

## Fall 2020:

### **SOFA 208-01 Dramatic Structure**

(5 hours per week – 27 Students – Lecture and Screening – No NTID – GA/TA: Selma Pena)

As I say every year, this remains my most time-consuming and important class. This was my eighth time teaching it and I'm constantly trying to find ways to do it better. COVID presented new challenges for this class which I mentioned above. I very much wanted to do as much as possible in-person, especially the two handwritten midterm exams, which we were able to do. We also began screening in person on October 8<sup>th</sup>.

My Grad TA, Selma Pena, was instrumental setting up the online structure, though. She also graded the 12 weekly myCourses quizzes. I graded all the handwritten midterms and the final term paper.

My mission for this class continues to be to encourage curiosity, and for students to pursue a broad base of knowledge for writing.

This class of SOFA Live Action is one of best I've encountered in my 7.5 years at RIT. They were lively, creative, diligent, and hard working. I only wish more of them filled out teacher evaluations. I do appreciate those who took the time.

**12/26 Responding – Effective Teacher: 92% Top 2 – 4.33 Average**

*“Great class! It is nice to have a teacher who is excited about their work and what they are sharing with the class. Hands down my favorite class of the semester. I think I really learned a lot and I am very thankful to have Frank as my teacher.”*

*“Great class from Frank.”*

*“I think you did a really good job at balancing the in-person/online aspect of this course!”*

*“I really enjoyed the class and I learned a lot. Deese is an amazing professor and I would love to take another class with him.”*

*“Frank was great at making various topics interesting and easy to understand. I think the way he organized the class and films helped me fully grasp the material.”*

*“I think that he did a good job at discussing the class topics with us and he helped us understand the topics he was talking about by using many different examples from different TV shows and movies, etc.”*

***“I think he did everything well. He explained all of the curriculum very well! I got a better understanding about a lot of the topics we learn. He was also a fun teacher and always there to help and guide us.”***

***“Deese does a great job teaching Dramatic Structure. The films that are screened directly correlate to the subjects being discussed in class. There was no need to rush to fit in the material it was very organized. I think the class being online and the screenings being in person is a good system and it worked for me. Deese’s exams are only short answers and essays, but he does give ample time for all questions. Even if you have to stay after, he understands because he’s asking a lot.”***

I was very happy to read the immediately above. I really put a lot into this particular class. (As did Selma.)

***“Frank was very good at presenting the information we needed as well as keeping us up to date with what was expected on the quizzes. Shout out to Selma for being an amazing TA.”***

***“He has a great passion for stories and listens to all his students with a great ear.”***

And for the criticism/improvement:

***“The term paper felt a bit disconnected with the content we were supposed to write about. Talking about contradictions of three characters, then motifs, and then dramatic license made it difficult to have a cohesive thesis.”***

***“Give out the final paper prompts and reading earlier in the semester.”***

***“Deese constantly talked about the term paper, but never said anything about it until the second to last full week of class. Even then he didnt officially send out the required reading until days after giving just under two weeks to write it. I didnt appreciate the fact that he announced the date the paper would be due, but he also said he hadnt decided on the questions yet. It just made the whole process of waiting for the questions to be posted both anxiety-inducing and confusing. I would come out with all the information at once, instead of saying things in chunks.”***

***“It would be cool if we could choose the movie we do the term paper on. That way everyone’s writing about something that interests them.”***

I had no idea there was so much concern about the term paper. Because I put it at the end of the semester due to COVID, I had to change the subject of the paper and it took a while to figure out. I eventual chose an analysis of the play “Hamilton” making all the 7-10-page papers a pleasure to read, as so many of the students love the play. I gave the students two weeks to write the first draft which they had the option of revising afterwards. I believe they all had

**Frank Deese – Teaching Self-Evaluations – Fall 2014 to Fall 2020 – (non-public details removed)**

enough time, but I will be more prepared next year. Oh... And I'm not letting them choose their own film. This was very directed pedagogy.

***“Don't screen Mulholland Drive”***

Ha! This class hated this film. It's an important film, so I won't be giving it up soon.

**SOFA 563-01, 663-01 Writing the Feature**

(2.5 hours per week – 11 Students (4 Grad, 7 Undergrad) – Lecture and Workshop – Yes NTID – No GA/TA Support)

Like my other classes, I tried to have this class meet in person as much as possible when classrooms became available in October. One complication was we still had out-of-town students then and our NTID support staff were remote. This meant that even while we were in person, we all had to simultaneously be on Zoom which created some audio feedback in the room. The students were initially very happy to meet in person, but I think the situation created a lot of in-class Zoom fatigue.

Add to that, this group of students seemed to be a bit low energy, or maybe just shy. Their outlines and scripts were quite good, though. (Not too much medieval fantasy and post-apocalyptic.)

6/11 submitted evaluations, but the comments could have been more extensive.

**2/7 Undergrad Responding – Effective Teacher: 100% Top 2 – 4.5 Average**

**4/4 Graduate Responding – Effective Teacher: 75% Top 2 – 4.24 Average**

***“Deese provided timely and elaborate feedback. -established a fun and welcoming environment. -dedicates care and time to students. -sometimes communicates and interacts with students as if they were working in the entertainment industry.”***

***“Very accommodating to students situations, especially given the circumstances. Very helpful feedback”***

And...

***“I know spending time on the outline was very important, but I wished you would assign students weekly pages as if they were ‘weekly discussions’ that are worth a small percentage of their grade. That way we can keep on track writing the whole semester and if we miss one or two it won't affect our grade as much. I personally rather do that than having just a few weeks at the end of the semester to finish the min 60-page screenplay as in my experience other classes tend to assign their heavier work in the middle and at the end of the semester. Anyways, thank you for a marvelous class (as always) and for is a great teacher!”***

This was very helpful and I may consider.

***“For the future, maybe have everybody read themselves on each other’s work with scripts and outlines on MyCourses (out of class), and bring feedback ready before class to discuss what does work, does not, or an opinions that could make each other’s stories better. I think that might be effective. Such as, in discussion on MyCourses is most effective feedback for each other than in class feedback. Something to consider.”***

We did use myCourses for feedback for the short outlines, but I really want students to direct most of their time to completing work on their own stories.

I look forward to having the class in person next year.

### **SOFA 406-11 – Senior Capstone I**

(Approx. 2 hours per week – 2 Students – Private meetings)

**Logan King** – Worked on feature screenplay with Logan. Logan finished a 25-page step outline and began writing screenplay pages during the break.

**Stevie West** – Advised Stevie on feature screenplay with outline.

### **SOFA 790-11 – Research and Thesis I**

(Approx. 3 hours per week – 3 Students – Private meetings)

**Yuhao Sheng** – Yuhao rode out the pandemic in China where he wrote and filmed his short film script called “1:38” I had weekly Zoom meetings with Yuhao to go over the script and production plan.

Also:

**Kyle Padden**: Kyle finished his supporting paper and received his MFA at the end of Fall 2020.

## **Spring 2020:**

### **SOFA 112-01 Fundamentals of Screenwriting**

(3 hours per week – 15 Students – Lecture and Workshop – No NTID – GA/TA Support)

*(For the student evaluations, I’ve included just the response rate, the “effective teacher” percentage in the top two choices – “agree” and “strongly agree” – and the average score for “effective teacher,” along with “positive” and “improvement” student written responses.)*

**7/15 Responding – Effective Teacher: 100% Top 2 – 4.43 Average**

15 students represented a return to the proper size for this class that had been too large for about several years. There were two sections and I coordinated my syllabus with Brian Price who taught the other section.

On the positive side:

***“He gives great insight on how to approach certain aspects of writing realistically for a film”***

***“The pacing of the class worked well for me because the first half is just focusing on getting you ready to write a whole film. He exposed us to a wide variety of screenwriters and screenplays that would inspire us and help us understand the craft. He encouraged a positive community where creative feedback and suggestions could be without fear of judgment.”***

As I’ve stated before, this is exactly what I try to do with all my writing classes.

***“This professor was very understanding to mental health and other outside factors especially during the pandemic. He provided good feedback in a timely manner and helped us to improve in the subject.”***

Always nice to hear. I do try to be empathetic to the difficulties of my students. Sometimes, however, a few students try to take advantage of that empathy.

Conversely:

***“I think he could be a little harder on the critiques. Sometimes it felt as though he was only picking out main issues of our screenplays. It would have been helpful to have harsher feedback for some assignments.”***

I do try to focus on the main issues. I also try to find something I like about the work because I have found that makes writers more receptive to criticism. Most students appreciate that, but others believe that sparing the rod spoils the writer.

As I said above, this class transferred well to quarantine, but required students to spend more of their own time critiquing the work of their peers.

#### **SOFA 564-01 and 664-01 - Writing the Series**

(2.5 hours per week – 14 Students (12 Undergrad, 2 Grad) – Lecture and Workshop – No NTID – No GA/TA Support)

#### **4/12 Responding (Undergrad) – Effective Teacher: 100% Top 2 – 4.25 Average**

Only 4 responses out of 14 students was shockingly low and very surprising to me as this was a very engaged and energetic class both in person and in quarantine. The biggest problem is that the class was too large for the rigor of the subject. I learned too late that several of the students

had not yet taken the “Writing the Short” prerequisite so should not have been enrolled. That won’t happen again.

“Writing the Series” remains one of most challenging classes for students to take and for me to teach. The class transferred to online very well and at the end we had two professional TV writers (Drama and Comedy) join our Zoom class. The comments are meager, even for just four reviewers. It’s quite possible students were just fatigued at the end of the first pandemic semester.

***“Good feedback on assignments. Gave helpful answers to questions. I always enjoyed coming to class”***

***“He’s really good at seeing up (sic) a positive environment which helps fosters ideas and creativity for each of our scripts. It’s really easy to bounce ideas off of each other and get helpful feedback”***

But...

***“I think a lower cap on the class size would help. It’s fun having a lot of students, but also makes it harder to split attention among them all, especially with the amount of content being generated by all of us. Maybe if there was a TA, the workload would be easier, but that’s up to you.”***

***“Faster grading is really the only thing..”*** Agreed. This class requires A LOT of reading on my part and I try to get my assessments returned as quickly as I can.

### **SOFA 590-01 Los Angeles (Undergraduate)**

(1 hour per week and week-long trip to Los Angeles – 6 Students – Lecture and Workshop – No NTID – No GA/TA Support)

There were actually 7 students on the trip as Bo Gao dropped out of the class before its first meeting. This was my third time leading live action, and this was an excellent group of students. We were able to visit a good array of studios, production companies, and post-production houses. The only real mishap was at the end when our United flight was canceled and we all had to spend the night in the Los Angeles airport.

I assigned a lot of reading for the class after the trip, mostly on the subject of film industry’s past and possible future. The class moved seamlessly from in-person to Zoom and we even had a get-together after grades were in.

***3/6 Responding – Effective Teacher: 100% Top 2 – 5.0 Average***

*“This class is incredibly important, and Deese is an excellent tour guide/professor for this course. If there is any way to lower the cost of the trip then I think more people could cash in on the opportunity.”*

*“Deese is a great and understanding professor who tries his best to get you the most he can out of your experience as a filmmaker in whatever field you are interested in.”*

*“This class and the LA trip experience is excellent, I wish we had the means to send more students on this trip each year. This class has helped me see a feasible plan of action for when I graduate and venture into the “real world.” Deese’s contact in LA were incredible. I wish I could go on this trip again.”*

On the “Improvement” Section were these:

*“I don’t think there’s anything to improve upon, except the price of the trip but that’s out of Deese’s control.”*

*“This one always stumps me..... I like our conversations and I feel like that is when I learn the most, so more conversational teaching (as you do)”*

As I’ve said before, this trip with 7 students per year is not enough. We very much need a coordination of internships for a **Semester in LA** presence.

