p> <p><b>Viewings:</b> <i>Vanya on 42<sup>nd</sup> Street</i> (1995)</p> <p><b>Due:</b> Post Annotated Character List with “defenses”</p>
<p>Week 4B Thursday, June 26</p>	<p>The non-Hollywood film</p>	<p><b>Readings:</b> Harrison: Part X: World Film (pp. 524-532); “In the Grove” (pp. 533-539)</p> <p><b>Viewings:</b> <i>Rashomon</i> (1951)</p> <p><b>Due:</b> Post Annotated Character List with “defenses”</p>
<p>Week 5A Monday, June 30</p>	<p>Handling Conflict: The Key to Story</p>	<p><b>Readings:</b> Harrison: Part II: Science Fiction (pp. 95-103); “Minority Report” (pp. 119-151)</p> <p><b>Viewings:</b> <i>Minority Report</i> (2002)</p> <p><b>Due:</b> Post Annotated Character List with “defenses” Post your Treatment - we will read and discuss your Treatments online</p>
<p><b>Week 5B</b> <b>Thursday, July 3</b></p>	<p><b>No Class (4<sup>th</sup> of July Weekend)</b></p>	<p><b>Nothing Due</b></p>

<p>Week 6A</p> <p>Monday, July 7</p>	<p>Transitions</p>	<p><b>Readings:</b></p> <p>Harrison: Part IV: Westerns (pp. 209-217); “This is What it Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona” (pp. 244-253)</p> <p><b>Viewings:</b></p> <p><i>Smoke Signals</i> (1998)</p> <p><b>Due:</b></p> <p>Post Annotated Character List with “defenses”</p> <p>Turn in a scene from Act 1 of your treatment (illustrating “inspired by” adaptation)</p>
<p>Week 6B</p> <p>Thursday, July 10</p>	<p>Raising the Stakes: The Stair-step of Suspense</p>	<p><b>Readings:</b></p> <p>Harrison: Part VI: Five All-But-Lost Stories (pp. 273-283); “Tomorrow” (pp.347-360);</p> <p><b>Screenplay:</b></p> <p>“No Country for Old Men” (2008 Winner of Four Academy Awards, including “Best Adapted Screenplay”)  <u>Note:</u> I will send .pdf file copies of the script, for educational purposes only.</p> <p><b>Viewings:</b></p> <p><i>Tomorrow</i> (1972)</p> <p><b>Due:</b></p> <p>Post Annotated Character List with “defenses”</p> <p>Comment on the Coen brother’s adaptation of “No Country for Old Men” using the stair-step of suspense; raising of the stakes, etc. Do you believe the use of violence in this film is appropriate to the tone and theme of the original novel? What is the message of this film in your opinion?  <u>Note:</u> you are welcome to cite outside sources and reviews, since we did not read the actual novel by McCarthy.)</p>

Week 7A Monday, July 14	Scene-work	<b>Due:</b> Turn in a scene from Act 2 of your treatment (illustrating “faithful” adaptation)
Week 7B Thursday, July 17	The Home Stretch – what more is there to do?	<b>Due:</b> Turn in Act 1 of the Step Outline for review.
Week 8A Monday, July 21  <b>*Please Note: this is a change. Please post your key scene Monday this week since the last day to submit work is next Friday.</b>	The Art of the Draft – Beginning the First Draft  Options; Copyrights; rewrites; deal-making, etc.	<b>Readings:</b> Seeger: ch. 9.  <b>Viewings:</b> None  <b>Due:</b> Turn in a scene from Act 3 (illustrating “key scene” adaptation)
Week 8B Friday, August 1	All work due	<b>Due:</b>  <b>Final Step Outline due by 5pm</b>

*This syllabus is subject to change without notice.*

Updated: 04/10/08

Regent University, School of Communication & the Arts

1000 Regent University Drive | Virginia Beach, VA 23464 | 1-888-718-1222

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