



# **TV WRITERS STUDIO<sup>SM</sup>**

# HANDBOOK

MASTER OF FINE ARTS IN WRITING  
AND PRODUCING FOR TELEVISION

**Media Arts Department  
Long Island University  
Brooklyn Campus**

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## PROGRAM SUMMARY

In keeping with the mission of Long Island University, the underlying philosophy of the TV WRITERS STUDIO is that, given a well-designed curriculum, the right team of mentors, appropriate technical resources and sufficient time, a group of talented graduate student writers, working collaboratively, can develop a TV series that is broadcast worthy. It is through this process that the students will develop the full range of skills, knowledge and experience necessary to enter the profession of television writing and production.

The TV WRITERS STUDIO will assemble a diverse group of graduate students of demonstrable writing talent in a Cohort and immerse them in an intense collaborative venture. What is being proposed is a unique, non-traditional writing-based program designed for participating students to function in a group effort - the Cohort - over two-years. Together, from start to finish, this Cohort will take part in various aspects of one continuous undertaking-- the Central Project. This Central Project shall include the creation of a primetime ready, one-hour dramatic series, from initial concept development all the way through to the marketing and proposed sale of that series. At the end of four semesters of working together, the Cohort will emerge with a unique product, a salable one-hour pilot script - and shootable series episodes. Each student cohort member will author his/her own episode script. Simultaneously, through guided independent study, Cohort members will be able to establish their individual identities as writers by preparing and authoring an original series prospectus and half-hour pilot script in a genre of their choice under the mentorship of a Division IV faculty member and/or industry professional.

After completing the two-year, 48-credit curriculum, the students will earn an MFA in Writing and Producing for Television. The program will be based in Conolly College's Division IV, the Division of Communications, Visual and Performing Arts. The unique pedigree of the degree complements the Division's progressive academic outlook. The MFA in Writing and Producing

for Television will use a unique teaching and learning approach that mimics the real world of contemporary television. Students enrolled in the program will be grounded in the structure and theory of dramatic writing. The Cohort will be exposed to the craft of television writing and guided in developing an insider's knowledge of the industry while examining the historical, theoretical, legal and entrepreneurial issues connected to the field. The curriculum will include graduate level writing, history and theory courses, the opportunity for independent study, and seminars and tutorials conducted by industry professionals.

By the end of two years, candidates for the degree will be required to demonstrate proficiency in the field of television script writing and the craft of producing. They will be expected to communicate their ideas effectively, both orally in class sessions as well as in their writing. Television demands that its writers learn to work as a unit, which is at the heart of its process. State of the art presentation technologies and practices such as web streaming, video blogging and pod-casting will be used to package, promote and showcase student work. In addition an informative multimedia website will be created highlighting the work of the Cohort.

## PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The TV WRITERS STUDIO is a two-year, forty-eight (48) credit interdisciplinary degree designed to produce highly-skilled, experienced "professionals" with strong portfolios who will be prepared to pursue challenging and fruitful careers in the television industry as writers and producers. The term "producer" is used here in the pure television sense. TV writers, in order to control and protect the integrity of their work, take on some executive duties and become writer-producers. An essential part of the skill set that the MFA in Writing and Producing for Television will develop will be a thorough understanding of the tasks that TV producers perform on a regular basis. These tasks include casting, supervising production design, editing, and mastering budgetary matters. However, the essential thrust of the MFA program is writing intensive.

As noted, this proposal calls for establishing a cadre of MFA candidates that will be asked to commit as full-time team members in a group dynamic. The cohorts will function as if they were actual staff writers on a television show. This unit will travel together for two years, wholly immersed in a single continuous project - the Central Project - the creation of a one-hour television series. In this quasi-TV lab/think tank, the student Cohort will initially be presented with a detailed outline, the skeleton of a TV series. The Cohort's job over the next two years, guided by their pedagogic leaders, will be to breathe life into the Central Project and reshape it with their writing and critical analysis. This two-year immersive journey will be capped by the invaluable experience of participating in the live presentation of a full-blown pitch of the series to network and cable executives. This MFA program will not be one that talks about writing in the abstract or muses on how it should be done. It will be a day-by-day grind through how it actually gets done when one is a staff member on a TV series, with all of its challenges and imperfections.

Students enrolled in the program will function as professional writers and producers as they transition through the development, pre-production, production, post-production and distribution of the Central Project pilot and

individual episodes. Students will be required to take 24 credits in writing and producing pedagogy, 9 credits in the ancillary areas of television history, intellectual property/marketplace and technology, 9 credits in moving image production and pre-production craft, 3 credits in independent study and 3 credits in capstone.