#### **SOFA 407-04 Senior Thesis II**

(Approx. 2 hours per week – 2 Students – Private meetings)

#### ***0/2 Responding***

**April Edquiban** – Under COVID restrictions, April did a good job of finishing her film.

**David Harris** – Harris, as he prefers to be called, completed and screened his film.

#### **SOFA 890-05 Research and Thesis II**

(Approx. 2 hours per week – 3 Students – Private meetings)

**Bo Gao** – Bo finished his film “*Fallen Leaves*,” and it was selected for the 2020 Honors Show. In June, I worked with Bo to get his supporting paper written in proper English. We went through it page by page and made the appropriate changes.

**Maria Gesek** – Maria finished a first draft her untitled feature screenplay. Due to COVID and her busy work schedule, Maria decided to postpone finishing her MFA to Spring 2021.

**Kyle Padden** – Kyle finished his screenplay “*Freedom of the Light*.” Kyle delayed finishing his degree at that time due to COVID. I continued working with him on his supporting paper.

## Fall 2019:

### SOFA 208-01 Dramatic Structure

(5 hours per week – 27 Students – Lecture and Screening – Yes NTID – GA/TA: Kyle Padden)

This remains my most time-consuming and important class. This was my seventh time teaching it and I’m constantly trying to find ways to do it better. The biggest challenge is teaching the students something they don’t already know, either from their life experience, previous classes, or my Fundamentals class. Save my first semester at RIT, this was the first time teaching this class to students who did not know me as half the class was in Dan LaTourette’s Fundamentals class.

All the exams are hand-written and graded by me. My TA Kyle graded the 12 quizzes given during the semester.

My mission for this class continues to be to encourage curiosity, and for students to pursue a broad base of knowledge for writing.

### 18/27 Responding – Effective Teacher: 83% Top 2 – 4.33 Average

This goes to what I try to do:

***“Deese makes reading and writing enjoyable and fun. He made the ideas we would discuss, understandable but left a little bit of the work up to interpretation specifically so that we would research it ourselves and have more diverse conversation when we returned to class. I enjoy Deese’s teaching style and I think I have a lot I can learn from him.”***

***“Gave great lectures on things that are super helpful for the structure of movies and screenwriting, incorporated history into his course to make it more interesting.”***

I really emphasized history for this class as I feel part of my mission as a professor is general education. I also have a section on historical accuracy.

***“Frank organized the course well and made sure our goals for the class were in our reach.”***

***“I enjoyed how the lessons for each week made sense with the screenings and then the quizzes and readings for each week instead of having them mixed up.”***

***“He was willing to listen to my concerns related to his class materials and suggest solutions. He uploaded reading assignments in advance so I was aware about upcoming quizzes.”***



I'm pretty sure this was a student who had a lot of difficulty with the English language, but seemed thoughtful, hardworking, and intelligent. I very much hope things get easier for him in the future.

And for the criticism/improvement:

***"I wish he could present a brief discussion of a film after screening, for example, giving us a hint about what is important to know before quizzes."***

It's usually late and everyone is tired, but I think I want to make a point of doing this more.

***"I liked the structure of lectures and screenings, but I would have preferred to take the quizzes after we had discussions of the movies. Some things became a lot more clear, especially for the more ambiguous movies."***

Well... That's kind of the point. Confusion feeds curiosity. It's like an itch that needs to be scratched.

***"The class didn't really feel involving. I think that that is due to the class being at 9 am and only 50 minutes long. There was such little time to grasp anything and it being in the morning definitely didn't help. I am not really sure what I took away from this class."***

Next year I will bring an espresso machine and hand out shots while I lead discussions.

***"Screenings could sometimes be long and boring, maybe have an intermission in the middle of longer movies, quizzes were very trivia based which sometimes made it hard to focus on the main points of the film because we were trying to remember random facts."***

Yes. The quizzes are easy, usually just trying to determine you were paying attention. But there is a good point. Maybe they *are* too trivial.

***"I wanna see more films, (this class is literally the only time during the academic semester that I can really watch and discuss films with my peers in the same major)"***

Yay! More films!

This was actually a challenging group to teach. About half the class I had in the Spring. But they were very kind when I was in the hospital after my clobbering by the car in September and they all signed a get-well card for me. It was very nice to receive that. ☺

#### **SOFA 563-01, 663-01 Writing the Feature**

(2.5 hours per week – 8 Students (2 Grad, 6 Undergrad) – Lecture and Workshop – No NTID – No GA/TA Support)

**Frank Deese – Teaching Self-Evaluations – Fall 2014 to Fall 2020 – (non-public details removed)**

This class was a lively and engaging group, so I'm a little disappointed I did not receive more comments.

**4/6 Undergrad Responding – Effective Teacher: 100% Top 2 – 4.5 Average**

***“Thank you so much for being flexible in a time of my life where everything seemed against me. You're a huge reason why I love writing as much as I do.”***

Unfortunately, my graduate students did not fill out evaluations.

**SOFA 613-01 Graduate Screenwriting**

(2.5 hours per week – 5 Students – Lecture and Workshop – No NTID – No GA/TA)

I teach this class as a combination of the undergrad “Fundamentals of Screenwriting” and “Dramatic Structure.” I assign many of the films I show in Dramatic Structure and give some of the more important lectures from that class. It worked out well for this group except for one student.

**4/5 Responding – Effective Teacher: 80% Top 2 – 4.4 Average**

***“Teaching you pretty much everything you need to know about writing your script. Frank is a great instructor. I have learned so much about script-writing that I didn't know before, and I know for a fact that my upcoming scripts will turn out higher quality as a result of being in Frank's class. Thank you Frank!”***

***And...***

***“By being better at time-management/ schedules, and a bit more open to different ideas”***

My car clobbering made the semester difficult for all classes. One student with poor attendance didn't understand why the whole course was not available on myCourses –as if attending class should be optional.

Two students said this:

***“Making the class longer. it's really important”*** and ***“Make the class length longer, I think 1 hour is too short. We can't finish the goal for that day.”***

I tried my best to be efficient with my time, but there was one student who would dominate conversations and slow things down. The length of the class has never been critiqued, but I may try to make it a 3-hour class in the future.

**SOFA 406-11 – Senior Capstone I**

(Approx. 2 hours per week – 2 Students – Private meetings)

**Frank Deese – Teaching Self-Evaluations – Fall 2014 to Fall 2020 – (non-public details removed)**

**April Edquiban** – “Did the Rabbit Die?” is a short film that was very personal to April. She screened a rough cut in December. There are a few reshoots planned for the spring.

**David Harris** – “A Bedtime Story” is David Harris’s short film. He screened a rough cut in December.

**SOFA 790-11 – Research and Thesis I**  
**(Approx. 3 hours per week – 3 Students – Private meetings)**

**Bo Gao** – I worked a lot with Bo on his short MFA film and he finished a good rough cut by the end of the semester.

**Kyle Padden** – Kyle is writing a fantasy feature MFA script. I worked extensively with him on plot outlining.

**Maria Gesek** – Maria is also writing a feature MFA screenplay very personal to her life.

## **Spring 2019:**

**SOFA 112-01 Fundamentals of Screenwriting**  
(3 hours per week – 20 Students – Lecture and Workshop – Yes NTID – GA/TA Support)

*(For the student evaluations, I’ve included just the response rate, the “effective teacher” percentage in the top two choice – “agree” and “strongly agree” – and the average score for “effective teacher,” along with “positive” and “improvement” student written responses.)*

**10/18 (2 withdrew) Responding – Effective Teacher: 50% Top 2 – 3.5 Average**

For the previous two years, this class was two sections combined. This semester went back to two sections, but only lowered the class load by 2 students from the previous year. (2 students withdrew)

The class remained very challenging to teach. My feeling was that I taught this class as well as I’ve always, but the above represents a huge drop off in my score for this class.

Given the low score, I was gratified to read

***“I liked our class discussion and presentation of each student's idea for upcoming projects. I could receive feedback from not only my professor but also my classmates, which were helpful as well.”***

***“Made a classroom environment where we weren't uncomfortable to present in. Made it informal in a beneficial way”***

***“He is very nice and supportive, and is knowledgeable about screenwriting. He supports his students being open to pushing their work to new levels and moving outside of their comfort zone.”***

***“As long as there was time, all feedback was in person and from the class. It is a writing class but the amount of writing is not as intensive, but you have to put your creativity to work each week. I feel this prepare us for the rest of the more advanced classes.”***

***“Created a positive environment, and gave grades based on if we did the assignment or not, because good writing is subjective.”***

This last one isn't entirely correct, but I do take into account effort and the degree of difficulty in writing projects when giving a score.

Conversely:

***“He had a tendency to get caught up in smaller detail when students were explaining. Other details went right over his head.”***

This may be legitimate as I look over material with the class, I'm looking at a variety of elements of screenwriting that may have me miss details of the story.

***“I wish the professor could provide me with each feedback on every assignment, critique on qualities of screenwriting skills. I was concerned if I did well on my projects because I did not get sufficient feedback.”***

I provided feedback in class on every single assignment, and then written feedback on the two screenplay reading assignments and the final script assignment.

***“In class, he can take too long to go over every students' work, which causes the class to fall behind often.”***

This is a legitimate issue for a class this size.

***“Sometimes the feedback on scripts, especially the final script, was less of a 'critique' per say, and more of what you personally would prefer to see written. Additionally, I wouldn't have minded you lecturing some of the material to us rather than always assigning the readings. The readings were pretty dense and didn't always make the topic we were studying clear. Most times, I didn't leave with a better understanding after reading it. Maybe consider going over the topics in class or showing more clips like you did for the subtext assignment.”***

This is thoughtful, if not a bit snarky about me foisting my opinion. I always preface my comments with my own degree of certainty and always invite to students to disregard or stick to their guns, so to speak. I don't believe the readings are too dense.

***“Sometimes there was not enough time to give feedback to everyone, which was understandable due to the size of the class. Also I would suggest making the students give each other a short written evaluation on each other's work. Grouping them in small groups and rotating them each week, especially or only if there is no time. I believe this will help students more in such a short class to give everyone's feedback on lengthy scripts.”***

I've considered this idea and rejected it as I want all students to get equal treatment. Happily, this class was one of my most insightful on the part of the students and the critique of written work. This class was usually 20 students in the room, but I remember a lot of lively discussions. I would not want to lose that with small groups. I also did not believe my TA was ready to lead a critique group.

***“Actually teaching components of scripts, etc. and not expecting people who have never written scripts to do so right away without explaining even the format.”***

I taught all necessary format elements for this class, but I did not want to foist too much on them too early. It takes a while just to get students adhering to the “see/hear” rule of screenwriting.

***“The professor can improve by actually teaching us more on how to write well and what to write about. Most students who aren't interested in becoming screenwriters were kind of lost.”***

I don't know how to remedy this. The entire class was dedicated to learning to write well from character desire, to subtext in dialogue, to format conventions. The students also read and critiqued two feature-length screenplays of their choice.

As in previous years, I tried to prepare my students for the reality that class size will make it a bit difficult and that we're all in this difficulty together. Part of that difficulty is grading which I do all personally. Luckily that won't be in issue in 2020 as my class size is 15.

