STANFORD FALL 2012 COURSE INFO/SYLLABUS:

That's a Great Idea for a Movie: The Making of a Strong Screenplay

Required Texts:

1. Robert McKee
   Story: Substance, Structure, Principles

2. Lajos Egri
   The Art of Dramatic Writing

3. Linda Seger
   Making a Good Script Great

4. Michael Arndt
   Little Miss Sunshine Shooting Script

5. David Small
   Imogene’s Antlers

6. Annie Proux, Larry McMurty, Diana Ossana
   Brokeback Mountain: Story to Screenplay

7. Screenwriting software. *Final Draft* is considered the standard in screenwriting software, but retails for $150 or more. *Celtx* is an open-source program that is free and recommended. It can be found online at versiontracker.com.

Note: Other materials will include a combination of online resources and uploaded reading, such as scripts. The films assigned for viewing are available on demand at either Amazon.com or Netflix.

Note on the required texts: I will select excerpts from each text. You will not be required to read the above texts in anything close to their entirety (with the exception of the scripts and short stories). They are, however, a good foundation for your screenwriting instruction library and will be useful to you as you continue your journey beyond our ten weeks.

Supplemental Reading:

Each week, I'll provide additional reading or viewing related to the topic at hand. These selections are totally optional, and only in case you’ve finished the assignments and have the time or desire to explore further.
Syllabus In Brief:

**Week One: Screenplays & Ice Breakers: Introductions (10/01-10/07)**
Lajos Egri on Premise: *The Art of Dramatic Writing* pgs. 1-30
Jim Sheridan interview (PDF)
Annie Proux - “Brokeback Mountain” short story
Larry McMurty, Diana Ossana - *Brokeback Mountain*
Premise & Core Idea Exercise

**Week Two: Character & Conflict: Building Blocks (10/08-10/14)**
“Finding the Conflict” – *Making a Good Script Great* (Ch. 11)
David Small – *Imogene’s Antlers*
Viewing: Andrew Stanton Ted Talk, “The Clues to a Great Story” (link)
Viewing: *Brokeback Mountain*
Logline Exercise #1

**Week Three: Meaning & Structure: Make the Fictive Leap (10/15-10/21)**
Paul Schrader Interview (PDF)
Michael Arndt *Little Miss Sunshine* script
Viewing: Michael Arndt on the theme of *Little Miss Sunshine* (link)
Logline Exercise #2

**Week Four: Scene Writing & Storylines: Find the Life (10/16-10/21)**
“How to Dramatize a Scene” - *Making a Good Script Great*, pgs. 108 – 126
Viewing: *Little Miss Sunshine*
Character Exercise

**Week Five: Stakes, Reversals, and Turning Points: Be the Gardener (10/22-10/28)**
“Turning Points & The Nature of Choice” – *Story*, pgs. 233- 251
Ernest Lehman - *North by Northwest* screenplay (PDF)
Structure Exercise

**Week Six: Dialogue & Subtext: Make It Real (10/29-11/04)**
Interview with Robert Towne (PDF)
“Balancing Images and Dialogue” - *Making a Good Story Great* pgs. 158-176
Sample Outlines (link)
Viewing: *North by Northwest*
Dialogue Exercise

**Week Seven: Workshop I (11/05- 11/11)**
Week Eight: Workshop II (11/12-11/18)

Thanksgiving Break – (11/19-11/25)

Week Nine: Workshop III (11/26-12/02)

Week Ten: What Next? Outlines, Drafts, and Rewriting (12/03 – 12/07)

Script Magazine “Work Habits of the Pros” (PDF)
Interview with Steven Zaillian
Optional one-on-one conferences.

Grading: For those of you who are taking this course for a grade, the breakdown is as follows. Please note that you can change your grading status at any point before the final class meeting (Friday of the last week of class) by contacting the Stanford Continuing Studies department.

Writing Exercises: 35%
Treatment: 30%
Forum/Workshop Participation: 35%

Your Writing and Workshop:
Throughout this course, you will be reading and responding to the writing and ideas of your peers. Some of that writing will be in the form of exercises, and much of it will be first drafts, so an open, kind, and engaged approach is required. The more time and energy you put into helping others improve their stories the better storyteller you will become.

Tips for Offering Useful Critiques:
You should read your classmates' submissions twice. The first time through just take note of how you’re reacting to the material, at what points and why. The second time through, read with your new screenwriting tools in mind and try to apply those concepts to your critique. Give the kind of thoughtful, detailed and constructive feedback that you would want to receive from others. Workshop is a system of reciprocity, so it's important that everyone participate.