### **SOFA 564-01 and 664-01 - Writing the Series**

(2.5 hours per week – 9 Students (7 Undergrad, 2 Grad) – Lecture and Workshop – No NTID – No GA/TA Support)

### **2/5 Responding (Undergrad) – Effective Teacher: 59% Top 2 – 3.0 Average**

“Writing the Series” remains one of my most challenging classes as the students are knowledgeable, usually very motivated, and have high expectations. (They also watch a lot

more TV than I do.) As I stated before, I always feel I have to be at the top of my game with this class. This semester was not an exception. I never ceased trying my best and even had a professional TV writer Skype in to give advice to the students.

That said... These two responding students gave me *the worst evaluation in my academic career*, clearly due to one very unsatisfied student. The two grads did not respond. This class also had two undergrads withdraw for personal reasons and one student rarely attended but did not drop out. Another student was critically injured in a car accident late in the semester.

***“He provided a list of reading materials that were helpful”***

***“Told us from the beginning that we needed to have a bible and a pilot script, so we really had the whole semester to write which was nice. Also the books were really helpful and guest speakers!”***

But...

***“The actual format of the bible (like structure or layout) was never really explained and led to me using different methods of organizing information until the end. Which is fine. But more clarity on that structure would have been nice.”***

I talked about the series bible from day one and gave a preliminary outline of what was expected early on. I did, however, encourage the students to make the bible their own and include more than what was asked for.

***“Professor Deese rarely used mycourse. He did not provide a syllabus and left the approximately 200 page paper for students to only start working on in week 12. This class needs to be better organized and have a structure to it. For many students, this is not the only class they are taking and the work load in such a small amount of time is extremely difficult and unfair.”***

First of all, it was 20 pages, not 200. 20 pages would be a very long bible. I discussed the bible throughout the course and provided the students with a handout very early describing what was needed. I did use myCourses and I posted a syllabus and handed it out in class the very first day. So I did not provide a “small amount of time.” I provided the entire semester and even scored the completed bibles on week 12 and allowed all students to revise their bible for a higher score.

***“This should be a writing intensive course.”***

It’s even more writing intensive than and “Writing Intensive Course,” but doesn’t follow all the criteria necessary to earn that moniker.

**SOFA 590-01 Los Angeles (Undergraduate)**

(1 hour per week and week-long trip to Los Angeles – 6 Students – Lecture and Workshop – No NTID – No GA/TA Support)

This was my second time leading students on this trip, but the first time in January, the week when the entertainment industry returns from the holiday break. This made scheduling difficult, but we were still able to get on the set of Modern Family at pretty much the last minute. We ended up having a good and full schedule, but this was not my favorite group. They complained a lot and gossiped in the van about other students and professors.

We ended up visiting five studio lots and I assigned a lot of reading about Hollywood history and the studio system. As frustrating as the students were on the trip, they were just the opposite in class. We had a lot of great and lively discussions during the semester.

***5/6 Responding – Effective Teacher: 100% Top 2 – 4.6 Average***

***“We gave Frank a lot of guff but it was a great class!” and “Was a lot of fun” and “Promotes a great discussion-friendly environment” and “He’s just cool.” and “Had productive discussions in class.”***

But...

***“His driving skills” and “Driving in LA.”***

I have a perfect driving record, but you roll over one low curb in a tight parking lot and... OMG, I didn't hear the end of it.

**SOFA 407-04 Senior Thesis II**

(Approx. 4 hours per week – 4 Students – Private meetings)

***0/4 Responding***

***Brian Hewitt*** – Brian was well on his way to finishing a very good thesis film with a few performance issues when he was in a near-fatal accident driving to Ohio Easter weekend. Miraculously, Brian healed completely and screened his film for a private audience in the Fall.

***Jesse James*** – I took over Jesse as an advisee when Prof. Cat Ashworth left for her semi-retirement. I worked with her extensively on the edit and she screened her thesis film at the end of the semester.

***Jake Scumaci*** – Jake completed his thesis film “Fields” and screened at the end of the semester.

***Olivia Metellus*** – Olivia finished editing and screened her thesis film at the end of the semester.

**SOFA 890-05 Research and Thesis II**

(Approx. 2 hours per week – 2 Students – Private meetings)

**Zichen Liang** – Zichen finished her MFA feature screenplay and screened her accompanying proof-of-concept film in May. I’m still working with her to finish the MFA paper.

**Yuan Yao** – Yuan screened his MFA film “My Guest from Afar.”

**SOFA 599- 08 SOFA Independent Study**

(Approx. 1 hours per week – 1 student – Private meetings)

**Jake Scumaci** – Having finished the bulk of this thesis work, Jake wanted to make a music video based on a song he liked (“Speak Loud”) from the band “Trills.” I was very supportive of the idea as long as he had written permission from the songwriters, which he secured. He also wanted to shoot on 35mm film, which I supported as long as he secured the resources, which he did. We went over the basic visual story a few times and I encouraged Jake to stay away from clichés as the subject of child abuse is fraught with them. Jake went off and made the film and I could not be more pleased with the results which were included in the Honors Reel.

## Fall 2018:

**SOFA 208-01 Dramatic Structure**

(5 hours per week – 23 Students – Lecture and Screening – No NTID – GA/TA: Kyle Padden)

As I have said before, this is my most time-consuming and important class. This was my sixth time teaching it and I’m constantly trying to find ways to do it better. The biggest challenge is teaching the students something they don’t already know, either from their life experience, previous classes, or my Fundamentals class.

All the exams are hand-written and graded by me. My TA Kyle graded the 11 quizzes given during the semester.

My mission for this class continues to be to encourage curiosity, and for students to pursue a broad base of knowledge for writing.

**15/23 Responding – Effective Teacher: 100% Top 2 – 4.47 Average**

This goes to what I try to do:

***“Professor Deese provided us with clear expectations as to what we're going to learn for that day, it wasn't up to speculation. There was structure, though some technical malfunctions here and there but that's expected, and the information provided to us was done so in a***



***timely manner within the regulated time of class. After the day had ended the powerpoint presentations were uploaded online for us to review. Even when we didn't receive our quizzes back after they were graded, he kept an open line of communication as to when we should expect them. Professor Deese exceeded the expectation of how a professor should conduct a college course."***

It was a new classroom for this class with funky media connections – hence the technical malfunctions.

***"He went through the different subjects in Dramatic Structure in a clear and timely manner, presenting it in a way that is easy for the students to understand and remember for future projects."***

***"Very easy to talk and listen to. Conveyed points clearly, and gave understandable examples."***

***"He presented each new topic in a way that was understandable through our readings, viewings, and in-class discussions."***

***"The weekly quizzes were at first intimidating but they did help me review the material of the week before. They were not too complicated either, they just helped me remember the most important aspects of each week."***

***"He communicates well with college-aged students, comes from an experienced background, and has a well-rounded knowledge of the subject."***

And for the criticism/improvement:

***"Continue to challenge, push and test your students past their boundaries."***

***"Grading on the exams (not quizzes) and the paper was a bit harsh in my opinion, but that's just life."***

I actually like to hear that. I'm proud of the written exams – but they are nearly unbearable to grade.

***"Deese, you're a good man but I will say that sometimes you were tardy in grading, but you did give us time compensation for making the grade back up. But yeah, that's the small thing. Everything else is great."***

SOFA traveling in October and November slowed down my grading.

**SOFA 563-01, 663-01 Writing the Feature**

**Frank Deese – Teaching Self-Evaluations – Fall 2014 to Fall 2020 – (non-public details removed)**

(2.5 hours per week – 7 Students (2 Grad, 5 Undergrad) – Lecture and Workshop – No NTID – No GA/TA Support)

Again, this year, I assigned reading ahead of time and tested the students on the reading. I also assigned Robert McKee's new book "Dialogue" which I think is excellent and useful.

**3/5 Undergrad Responding – Effective Teacher: 100% Top 2 – 4.67 Average**

***"Another favorite teacher - understanding of the writing process and lets our creative sides spill over in class."***

***"Facilitated constructive discussions giving feedback on each student's work. It is difficult to get through everyone, but Frank did a good job giving everyone time to share."***

Unfortunately, my graduate students did not fill out evaluations.

**SOFA 613-01 Graduate Screenwriting**

(2.5 hours per week – 5 Students – Lecture and Workshop – No NTID – No GA/TA)

In spite of some language and cultural issues with my two students from China, this class had great energy and lively discussions. I teach this class as a combination of the undergrad "Fundamentals of Screenwriting" and "Dramatic Structure." I assign many of the films I show in Dramatic Structure and give some of the more important lectures from that class. It worked out very well with this group.

**4/5 Responding – Effective Teacher: 100% Top 2 – 5 Average**

***"This was my favorite & most productive class of the semester. I really appreciated the structure of the course - writing a few short pieces before a longer assignment was helpful not only in helping me learn how to write screenplays, but also in helping me come up with ideas for future films. I also found the readings very helpful - if anything I think there could be more readings.."***

Yes! More readings!

***"I like the format, and I think it was the only class we had this first semester that assumed we learned anything at all in our undergraduate university. It was nice getting a refresher/development in the other courses, but this just felt like a good critique focused studio class with an overview of fundamentals while we practiced."***

***"Y'all have some good faculty at this school, and Frank is no exception. I think he knows his way around a phrase, and he has a good handle on the realities of life and industry."***

Frank Deese – Teaching Self-Evaluations – Fall 2014 to Fall 2020 – (non-public details removed)

*“Class discussions were great, the assignments were worthwhile, and Frank's feedback was very helpful.”*

**SOFA 406-08 – Senior Thesis I**

(Approx. 3 hours per week – 3 Students – Private meetings)

**1/5 Responding – Effective Teacher: 100% Top 2 – 5.0 Average**

**Reuben VanHoeve** – With Prof. Ambarien Aqadar on personal leave, I took on Reuben as an advisee on his thesis film which was later chosen for the Honors Show.

**Brian Hewitt** – Brian wrote, filmed and screen a rough cut of his thesis film.

**Camille Howard** – I saw Camille through the thesis approval phase in the Spring, but then she re-proposed with Cat Ashworth, but did not switch over to Cat's roster.

**Olivia Metellus** – I worked with Olivia on the script of her film and on the rough cut.

**Jake Scumaci** – I worked with Jack on the script and she screened his rough cut in December.

**SOFA 790-07 – Research and Thesis I**

**(Approx. 2 hours per week – 2 Students – Private meetings)**

Both Zichen and Yuan decided to repropose in the Fall which created a heavy time and effort burden on me at the beginning of the semester. (Jake Scumaci also reproposed.)

**Zichen Liang** – Zichen proposed a comedy script based on her own experiences moving to the United States and having many rich and shallow friends. Zichen has written an extensive outline/treatment, and is now writing the first draft screenplay.

**Yuan Yao** – Yuan reproposed an MFA film based on his own experiences, but from the point of view of an American middle-aged man who works out his prejudices against Asians while having a Chinese tenant.

## Spring 2018:

**SOFA 112-01 Fundamentals of Screenwriting**

(3 hours per week – 22 Students – Lecture and Workshop – No NTID – GA/TA Support)

*(For the student evaluations, I've included just the response rate, the “effective teacher” percentage in the top two choice – “agree” and “strongly agree” – and the average score for “effective teacher,” along with “positive” and “improvement” student written responses.)*

**12/22 Responding – Effective Teacher: 100% Top 2 – 4.67 Average**

This was the second time both sections were combined into one mega-class with 22 students instead of half that. It was very challenging to teach but it helped to have a TA attending.

*“Really nice encouraging guy. Made the classroom feel like a safe friendly environment to read aloud all of our writing. Often gave feedback that was truly helpful.”*

*“He was immensely helpful in providing feedback on story structure and ideas for character choices.”*

*“Made the class enjoyable. The only class that I really looked forward to during the week. His feedback was fair and helped me improve.”*

*“Created a great, safe environment for ideas and learning.”*

All of the above is what I try to achieve in this class. I’m gratified it was noticed.

Conversely:

*“The only issue in the class stemmed from the fact that it was too full, which is out of the instructor's control.”*

*“Maybe grade a little faster but honestly not that big a deal”*

I tried to prepare my students for the reality that class size will make it a bit difficult and that we’re all in this difficulty together. I was late getting back one assignment during the time I was in Los Angeles for the class trip. As this class is double in size of what it should be, grading is that more difficult. I do almost all of it myself.

**SOFA 564-01 and 664-01 - Writing the Series**

(2.5 hours per week – 7 Students (4 Undergrad, 3 Grad) – Lecture and Workshop – No NTID – No GA/TA Support)

**3/4 Responding (Undergrad) – Effective Teacher: 67% Top 2 – 4.21 Average**

Again, “Writing the Series” remains one of my most challenging classes as the students are knowledgeable, usually very motivated, and have high expectations. (They also watch a lot more TV than I do.) As I stated before, I always feel I have to be at the top of my game with this class.

I also had three graduate students, two of which had limited English skills. That, and cultural differences when it came to story, made the class very challenging. None of the grad students filled out evaluations.

***“Frank is a great teacher who clearly cares deeply for his students. He has a wealth of knowledge and is always there when we have questions.”***

***“Frank has a depthful knowledge of the subject matter, and he applies that in class feedback.”***

But...

***“The only complaint isn't really something that's Franks fault, rather its just how the course got slightly disorganized due to the LA trip and numerous other responsibilities. Frank is aware of this and apologized profusely to us. Its just something to note going forward.”***

I would not say it was not my fault as I am responsible for the organization of the class. The preparation and execution of the Los Angeles Trip during the March spring break was a massive amount of work, especially as it was my first Los Angeles trip.

#### **SOFA 590-01 Los Angeles (Undergraduate)**

(1 hour per week and week-long trip to Los Angeles – 6 Students – Lecture and Workshop – No NTID – No GA/TA Support)

As I said, this was my first time leading students on this trip. I happened mid-semester, so we had an opportunity to discuss the kinds of people and places we'd like to visit. Taking over from a former professor who was not available to advise made the trip all the more challenging. I had a difficult time booking visits to studios and substituted with individual meetings with important famous people I knew from Los Angeles. The students expressed great appreciation for that.

***5/6 Responding – Effective Teacher: 100% Top 2 – 4.6 Average***

***“Great class, loved the trip. I can't wait to go back to LA on my own. I know now after this class that I'll be much more comfortable going and potentially moving there on my own.”***

***“Very open to listening to what the class wanted, encouraging of our interest in the industry and LA in general.”***

#### **SOFA 407-04 Senior Thesis II**

(Approx. 3 hours per week – 4 Students – Private meetings)

***2/4 Responding – Effective Teacher: 100% Top 2 – 4.0 Average***

**Lane Mc Fadden** – Lane was very much ahead of schedule and finished a very good parable of a film called “The Duel.” The film was included in the Honors Show and won the “Faculty Award.”

**Kevin Cosgrove** – Kevin finished his thesis pilot, extra episode, series bible and filmed scenes from “The Lobby” based on his mother’s experience working as a lobbyist in Albany.

**Emily Scialabba** – Emily finished the pilot and bible of her TV series called “Apartmentalized.”

**Ramon Vasquez** – Ramon screened his thesis film in May.

**SOFA 599- 08 SOFA Independent Study**

**(Approx. 2 hours per week – 2 Students – Private meetings)**

**Lane McFadden** directed “**Scott Free**” from a screenplay by Camille Howard. It was an excellent short film and I had complete faith in what Lane and Camille were trying to do. I had very few suggestions except clarity about who was who in the story.

**Jenna Roscoe** wrote and directed “**Cha Boi Mikey**.” This was hilarious and I loved the final film. It was a pleasure watching Jenna grow from a shy and uncertain freshman to a confident and competent filmmaker. My main goal with Jenna was to get out of her way. I think she appreciated that in my previous class with her (Writing the Feature) where I made suggestions, but encouraged her to write the script she wanted as my inclinations are very different from hers.

## Fall 2017:

**SOFA 208-01 Dramatic Structure**

(5 hours per week – 25 Students – Lecture and Screening – NTID – GA/TA: Dan LaTourette)

As I have said before, this is my most time-consuming and important class. This was my fifth time teaching it and I’m constantly trying to find ways to do it better. The biggest challenge is teaching the students something they don’t already know, either from their life experience, previous classes, or my Fundamentals class.

My mission for this class continues to be to encourage curiosity, and for students to pursue a broad base of knowledge for writing.

I had said last year: *“I also wanted to show more films that included racial diversity. This year I showed ‘Selma’ and discussed the controversy surrounding the director’s dramatic license with regard to President Johnson.”*

Mid-semester, I had a student request to meet me during office hours to complain that the movies so far did not include any people of color. I told her about what I planned later in the semester, including the newly-released “Fences,” but she did not seem satisfied with anything short of reworking my curriculum. I did not do that, but her concerns increased my desire to show more diversity. So later I also included the Latino telenovela –themed “Jane the Virgin” series pilot, and the students were very happy about the change. I will continue to search out diverse content as long as it fits the concepts I’m trying to teach.

#### **14/25 Responding – Effective Teacher: 100% Top 2 – 4.64 Average**

My response rate went down this year. Not too surprising. It was more a difficult class.

This goes to what I try to do:

***“The instructor was knowledgeable and engaging. He presented the class as a discussion-based place, and was very open to any ideas, especially promoting creativity and individuality. The quizzes and exams were straightforward and understandable, and he took the extra effort to ask for genuine, unique answers rather than just reciting documents. He spoke to students as people, and focused on individual growth rather than completed assignments. Definitely got me thinking about film in different ways.”***

***“The class was well-structured with the tests being given out consistently on new material each week. On top of that, concepts were easy to understand through application using the films we watched”***

***“He was very organized and gave great feedback to students. He would engage students in conversation so we would understand and comprehend more.”***

I like being called “organized.” ☺

***“Frank Deese is... a... screenplay writer. He is aware of the developments in visual media storytelling today and centuries ago and uses incredibly fitting examples across media to convey what makes stories compelling. His car malfunctioning was the reason for his delay on one or two class days. Even when having to cancel those classes because of his delay, Frank was ready to work with the setbacks and complete his instruction of the material to us in an effective manner.”***

“Check your fluids, students.” I had to cancel class only once for this, though.

And for the criticism:

***“I feel like we could have got even more into genres, tropes, and ideas that surround the Hero's Journey even more. Maybe talking about the differences in international ways of storytelling that have popped up”***

***“While the class is writing intensive, sometimes it felt that most of the writing we did was busywork to prove that we had watched the movie/read the assignments. However, not all quizzes were like this, and the midterm was also a nice opportunity to apply ourselves in writing. This has always seemed kind of ridiculous to me since we're paying to go here already and it's ultimately up to us to do the work. It just takes away from the time we pay for to learn from the teacher.”***

I'm not exactly sure what this means, but I think there was plenty of writing beyond the short answers on the quiz.

#### **SOFA 563-01, 663-01 Writing the Feature**

(2.5 hours per week – 11 Students (9 Undergrad) – Lecture and Workshop – No NTID – No GA/TA Support)

Again, this year, I assigned reading ahead of time and tested the students on the reading. I also assigned Robert McKee's new book “ Dialogue” which I think is excellent and useful.

**4/9 Undergrad Responding – Effective Teacher: 100% Top 2 – 4.50 Average**

***“Frank gave insightful feedback on my scripts and presented worthwhile materials to enhance my knowledge on feature screenwriting”***

***“Frank is great about making sure that students feel secure presenting creative ideas, knowing that they could be taken seriously and that they will be respected for their ideas”***

***“Frank was very good at providing timely and extremely effective feedback when reviewing our work..”***

And a lengthy criticism:

***“I do wish that Frank critiqued students more harshly on their work. I would have enjoyed a more rigorous discussion of the material that I presented. I also wonder if it would be better for students to present their materials to be read before coming in to class, so that there could be a more lengthy discussion of the materials that are being presented by students. I know that there may be concern over students doing the reading for the course, but the amount of class time that is taken up by table reads seems overpowering to me.”***

This is a standard problem with workshop classes. Students will not read material before class.



**SOFA 613-01 Graduate Screenwriting**

(2.5 hours per week – 4 Students – Lecture and Workshop – No NTID – No GA/TA)

This was a very difficult class to teach as the four students were very shy and whatever energy was in the room I had to bring. It took a long time to make these students feel comfortable around each other so that they were even remotely conversational. But they had some interesting stories to tell in their work and they were all good students when it came to assignments. I like to make this class a combination of Screenwriting Fundamentals and Dramatic Structure. These four students were able to attend my DS screenings and hear some of the analysis lectures in that class.

**4/4 Responding – Effective Teacher: 100% Top 2 – 4.5 Average**

*“Frank is extremely knowledgeable in the subject and provided exceptional feedback and advice on every assignment.”*

*“Provided plenty of opportunity to practice screenwriting and gave prompt feedback.”*

Then there was this:

*“I would have had a more positive learning experience if material we were expected to read aloud in class was kept PG rated, or at least we were given opportunity beforehand to choose what to read.”*

Well... Not much to do about that.

**SOFA 406-03 and 06 – Senior Thesis I**

(Approx. 3 hours per week – 3 Students – Private meetings)

**2/4 Responding – Effective Teacher: 100% Top 2 – 5.0 Average**

**Lane McFaddin** – Lane wrote and filmed a very good parable of a thesis film called “The Duel.” He screened a rough cut in December.

**Kevin Cosgrove** – Kevin began outlining and writing a thesis TV series about lobbyist work in Albany, NY?

**Emily Scialabba** – Emily proposed and began work on TV series called “Apartmentalized.”

**Ramon Vasquez** – Ramon filmed and screened a thesis film he wrote in my Fundamentals of Screenwriting class.

## Spring 2017:

### SOFA 112-01 Fundamentals of Screenwriting

(3 hours per week – 23 Students – Lecture and Workshop – NTID – GA/TA Support)

*(For the student evaluations, I've included just the response rate, the "effective teacher" percentage in the top two choice – "agree" and "strongly agree" – and the average score for "effective teacher," along with "positive" and "improvement" student written responses.)*

#### **10/24 Responding – Effective Teacher: 90% Top 2 – 4.5 Average**

The response rate is much less than previous years, but the average "effective teacher" is higher than last year.

This was the first time both sections were combined into one mega-class with 23 students instead of half that. It was very challenging to teach and keep the class interest over three hours.

***"Professor Deese is very supportive and enjoys hearing unique ideas from students. His class is very open and almost feels like a critique panel which helps the scripts in the class grow better and stronger."***

***"He made the class very interesting and relaxing. He is very understanding and pleasant to talk to overall. He's great at giving good advice and sparking class discussions."***

***"Professor Deese is an excellent teacher who definitely knows how to write an effective and amazing script, this then trickles down to his students who learn an incredible amount. To be honest I didn't think of myself as much of a scriptwriter before the class, but Deese has made me feel like I can actually do a decent job."***

I like the last one a lot because it goes to exactly what I try to do, including trying to write the elusive "amazing script."