My commentary:
I will comment briefly (in a couple of sentences) on the short pieces and with a letter on the longer assignments that you turn in to workshop. I post my responses in the forum where anyone can read them. In a live course, I’d be making most of these comments out loud, for all students to benefit from the instruction, and to give everyone the chance to agree or disagree with my remarks during discussion. In an online course, we can do a version of this by having a “threaded” discussion on blackboard. I will also read your comments to one another and pipe in when I have something to add, and I encourage you to
do the same. The more conversational the class is, the more fun we will have and the more you will learn from our conversations.

Your Weekly Responsibilities

- Log onto the blackboard, and read through the entire “Schedule” page. This page includes my “lecture” for the week, as well as assignments, optional/supplemental readings, and other reminders.

- Read the assigned texts or view the assigned films, and post your responses to the discussion section in the forum.

- Respond to the Writing Assignment and Discussion Threads, post your response in the forum, and read/comment on at least one or two other student pieces or to the pieces in your workshop group.

- Provide in-depth (roughly a page) of comments for each final treatment submitted in the forum, checking back later in the week to continue your involvement in the conversation.

- Participate in an hour-long “live” chat session, hosted by me. (Optional)

What I’ll Be Doing:

- Sending out a weekly e-mail containing general class info and the upcoming reading, viewing and writing assignments.

- Setting up the forums and moderating the discussion within.

- Reading and commenting on all student work in a positive and helpful manner.

- Hosting the weekly online chat sessions.

One VERY IMPORTANT Note: All of the above is essentially optional, with the exception of providing comments for the full-length piece. Although many students take online courses with the absolute best intentions of doing every last little assignment, "real life"—family, illness, professional obligations, etc.—often has a way of making that impossible. Sometimes, the frustration this causes prompts students to drop completely out of the class. Rather than adopting an "all-or-nothing" approach to your participation in this course, I recommend simply doing what you can, when you can. If there are a couple of weeks in which you don't get to the reading, that's no problem. If you have to skip a couple exercises, this is also okay. As long as you both hand in a full-length piece and participate fully in the workshop, you'll be fine. And remember, if you DO have to
take a couple of weeks completely away from the class, you can always come back! "The door is always open," as they say.

**My Presence Online:**
I’ll be online in the classroom at least three days a week, generally Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. I check my email on weekdays and respond as promptly as I can. If your question is relevant to the entire class, I encourage you to post it to the weekly “Thoughts/Questions” thread, where I can respond publicly for the benefit of group conversation. The beauty of an online class is that we can all do our work when our schedules permit; we don't have to be working simultaneously. I will hold a live “office hour” chat toward the end of each week, at varying times to allow as many people as possible to join in. These sessions are intended to simulate the live give-and-take you’d find in a traditional classroom, and are not mandatory, but I encourage you to participate if your schedule allows. The sessions will be recorded in case you can't join in.

**Weekly Schedule:**
MONDAY: Class week "officially" starts. (Starting in Week Seven your assignments will be due on MONDAYS at 10 AM PST).
WEDNESDAY, 12 noon (PST): Responses to reading discussion questions due.
THURSDAY, 12 noon (PST) Writing exercise due (though the earlier you post, the more time you'll have to receive feedback). I respond to them in the order in which they come in.
FRIDAY: I'll post new Forum threads for the coming week.
SUNDAY, midnight (PST): Deadline for posting your responses on the forum.

THROUGHOUT THE WEEK: Respond to posts, participate in discussions.

WEEKEND: If you choose you may use the weekend to get a jumpstart on reading assigned chapters, drafting your writing exercise. I won’t be in the classroom over the weekend but you're welcome to start posting for the next week whenever you're ready. The classroom is always open!

Please note that after we begin a new week, the previous week's discussion concludes and we will not look back into those weeks.

**Instructor Bio** Xandra Maria Castleton, MFA, is a screenwriter, producer and story consultant whose scripts have served as the basis for award-winning documentary, television and film projects, among them an Emmy Award-winning profile of filmmaker John Waters. Her films have premiered at festivals such as Sundance, Tribeca, AFI and Rotterdam, while her feature film, Full Grown Men, was the winner of the 2007 Sundance Channel Audience Award prior to a theatrical release by Emerging Pictures. Xandra is represented as a writer by the Gersh Agency, and is the resident screenwriting instructor at the San Francisco Writers’ Grotto Teaching Series.