Conversely:

***"I wish the critiques were separated into small groups so the class didn't drag on. I wish more content was posted on MyCourses. Also, it's really inefficient to email our homework as well as print it out. All assignments should be turned into a dropbox through MyCourses like literally every other class."***

***"Maybe mix up the course work a bit. Every class was extremely similar and repetitive; read scripts, discuss, new topic, example, and done. Some ideas might be the whole class/groups***

***working together to fix a script, grammatically and/or story wise. It would create more opportunities for in class discussions.”***

I don't see how breaking up the class would help. I tried to prepare my students for the reality that class size will make it a bit difficult and that we're all in this difficulty together.

***“Maybe stop kids from going off on tantrums; stop them from interrupting each other, especially interrupting those who were just presenting and are trying to talk afterwards. Use of MyCourses :-)”***

I do my best to moderate class discussions and step in when things get out of hand, but I had one student with a cognitive disability and another who jumped on any racially or ethnically insensitive utterance, both real and imagined. There were a lot of moments that got a bit contentious.

### **SOFA 564-01 and 664-01 - Writing the Series**

(2.5 hours per week – 11 Students (7 Undergrad, 4 Grad) – Lecture and Workshop – No NTID – No GA/TA Support)

**4/7 Responding (Undergrad) – Effective Teacher: 100% Top 2 – 4.75 Average**

There were also two grad students, but they weren't enough to warrant an evaluation report.

“Writing the Series” remains one of my most challenging classes as the students are knowledgeable, and usually very motivated. (They also watch a lot more TV than I do.) As I stated before, I always feel I have to be at the top of my game with this class.

***“Presented course material, choose good readings. Positive learning environment.”***

***“Frank enabled me to better understand both the industry and the form of television writing, and gave helpful feedback as well as allowing time to get feedback from my peers.”***

***“He did a great job of allowing our ideas to flourish rather than mold them into something he would like. Additionally getting a guest speaker was incredibly helpful as he gave us an inside scoop on the current television world. Another really great thing was the course reading, which rather than being tedious was actually very helpful when writing your series.”***

Here is a mixed response:

***“Bringing in David Schickler was one of the highlights of all semester, really great to hear about how he works with Hollywood. Good feedback on material, the class size is just tooooo large. Should make it limited, pace of class would speed up and it would be easier to grade everything.”***

**Frank Deese – Teaching Self-Evaluations – Fall 2014 to Fall 2020 – (non-public details removed)**

The switch to one evening class per week that is three hours long allowed me to invite a guest speaker. David is a native Rochesterian, but works in the industry remotely. He was a fun guest.

I don't think the class size was too large at 9 students, but we had one grad student who had not taken the prerequisite classes, but I admitted him on the recommendations of others. That was a mistake. He was not ready to take this class and his inexperience dragged the class down. I won't make that mistake again.

And some criticism:

***“Present newer information on the TV industry, whether it is one day with a powerpoint or generally”***

I certainly try my best with this.

***“I think the course could benefit from a stronger timeline, particularly for the comedy scripts. I would have enjoyed bringing drafts of the scripts in earlier and getting feedback off of those as opposed to off of step outlines and episode pitches.”***

This is a valid point, and I will try to improve getting pages in front of the class. But I still think outlines are very important. A good script usually comes from a good outline.

***“If the bible wasn't one assignment, but maybe compartmentalized and then assigned earlier, my approach to the rest of the work would be faster and easier to approach.”***

This is actually a very good point. I may try to implement this suggestion.

**SOFA 526-02 Writing the Short (Undergraduate)**

(3 hours per week – 5 Students – Lecture and Workshop – No NTID – No GA/TA Support)

This was an even 7/5 mix of grads and undergrads. This was going to be Peter Kiwitt's class, but I took it over at the last minute when he went on leave. Though I liked most all the students individually, it was a very difficult mix with the 7 grad students being from overseas with marginal English skills. It was a stressful class and I had difficulty keeping the unwieldy group focused on the tasks at hand. There were several students I constantly had to remind to get off their phones. I felt like a middle school teacher.

***3/5 Responding – Effective Teacher: 67% Top 2 – 3.67 Average***

I think this is my lowest score of any class after nine semesters at RIT. The three undergrad students who responded did not leave any comments. That hurts because I put a lot of effort into this very difficult class.

**SOFA 626-01 Writing the Short (Graduate)**

**Frank Deese – Teaching Self-Evaluations – Fall 2014 to Fall 2020 – (non-public details removed)**

(3 hours per week – 7 Students – Lecture and Workshop – No NTID – No GA/TA Support)

**6/7 Responding – Effective Teacher: 100% Top 2 – 4.17 Average**

I got more appreciation from the grad students, but the response was tepid.

*“Frank spends the equal amount of time on each of the scripts. We also get to listen and discuss others' scripts as well, which helps us understand scripts and stories.”*

*“The way he teaches and lets the students have their own way of writing.”*

And this criticism:

*“Frank works a lot and has to read many scripts every day, which almost seems impossible. He sometimes could get confused with the stories which is totally understandable.”*

Some of the stories *were* remarkably the same. I wish the responses from this class were better because I think I did an excellent job with this group.

**SOFA 407-04 Senior Thesis II**

(Approx. 3 hours per week – 3 Students – Private meetings)

**Adam Heilbrunn** – Adam completed his thesis feature screenplay thriller and screened his proof-of-concept film.

**Savannah Bayse** – Savannah’s thesis film “Holdfast” turned out very well. She screened it in May.

**Patrick Hogue:** Pat screened his film “Sherman” which was included in the Honors Show.

**SOFA 890-05 – Research and Thesis II**

(Approx. 3 hours per week – 3 Students – Private meetings)

**Phillip Leteka:** Phillip’s MFA film “Seek Another Land” was included in the Honors Show and won the “Chairman’s Award.”

**Benjamin Strack:** Ben screened his MFA thesis film “Outburst” and it was included in the final Honors Show.

**Qin Zhou:** During the Summer of 2017, I had weekly telephone calls with Qin in China. We went over the outline and script line by line. (She screened her film in 2018.)

*In addition to the above, I also served on the Graduate thesis committees of **Fraaz Kahn, Dan LaTourette, and Manjoh Reddy.***

## Fall 2016:

### SOFA 208-01 Dramatic Structure

(5 hours per week – 18 Students – Lecture and Screening – No NTID – GA/TA: Ben Strack)

As I have said before, this is my most time-consuming and important class. This was my fourth time teaching it and I'm constantly trying to find ways to do it better. The biggest challenge is teaching the students something they don't already know, either from their life experience, previous classes, or my Fundamentals class.

This class was my smallest ever, but also the brightest and most knowledgeable I have ever had. (This is a truly impressive live action class. They are 2<sup>nd</sup> years now.) That made teaching the class a pleasure, but also a greater challenge. I tried to meet that challenge by including in my reading some essays that had more to do with being an artist in general and a citizen. Some of the works I had them read were Emerson's "Self-Reliance," Tennessee Williams's "The Catastrophe of Success," and King's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail."

Part of my mission, besides teaching dramatic structure, is to encourage curiosity and for students to pursue a broad education. I know very few successful writers who are not also very knowledgeable about the world. They have to be to write good novels and screenplays.

I also wanted to show more films that included racial diversity. This year I showed "Selma" and discussed the controversy surrounding the director's dramatic license with regard to President Johnson.

Again, my TA Ben Strack graded all the quizzes and took roll every day. Having Ben was a huge help.

Ben and I also set up myCourses for tracking grades and attendance, which was also a huge help at the end of the semester.

### 15/18 Responding – Effective Teacher: 100% Top 2 – 4.53 Average

I had an improved response rate from previous years due to my nagging persistence.

These are nice to read, especially given the level of the students:

***"The format of the course allowed for a lot of discussion time while still remaining on schedule. These discussions were always very informative and engaging. The class never seemed to linger, I found myself wanting to stay longer not leave sooner. Frank is very good at involving everyone in the class, providing a positive environment, and creating a safe***

*space. The quizzes forced me to read the material assigned which was always enlightening and interesting. The quizzes every week worked very well for me as a whole.”*

*“Overall Frank did an excellent job! The lessons were presented clearly and with a great deal of knowledge!”*

*“Lots of interesting information presented in intriguing ways.”*

*“I really enjoyed class discussions and how open everyone was to participation.”*

The comment below goes to my biggest concern teaching this class. I do find, however, that what I talk about is not new to the vast majority of students:

*“A lot of the material was very similar to what I had been taught in previous film theory classes. Honestly, a lot of it could be analyzed with just basic knowledge from high school English and writing classes.”*

*“I really enjoyed the class. My only complaint would be that we would lose a great deal of in class time due to the quizzes every Monday. If the class was 15 minutes longer on the non-screening days, we would have had more time for discussion.”*

There is some truth to that. I don't know how to fix it.

#### **SOFA 563-01, 663-01 Writing the Feature**

(2.5 hours per week – 6 Students (6 Undergrad) – Lecture and Workshop – No NTID – No GA/TA Support)

Again, this year, I assigned reading ahead of time and tested the students on the reading. This was a small and relaxed class with very lively discussion and a few conflicting personalities. I found myself playing moderator more rigorously in order to keep the peace. Several of my students were severely hampered in their writing because they were making a film. The large workload of SOFA students is an ongoing issue with no resolution.

#### **4/6 Undergrad Responding – Effective Teacher: 100% Top 2 – 4.75 Average**

*“This class is awesome. The format of the course is great and it really helped me develop my writing.”*

*“Deese is cool. Everybody likes Deese. He makes class fun and has an intelligent and concise attitude about the craft of screenplay writing.”*

*“Creating that positive environment and providing great encouragement towards the students.”*

Below are typical criticisms of me as a professor:

***“Definitely stricter deadlines are needed, and a bit more structure towards critiquing students work in class.”***

This is very valid. I’ve started using my stopwatch in class more to keep track of the time we’re spending on any given writer. But... some writers need more time and feedback.

I’m not sure I agree with this:

***“Not really a thing, but if we could have more round table discussions later in the process, it would be nice. By that I mean, not reading the text and analyzing, but everyone working on their film in the same room, on their devices, with the ability to throw out questions as they write. It'd be nice to have.”***

***“Be a bit more familiar with the deadlines so that students can be reminded of them as they get closer and closer.”***

I am familiar with the deadlines, but have joked in class that I was surprised a deadline was so soon. These are advanced writing students and I try to get them to be their boss when it comes to making deadlines.

### **SOFA 613-01 Graduate Screenwriting**

(2.5 hours per week – 8 Students – Lecture and Workshop – No NTID – GA/TA Dan LaTourette)

This was a very difficult class to teach as 6 of the 8 students did not speak English clearly. Two of the Chinese students really struggled to communicate. But this was the hand I was dealt and I played it as best I could. Having Dan LaTourette help in and out of class was greatly appreciated by me and the students.

Given the above, I was happy to read this:

***“You did a fantastic job teaching screenwriting to a group that was majority non-english speakers. That’s an incredibly difficult task and you did it better than I'd have assumed from anyone.”***

***“Professor Deese consistently gave great feedback on mine and other students' work. He is a good lecturer and is pleasant and approachable. Overall I am satisfied with this course and with his help as a professor.”***

Then there was this:

***“Deadlines in class were mostly clear, but they were not documented anywhere, and that would have been greatly appreciated. My section was a very shy section, so I do not know***



*how much he could have improved upon this, but it would have been nice to get more feedback from my peers. I think class time could have been used more effectively- we frequently went over the time he had planned for certain tasks. While feedback on work was direct and abundant, progress concerning grades was virtually non-existent, other than letting us know that as a class we were on the right track and if we handed everything in, it was good. I have not gotten a single numerical grade in the course so far, and therefore it is very difficult to gauge my performance.”*

I told the class at the beginning that most all the assignments would not be graded but only counted as “turned-in” or not “turned in.” Not a single student missed an assignment. There were two graded assignments, including the final screenplay. At the time this student wrote the above, I had not yet returned the first of those two assignments.

#### **SOFA 406-03 and 06 – Senior Thesis I**

(Approx. 3 hours per week – 3 Students – Private meetings)

**Adam Heilbrunn** – Adam is my one screenwriting student for 2016-17. He is writing a thriller feature screenplay. Currently, he is 30 pages into the screenplay based on his outline.

**Patrick Hogue** – Patrick has made a film about a young man who searches for his lost cat on the day of his father’s funeral. I look forward to Patrick focusing and fine-tuning this work. He screened in December.

**Savannah Bayse** – Savannah wrote, directed, and screened a rough cut of her thesis film in December.

#### **SOFA 790-07 Research and Thesis**

(3 hours per week – 3 Students – Private Meetings)

**Phillip Leteka** – Phillip final script that could be successfully filmed at the Genesee Country Village. I visited the set on the final day of shooting and everything was going smoothly. I look forward to seeing Phillip’s first assembly of his MFA film very soon.

**Benjamin Strack** – Ben wrote his MFA film and screened a rough cut in December.

**Qin Zhou** – Qin is writing and shooting her MFA film in Shanghai.

*In addition to the above, I also served on the Graduate thesis committee of **Dan LaTourette** . He is writing a Civil War feature drama for which I have given him notes.*

**Spring 2016:**

**SOFA 112-01 Fundamentals of Screenwriting**

(3 hours per week – 10 Students – Lecture and Workshop – No NTID – No GA/TA Support)

*(For the student evaluations, I've included just the response rate, the "effective teacher" percentage in the top two choice – "agree" and "strongly agree" – and the average score for "effective teacher," along with "positive" and "improvement" student written responses.)*

**8/10 Responding – Effective Teacher: 100% Top 2 – 4.38 Average**

The response rate is higher than previous years, but the average "effective teacher" is lower than last year.

This was, in a lot of ways, a very difficult class to teach. There was a critical mass of very shy students and it was very difficult to achieve momentum in any group discussion. It really took all my energy and enthusiasm to get the ball rolling. I think most all of them were interesting individually – and some very talented – but as a group they were somnambulistic.

Positively, they wrote:

***"He did a good job in providing good critical feedback for our writing. It was really informative and engaging. He always manages to make his classes fun."***

***"Franklin Deese is well acquainted with the subject, and through his experience he is able to offer magnificent feedback and advice. Every time he offers information it is not as fact, it is as direction. His objectivity is amazing."***

I like this one above, but I think the writer means by "fact" is that I did not jam my opinion down their throats. I like this below:

***"Professor Deese is an excellent teacher who definitely knows how to write an effective and amazing script, this then trickles down to his students who learn an incredible amount. To be honest I didn't think of myself as much of a scriptwriter before the class, but Deese has made me feel like I can actually do a decent job."***

Below are some valid criticisms:

***"The first screen reading assignment did take a while to be graded, but other than that, Professor Deese was on top of everything."***

I was late getting that assignment back. I will also start posting grades for this class on myCourses.

***"Post grades on myCourses. Every once in a while your voice gets quiet, try to speak at a more consistent volume."***

That's the first complaint I've had about my voice. ☺

***“We have different tastes in what makes a good story, but I don't think that's necessarily bad. I just want to tell more unconventional stories in unconventional ways, and I feel he favors conventional stories that are sort of boring to me - It could be that I'm just bad at this right now, or bad at explaining my ideas, and that's why things that I feel make them unique are being suggested to change.”***

I'm always glad to have students like this. My tastes may be conventional, but I love having students who are unconventional, and I think I encourage their work. The only thing I insist on in my class is that there is an actual narrative.

### **SOFA 112-02 Fundamentals of Screenwriting**

(3 hours per week – 13 Students – Lecture and Workshop – No NTID – No GA/TA Support)

The students in this section were much more engaging – amazingly so, actually. The energy and enthusiasm in the room was very high. In fact, this may have been one of the best group of students I have ever taught. I was continually amazed by their experience and knowledge base.

**9/13 Responding – Effective Teacher: 100% Top 2 – 4.78 Average**

Nice to hear, coming from this group:

***“Great class. I love building up from brief papers to scenes to a short film screenplay.”***

***“I love the way Frank set up his class. We would be able to read our work and get feedback right there not only from him but from our peers as well.”***

***“I loved the workshop structure of the class. Deese establishes really well an environment where people can point out what doesn't work about another student's project in a positive way.”***

***“He knows the subject very well and interacts with us constantly”***

And, on the other hand:

***“While I enjoyed getting everyone's feedback in class, I would've liked more instruction time and not so many full classes with peer feedback. This might've just been my perspective as an upperclassman though.”***

***“I would only say that having some of the instruction sheets that you gave us in hard copy, being put on my courses, would have been helpful.”***

As I said, I will try to use myCourses more with this class.

***“Some assignments are unclear and there is no way to check them on mycourses.”***

I always invite students to ask questions if they don't understand something. But I will try to use myCourses more often.

**SOFA 564-01 and 664-01 - Writing the Series**

(2.5 hours per week – 11 Students (7 Undergrad, 4 Grad) – Lecture and Workshop – No NTID – No GA/TA Support)

**7/7 Responding (Undergrad) – Effective Teacher: 86% Top 2 – 4.43 Average**

**4/4 Responding (Graduate) – Effective Teacher: 100% Top 2 – 4.75 Average**

My first 100% response rate! I promised the students we would meet finals week if we did not get 100% response. We did not meet finals week.

“Writing the Series” is always one of my most challenging classes as the students are advanced writers knowledgeable, and usually very motivated. (They also watch a lot more TV than I do.) I always feel I have to be at the top of my game with this class. Even the supportive comments are more thoughtful and specific:

***“The instructor always had a positive mentality and supported the students to the fullest extent.”***

***“Frank is very understanding when it comes to the different paces at which people work. He also doesn't give the class busy work, but rather focuses on the essential aspects.”***

***“Deese is super supportive and will listen to every idea you have and try to find the good in it. He's really about discovery and I like that.”***

***“Explaining the industry, being collaborative with the students with their work, getting the whole class involved.”***

***“Communicating with students. Maintaining student interest. Providing appropriate examples. Being clear about assignment expectations. Helping students acquire assistance and recourses.”***

***“He critiqued in a way that provided construction without tainting any confidence and his motivation to get students to try things is appealing.”***

And some criticism:

*“Writing classes are always one of the hardest classes to get right because the gripes I have deal with the number of students in that the focus we put on certain people's works varied drastically and we never touched upon some works thoroughly which might have been to the detriment of that student. That being said, it is hard since it is the only writing class offered.”*

Rereading the above, I'm not sure exactly what it means.

*“Time management for the class is a big issue. We spent way too much time on small parts of our projects. I think being more strict on time constraints would be better for the future”*

*“As much as it pains me to say, I believe the class would benefit from having harder deadlines and little bit less forgiveness about being behind. The problem is that if there aren't hard deadlines, most of the students will naturally push the deadline as far back as they can, which is really great during the middle of the semester, but ends up being a problem at the end, when the amount of work bottlenecks and ends up just making things difficult..”*

*“All I can say is that I would have liked the Pilot script guidelines and Bible Guidelines on MyCourses from day one, so that I, as a student, could start working Deese on that a lot sooner than week twelve or thirteen.”*

Time management was a real problem for the class. I have consolidated it into one three-hour block which should make it easier. The Tuesday/Thursday split seems to allow less time to regularly go over student work. I have also started to use a stop watch in class to make sure we don't spend too much time on one student's work.

That being said, some student work requires more attention than others. I believe there needs to be some amount of flexibility.

### **SOFA 407-04 Senior Thesis II**

(Approx. 6 hours per week – 6 Students – Private meetings)

**Justen Haynes** was my only writing student and completed an excellent and very imaginative thesis horror feature-length screenplay. He screened his proof-of-concept film in May.

**Doug Lane's** “The Next Realm” was a comic polemic about the dangers of blind religious faith. He shot his thesis film on film and screened in May.

**Tom Mendosa** screened his thesis film “I Did a Bad, Bad Thing” in May.

**Ben Stutzman** screened his thesis film “Clairvoyant” in May.

**Mike Slack** screened his thesis film in May. It was included in the Honors Show.

**Anthony Palmerio** screened his thesis film in May.

**3/6 Responding – Effective Teacher: 67% Top 2 – 4.33 Average**

*“Provided great feedback and was willing to work through every aspect of the film one on one to ensure the best final result.”*

And:

*“Sometimes Frank was hard to reach or meet with, but between teaching many classes and being an advisor for many students that is understandable. As long as clear lines of communication are kept, he remains one of the most liked professors among the student body.”*

I give all my students my personal mobile number and respond to all texts and calls. I don't know how much clearer the lines of communication can be.

*In addition to the above, I also served on the Graduate thesis committees of **Yumeng Zheng** and **Nelson Robinson**.*

**SOFA 799-08 – Graduate Independent Study**

(Approx. 1 hour per week – 1 Student – Private meetings)

**Dan LaTourette** – I worked with Dan as he outlined and completed a feature screenplay about a young professional tennis player who struggles with the pressures of fame and where her talent has placed her. Dan definitely knows tennis. Part of my challenge with him was explaining to him that most readers will NOT understand tennis. Dan is a great student to work with.

## Fall 2015:

**SOFA 208-01 Dramatic Structure**

(5 hours per week – 28 Students – Lecture and Screening – NTID for one student – GA/TA: Ben Strack)

Again, this is my most time consuming, challenging, and important class. This is where I teach not only the foundation for advanced writing work, but also the script-critiquing side of film producing and directing. This was the third time I taught this class at SOFA, and I was able to use a lot of the materials and experience from the preceding years, but I also made some changes to make this course “Writing Intensive.”

As I said last year, the challenge is to keep the lectures as interactive presentations that engage the students, but also ones that impart the knowledge they need to write, direct, and evaluate

creative work. I believe I've been more successful doing that this year with fewer lectures and with more class-discussion assignments based on the films and the units of study.

There is still a quiz every Monday after the screening, but now only one handwritten essay-like midterm exam. Now there is also a term paper which I read and return for revising, and a handwritten final. I hand grade all the tests and the final exam. I also grade the term paper.

My TA Ben Strack graded all the quizzes and took roll every day. Having Ben was a huge help.

### **13/28 Responding – Effective Teacher: 100% Top 2 – 4.77 Average**

Embarrassing response rate. I need to fix this.

These are nice to read:

***“Frank (sorry, Professor Deese) is an incredibly kind and understanding professor, who creates a relaxed and very effective class environment in which we can truly expand our knowledge on screenwriting as a whole. His choice in film and television references (viewed every Thursday evening) are intriguing and diverse. 10/10, would recommend, without question!”***

***“Had active, engaging discussions with class members to ensure that they were understanding as well as participating and interested in the subject at hand.”***

***“Assignments were clearly announced. Viewings and concepts were reviewed/discussed, asking the class first, making them think, then explained after to make it clear. Clearly expressed what he wanted to see in assignments: long, thought out descriptions, conversational writing, etc. Breaking apart the story: Started in class to show how it was done-helpful.”***

***“He knew what he was talking about and was very eager to engage in conversations and debates with the class, which really helped us when it came to discussing the material.”***

No one likes Aristotle:

***“Make sure the readings are a little easier (Aristotle and other philosophers was hard to read.”***

This was not nice to read, but I take it very seriously as I mentioned before:

***“This class was fun but I don't feel like I learned anything. Everything we talked about was discussed in Fundamentals of Screenwriting, it was essentially just a viewings class. I appreciated the exposure to some of the movies we watched but this class was really just tedious and ineffective.”***

**SOFA 563-01, 663-01 Writing the Feature**

(2.5 hours per week – 14 Students (9 Undergrad, 5 Grad) – Lecture and Workshop – No NTID – No GA/TA Support)

This remains one of the most challenging classes for me to teach effectively. I did try something new this year that I found effective. In May, I gave a summer reading assignment to all the enrolled students and the also told them that they need their story idea ready for the first day of class. This allowed us to hit the ground running on the first day of class. Given this, I upped the minimum number of screenplay pages from 40 to 60, along with the 10-page+ step outline. Most all the students achieved this goal by the end of the semester.

14 students is too many for this class, but it was an incredible group and every class discussion was lively and interesting.

**5/9 Undergrad Responding – Effective Teacher: 100% Top 2 – 5.0 Average**

*“Is understanding and encouraging when students are behind on their writing, or stuck and unsure how to move forward, while also pushing us to make continuous progress.”*

*“Frank is a great professor for learning about writing a feature and he definitely helps you in your progress in writing our feature script.”*

Again, this seems to be a running theme. It is my opinion that grinding one’s boot into a sapling does not help it grow.

*“Occasionally, I think some harsher criticism might be needed in order to help students do the best work they can.”*

**3/5 Graduate Responding – Effective Teacher: 100% Top 2 – 5.0 Average**

*“This is one of the interesting and insightful courses in the entire program.”*

*“Given the amount of students he managed to meet with everyone at least once and made sure their works were critiqued and supported.”*

Nice, but it’s the *number* of students, not *amount*.

*“It was a little difficult to communicate with him. Maybe a slight tinge of forgetfulness that I wish wasn’t there but then again he is dealing with so many students.”*

Interesting. No argument about “so many students.”



**SOFA 613-01 Graduate Screenwriting**

(2.5 hours per week – 3 Students – Lecture and Workshop – No NTID – No GA/TA Support)

As I said before, I combined *Fundamentals of Screenwriting* and *Dramatic Structure* into one course and it seemed to work well. This was a very difficult class to teach in that the students were not proficient enough in English to write well. But they were intelligent and all three very eager to learn.

Only one student submitted a teacher evaluation, so I was not scored in this class.

**SOFA 406-03 and 06 – Senior Thesis I**

(Approx. 6 hours per week – 6 Students – Private meetings)

**Justen Haynes, Doug Lane, Tom Mendosa, Ben Stutzman, Mike Slack, Anthony Palmerio**

**Justen Haynes** is my only thesis writing student and is outlining and writing a horror film called “Dead Set.”

**Doug Lane** switched stories mid-summer, but I think it was a smart move. Shooting on film, he has completed a rough cut of “The Next Realm” which he screened in December.

**Tom Mendosa** wrote and directed his thesis film. I was very pleased with the rough cut which he screened in December.

**Ben Stutzman’s** thesis rough cut invites more opportunities for cutting and simplifying. He also has more shooting to do.

**Mike Slack** wrote a very good draft of “Bosworth” very early on and the only real challenge was streamlining the script. He screened his rough cut in December.

**Anthony Palmerio** wrote, directed, and screened his rough thesis cut in December.

**2/6 Responding – Effective Teacher: 50% Top 2 – 4.0 Average**

*“This course was specific to my major and involved making a film outside of class so the instructor got me going in the right direction and I worked mostly by myself with him guiding me. I have however had him in the past and he is one of the best professors I’ve ever had in my 4 years at RIT”*

Needs Improvement: *“Time, which is not always able to be improved upon. Sometimes he is hard to reach, but ones schedule, not his decision to be uninvolved, caused that.”*

I give my students my personal cell phone so I’m a bit surprised that I was thought “hard to reach.” I will take him at his word and try to do better.

*In addition to the above, I also served on the Graduate thesis committee of Yumeng Zheng.*

## **Spring 2015:**

### **SOFA 112-01 Fundamentals of Screenwriting**

(3 hours per week – 16 Students – Lecture and Workshop – No NTID – No GA/TA Support)

This is the second time I've taught the course at RIT-SOFA and I believe I have established a workable routine. Sixteen is too many students, but luckily there are fewer this coming semester.

The culture of this particular class was EXTREMELY sensitive with students complaining about the offensive content of each other's scenes and screenplays. I had to do my 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment freedom speech during one contentious exchange. Given the environment, I was heartened by some of the responses below.

(For the student evaluations, I've included just the response rate, the "effective teacher" percentage in the top two choice – "agree" and "strongly agree" – and the average score for this category, along with positive and "improvement" written responses.)

### **7/16 Responding – Effective Teacher: 100% Top 2 – 4.71 Average**

That is a pathetic response rate. I need to have the students do evals during classtime.

***"Engaged well with students, usually attempting to get them comfortable with the ideas introduced in a group setting where ideas and opinions were accepted."***

That's exactly what I'm aiming for, so I'm pleased with that, as well as the one below given that deadlines are my admitted weakness.

***"He taught the class very well, and made sure we knew what we had to do and when it was due."***

***"He is very understanding and is really enthusiastic about screenwriting. He definitely knows his stuff. He provides me with helpful feedback on my scripts and is willing to go out of his way to help me."***

***"This was a fun class! Honestly! The atmosphere was light-hearted and we didn't have to worry about filtering ourselves. Critiques were always the highlight of the class and it was***

***then that I learned some of the most critical parts of storytelling as well as trying to expand my ideas to think outside the box.”***

I was especially gratified by this last one. Though I don't aim for “fun,” I don't want the students filtering themselves. I aim to create a safe and free environment for creative discussion.

Below are the not-so-happy:

***“The class is really long and I wish there was a better and more efficient way to go through each person's script. Maybe peer reading? Like maybe we can get in groups and share each other's scripts and give each other feedback. And then the professor can walk around and give feedback too?”***

I can't imagine this working well. I like to engage the room as a single unit, not break it up. That is also more like a professional situation.

***“He gets behind on grading!! I understand why, though - he had a film to make.”***

I did, I do, and I'm trying to improve.

### **SOFA 112-02 Fundamentals of Screenwriting**

(3 hours per week – 17 Students – Lecture and Workshop – NTID for 2 students – No GA/TA Support)

The students in this class were actually much more engaged and presented some very excellent work. They were also more critical of me on average.

### **9/17 Responding – Effective Teacher: 100% Top 2 – 4.56 Average**

These responses are gratifying:

***“He was adamant about setting up a creative environment that was judgment-free and low-pressure, which made it so much easier to share our work with one another. He was also very good about emphasizing the strengths in each person's script while also giving them changes to think about.”***

***“This was a fantastic learning environment, and I was given extremely helpful critiques on my work. The examples presented in class were perfect. This was one of my favorite classes this semester.”***

***“Frank was very helpful in explaining the intricacies of screenwriting, both in story and format. The class felt like a safe place to share ideas. Frank was accepting of all stories, almost to a fault at times.”***

Yes, accepting to a fault at times. I get that a lot. I do try to find what is good in every student's work and grow that thing with as much nurturing as possible. Some may view that as pandering, but I've had a lot of success with this method.

And, on the other hand:

***“More information about formatting. Possibly give a couple of quizzes on proper format.”***

***“Frank could have focused slightly more on formatting of screenplays.”***

They are right and I should probably do more of this; but my experience is the students do pretty well with format with a few mistakes that I point out. Also, format details change from writer to writer. I have them read two professional screenplays to give them differing examples of format and writing styles.

***“I felt as though there wasn't a lot of course material pertaining to improving our writing. Much of the tips were personalized and based on our script of the week, which is a great way to improve that particular script, but perhaps not our writing overall. I also felt that for the majority of the time, I received only generic positive feedback on my scripts and rarely did I receive real constructive criticism. However, I did notice that constructive criticism was given to almost all the other students, so I suppose he could improve by being mindful of giving every student criticism that helps them improve their writing skills no matter what level they're at. An absolutely wonderful instructor, though.”***

This is an interesting problem: How do you teach the general by teaching the particular? My experience is that general concepts can easily be taught but solving particular problems in screenplays is the actual laboratory for learning. Also, screenwriting is not only about writing one's own work, but identifying issues in the work of others, and coming up with solutions.

### **SOFA 564-01 Writing the Series**

(2.5 hours per week – 13 Students (10 Undergrad, 3 Grad) – Lecture and Workshop – No NTID – No GA/TA Support)

This is the second time I've taught this course and I applied a few things I learned from the first time, the most important being getting to the student's stories at the beginning then interweaving the basics of TV writing. The students were also more prepared as we had covered basic series writing in Dramatic Structure.

This time most all the students finished their pilot scripts and series bibles. I even had them do the bibles first so they would not rush them in the final hours before the due date.

**8/10 Responding (Undergrad Only) – Effective Teacher: 100% Top 2 – 4.86 Average**

These work for me:

*“Frank Deese is one of the best professors I have had and always seeks to get the best out of his students while always making sure to keep the ball in their court. SOFA made the right decision bringing him on officially, and students are lucky to have him here.”*

*“Frank is a great instructor and human. He made himself available constantly for one-on-one feedback on our projects if we needed it. You can tell he was enthusiastic and caring about each and everyone’s project and needs. He helped everyone out at their own pace without slowing down others. The environment was incredibly encouraging and I think everyone benefited from that.”*

Again, I’m gratified – especially the remark about creating an encouraging environment. The comments below are well taken. Structure and clear due dates continue to be my weakness.

*“More periodic due dates to keep the students minds on their series. I found my self forgetting about it due to other classes due dates taking precedence.”*

*“Just having a framework for the class would be nice. As I understood, this is his second time teaching it, so still getting a feel for things, but I would have liked to know the long term schedule, at least roughly, so i could pace myself correctly. No further complaints.”*

*“I understand the need to educate about the format of how television scripts are written, I just wish that process was earlier and faster so that we had more time to develop and work on our ideas.”*

As the students get more familiar with series format and technique, I think we can get to the stories even sooner.

### **SOFA 407-03 Senior Thesis II**

(Approx. 6 hours per week – 6 Students – Private meetings)

**Jesse Weeden:** Jesse screened the final version of his thesis film **“The Experience Machine.”** I felt it deserved its place in the honors show and was thrilled it received the “Chairman’s Award.”

**Matt Lees** finished a very good draft of his feature-length comedy script and screened his proof of concept film.

**Ed Foose** made a very unusual and unique poem of a film called **“November Moon”** which he wrote initially in my Writing the Short class in Fall 2013. He screened his film in May.

**Alexandra Espinoza** wrote two episodes of a comedy series adapted from her experience working at Burger King in high school. Her filmed scenes screened in May.

## Frank Deese – Teaching Self-Evaluations – Fall 2014 to Fall 2020 – (non-public details removed)

**Alicia Cobb** craft-tracked in production design. Her two films were “Starcross’d Destiny” and a drama by Josh Bogert. She put together a very good film for screenings detailing her work.

**Jackie Schiff:** “Star Cross’d Destiny” screened in May.

### 3/6 Responding – Effective Teacher: 100% Top 2 – 5 Average

*“Frank’s experience and methods of completing a project helped quite a bit over the course of the year. He was very supportive and didn’t try to mold the project into what he wanted (something a lot of other professors do albeit unintentionally). He provided helpful and - more importantly - relevant feedback on a regular basis.”?*

*“I do think that maybe there should have been more of a discussion before shooting began about the script and pre-production issues. While he was supportive, I do think he might have been a bit too supportive if that makes sense; the criticisms were never very (which sometimes is what a project needs).”*

This second raises an important issue for me. Is it possible to be too supportive? I think the answer is yes if the support is dishonest. I always check myself for that honesty. But experience has given me an ability to appreciate elements in creative work that are not obvious to others. I try to focus and encourage those elements. Sometimes, to some people, that makes me seem like a “yes man.” As long as I am sincere in my assessment, I won’t apologize for my positivity.

### SOFA 890-03 Research and Thesis II

(Approx. 1 hour per week – 1 Student – Private meetings)

**Matthew Spaul**

**Matt Spaul** exceeded expectations with his MFA film “Spiritus.” In the planning and editing we had long discussions about where to take the film and Matt, thankfully, steered away from the obvious choices that might have cheaply enhanced the drama but lessened the impact.

(Admittedly, I suggested some of those choices.)

Matt deservedly received a lot of attention and earned many awards with this documentary, including a nomination for a student Academy Award. (And the honors show.)

*In addition to the above, I also served on the Graduate thesis committees of **David Tan** and **Tianyi Wang**.*

## Fall 2014:

### SOFA 208-01 Dramatic Structure

(5 hours per week – 36 Students – Lecture and Screening – No NTID – No GA/TA Support)

This is my most time consuming, challenging, and important class. This is where I teach not only the foundation for advanced writing work, but also the script-critiquing side of film producing and directing. This was the second time I taught this class at SOFA, and I was able to use a lot of the materials and experience from the preceding year.

The challenge is to keep the lectures as interactive presentations that engage the students, but also ones that impart the knowledge they need to know. To assure this, I test the hell out of them. There is a quiz every Monday after the screening, two handwritten essay-like midterm exams, and hand-written final. It's important to me that everyone gets what's being discussed and the test keep me apprised of all 36 students' progress. Unfortunately, it is a lot of work. I hand grade all the tests and quizzes, scan them, then email them back to the students. I have a PDF copy of every test I've given to every student. Next year, I hope to have an effective graduate student TA who can do the returning of graded work.

### **20/36 Responding – Effective Teacher: 95% Top 2 – 4.8 Average**

Still, a low response rate, but I'm pleased with the general tenor of the comments.

***“Everything! Honestly my favorite teacher to take classes with. Always keeps class interesting and relevant to things in todays industry movies or television. Grades fairly and understandably. Understands missing an exam or quiz and will let you make it up.”***

***“Creates a really positive environment and welcomes everyone to express their opinions honestly. Always leaves time for debate and discussion after watching a film, instead of just telling us what he thinks or what we should think.”***

***“The films we watched a great selection of films and shows. The questions and discussions about them actually made me more interested in the material. There are a few of the shows we watched/discussed that I will likely be continuing outside of class.”***

This is what I strive for, and seemed to have achieved, at least for these commenters.

***“Frank is a great guy! He obviously loves his job and it really shows. He also is very knowledgable and I always feel comfortable going to him if I need to. I like how he will adapt class plans for discussion. He knows the value of differing opinions and will take the time to hear everyone out on their thoughts. I like that he sincerely wants to know our feelings about things. I definitely have retained things from his teaching as well.”***

If you want differing opinions, show “Into the Wild.” There was a heated debate after that one. I'm happy no one was armed.

I do, however, take this seriously:

***“Didn't learn much from his lectures. Talking about dramatic storytelling when really the only movies he screened were popular classics. Was very skeptical of what he had to say at times, but it seems everyone else in the class was content because he's a nice person.”***

There's always a few (sometimes quite a few) who do not like me, my approach, my style, or my face. A well-constructed insult, though. If it's who I think it is, he's a very intelligent young man.

This one was a more helpful criticism:

***“I think maybe in class activities or something of the sort could be good. Just a way to be more active rather than just sitting there for an hour being lectured. Or more open discussions even although we do have more of those than most classes which I like.”***

I do try, but for this person I failed. This next one is crucial:

***“Well since I was in Frank's fundamentals class, I saw some stuff from that class in this one. Maybe rewrite the lectures a bit?”***

Not everyone has taken fundamentals, and there are things that need to be known. I would like, however, to keep the overlap to a minimum. I think I will have more success in future semesters when I know most of the students.

***“Sometimes the class felt too relaxed. Many times it was nearly impossible to hear over all the other students talking during the lecture. It was extremely distracting, not to mention annoying, that they felt no reason to listen during lectures. Maybe separating students who were continually too loud might have been helpful.”***

I try to get as close to the students as possible when I lead a discussion/lecture and I've even purchased a clicker to move the PowerPoint slides so I don't have to go back to the podium. I also try to learn every student name as soon as possible so that I can call on students I notice letting their attentions drift, or whispering, or surreptitiously looking at their iPhone. (Do they think they're invisible?)

***“Ask students to give a presentation on how a film of their choosing falls into the 3 act structure. Make each student go through their personal favorite to find out it's built on a generic structure. I think that would be useful.”***

Intriguing idea. Every minute is accounted for in the semester. But maybe I can make room if I remove overlap from Fundamentals.

***“Sometimes a little bit more feedback would be helpful (on the midterms, perhaps.)”***



I write all over those things. I can't imagine doing more. I am, however, open to any student who wants to discuss their exam.

***“I have few issues with this class. It wasn't amazing but nor was it bad. It was a class that I didn't mind attending and did end up taking some things from. I felt like it was a little more of a review class for me after taking screenwriting already but it definitely did not hurt me in anyway. It only helped and reinforced previously learned knowledge.”***

Don't feel damned by this faint praise.

### **SOFA 563-01 Writing the Feature**

(2.5 hours per week – 7 Students – Lecture and Workshop – No NTID – No GA/TA Support)

This has been one of the most challenging classes for me to teach effectively. The students are so busy with their films they have little time to devote to outlining and writing the first 40 pages of a feature screenplay. My students performed well, and have completed all the requirements of the class, but now they have unfinished screenplays. I'm trying to figure out how to solve this problem.

### **5/7 Responding – Effective Teacher: 100% Top 2 – 4.8 Average**

***“I had a rough semester, and Frank was very understanding about class presentations. He was firm on deadlines but loose on in class material, knowing with printer and time issues, these things happen.”***

Nice to hear, but this seems to be my weakness.

***“Honest and helpful with assignments.”***

***“Maybe layout the curriculum just a little more, I didn't get a great sense of due dates so when I fell behind, it was not until almost too late that I knew I had catch up to do. But Frank is one of the best professors in SOFA, in my biased opinion. He is a great person to have teaching us and I always get a lot from his classes.”***

Nice sentiment, but I do have to be more forceful with deadlines.

***“Like mentioned in class, I wished this class was a fall/spring semester course, as I think it's really tough to condense an entire feature length screenplay into one semester. We got to read a little bit of dialogue screen pages during the last 2 weeks of class, but I really wished we got around to reading more.”***

True and to the point. I need to keep to the schedule more diligently.

### **SOFA 526-01 Writing the Short (Undergraduate)**

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(3 hours per week – 5 Students – Lecture and Workshop – No NTID – No GA/TA Support)

This was an even 5/5 mix of grads and undergrads. I've never taught a more diverse class than this. And, I think, a lot of good work came out of it. Most of the students were very engaged throughout the semester, and there was a lot of original thinking and daring subject matter. There were, however, a few students who were horrible with deadlines. But, by and large, the work was very good.

**3/5 Responding – Effective Teacher: 100% Top 2 – 5 Average**

*“I learned more things about writing, and more ideas how my writing can be improved.”*

*“Very effective at keeping ideas alive and providing helpful feedback.”*

*“Try to get the rest of the class to give feedback on scripts more somehow. Make it part of the course.”*

This is fair. There were times where I felt I was the only one critiquing. I think I said so in class. For almost half of the students, however, English was their second language. It seems sometimes it made them reticent at the table.

**SOFA 626-01 Writing the Short (Graduate)**

(3 hours per week – 5 Students – Lecture and Workshop – No NTID – No GA/TA Support)

**3/5 Responding – Effective Teacher: 100% Top 2 – 5 Average**

*“Listen and guide the student. Our story was our own.”*

*“Encouragement to try various formatting rule and when and how to break them.”*

Same as above, but these were the Graduate students.

**SOFA 406-16 Senior Thesis I**

(Approx. 6 hours per week – 6 Students – Private meetings)

As has been stated in faculty meetings, thesis advising is like having a fourth course, and a demanding one at that. **Jackie Schiff** is making a film based on base on a web comic called “Starcross’d Destiny” (<http://starcrossd.net/>) for which she has permission from the author/creator.

**Alicia Cobb** is craft-tracking in production design. Her two films are “Starcross’d Destiny” and a drama by Josh Bogert. We meet regularly and she has shown me still photos of her work on

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set. Talking to Josh at my house in Los Angeles, he told me that Alicia did a great job on his set, most notably making a room look like a child's room in very little time.

It has been a pleasure to watch **Ed Foose's** film "November Moon" unfold. Ed wrote the script in my Writing the Short class in Fall 2013. It's a magical story with a lot of SFX work. I have read every word he's written on this story and helped guide him to the final draft, though he often ignores my notes. We often have very heated discussions over small details. I have also looked at two complete edits of the film.

**Matt Lees** is writing a feature-length comedy script about a college-debt-ridden young woman whose botched bridge-jump suicide goes viral on YouTube and wins her a place as a high-paid counselor at an elite high adventure camp for the snotty-nosed scions of America's elite – a camp that weeds out the weak with extreme prejudice. This is a great story and script. I think Matt will leave RIT with a nice piece of work under his arm. He also plans to film part of it with himself narrating the description.

**Alexandra Espinoza** is writing a comedy series adapted from her experience working at Burger King in high school. It, too, is very funny. And – she, too, will be filming part of it with description narration.

**Jesse Weeden** is my grown-up among undergraduates. I helped him a bit during the early stages of writing "The Experience Machine" about a lonely man trying to find companionship in virtual reality. I've seen dailies and a rough cut scene. So far, I'm very impressed. Jesse also has some pickup work to do after the break.

### **1/6 Responding – Effective Teacher: 100% Top 2 – 5 Average**

No Comments

### **SOFA 790-10 Research and Thesis I**

(Approx. 1 hour per week – 1 Student – Private meetings)

#### ***Matthew Spaul***

**Matt Spaul** is my other grown-up, a young man with a lot of personal and professional experience. He switched from writing a fiction film about the 48 hours before an execution to a documentary about a Catholic priest in Rochester, New York who was excommunicated in the late 1990s for breaking Canon Law. I am not an expert in documentary, but I do watch a few and know a bit about the Catholic church having researched and written a screenplay about Thomas Becket. I also feel I can help Matt to solve issues of rising conflict and resolution.

I have seen an early cut of Matt's film "Spiritus," and I believe it's excellent. It's very well filmed and unfolds the events seamlessly. I've told Matt that the only issue I have with it at all, is there is no visceral sense of the adversary to Father Callan.

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*In addition to the above, I also served on the Graduate thesis committees of **Tina Chapman, David Tan, and Tianyi Wang.***