FACULTY

**Norman Steinberg** is the Director of the MFA in Writing and Producing for Television Program Director. Before accepting his current position as Parsons Family University Professor at Long Island University, Steinberg's screenwriting career began under the tutelage of his mentor and friend Mel Brooks when he became part of the team with Andrew Bergman and Richard Pryor that wrote *Blazing Saddles*. What followed was an almost forty year screenwriting career that includes *My Favorite Year* starring Peter O'Toole; *Johnny Dangerously* and *Mr. Mom* starring Michael Keaton; Bryan DePalma's *Wise Guys* starring Danny DeVito and Joe Piscopo; and many others including the film that ended Luciano Pavarotti's screen career, *Yes Georgio*. Steinberg's screenwriting career continues to this day.

**Stephen Molton** is the Cohort IV Leader for the MFA Writing and Producing for Television Program. An award-winning author, Molton has also written movies (*Deep Blue*) and mini-series (*Live By the Sword and Weaveworld*) for such companies as Showtime, New Line Cinema, Paramount Pictures and Viacom Networks, and produced two documentary features, *L.A. Homefront* and *Generation 9/11*. His books include *Brave Talk* and *Brothers in Arms: The Kennedys, the Castros and the Politics of Murder* (co-authored with Gus Russo), which was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize. He has worked for HBO and MTV Networks and as a creative executive for Showtime Networks, Inc. Molton has also taught at Columbia University, NYU's Tisch School and SUNY Stony Brook/Southampton.

**Larry L. Banks** is the Media Arts Department Chair. During the past twelve years, Larry Banks has distinguished himself as a feature cinematographer on such films as *Juice*, *Strapped*, *Fly By*

*Night and Substitute 2*. He has also been the Director of Photography on numerous music videos and TV shows. Working with notable directors such as Spike Lee and Forest Whitaker; Larry has also been the Director of Photography on, and directed commercials for Nike, Levi's and AT&T. In the latter part of 1997, Larry directed a documentary called *Blues Stories*, on the roots of American music from the '20s and '30s featuring Taj Mahal as narrator. Most recently, Larry completed work on a TV pilot called *Black Jaq* produced by Sony TriStar and directed by Forest Whitaker

**Bernard Orenstein** is a seasoned television writer and producer who will be teaching the History of TV. There are few people as qualified as Bernard Orenstein to take students on a guided tour through the history of the medium simply because he because he has been a significant part of that history. In a writing career that spans more than fifty years, he has been associated with some of the most successful and long-running series in television. During that half century, he has worked with Icons like Dick van Dyke, Redd Foxx and Bill Cosby. By virtue of his extensive experience on series like *Sanford and Son*, *What's Happening!!* and *Cosby*, he has become a sought-after authority on the history and impact of African American performers and the TV series in which they appeared.

**Susanna Styron** teaches Genre Theory and Writing the Pilot . She wrote and directed the acclaimed Columbia Pictures feature film, *SHADRACH*, starring Harvey Keitel and Andie MacDowell. She has written for Tom Fontana's television series *BORGIA*; and written and directed for Sidney Lumet's series *100 CENTRE STREET*. She co-authored (with Bridget Terry) the television movies *IN FROM THE NIGHT*, starring Marcia Gay Harden, and *BACK WHEN WE WERE GROWN-UPS*, starring Blythe Danner

and Peter Fonda, for Hallmark Hall of Fame; as well as *CROSSING THE LINE* and *TAKING BACK OUR TOWN* for Lifetime. Susanna has published articles in The New York Times, the Yale Review, Spin Magazine, and Real Simple Magazine. She holds a BA from Yale University and an MFA from the American Film Institute. Susanna has taught screenwriting and directing in the MFA film programs at Columbia University and at NYU's Tisch School of the Arts, and undergraduate screenwriting at Princeton University.

**A. Dean Bell** teaches Intellectual Property and Cutting the Deal. He is a writer/director whose feature, *What Alice Found*, won the Special Jury Prize for Emotional Truth at the 2003 Sundance Film Festival and Grand Prize at the 29th Deauville Festival of American Film in France. He has developed a pilot for a nighttime drama under contract with Fox Broadcasting and directed the theatre sequences in the PBS film *Margo Jones: A Life in the American Theater*, starring Judith Ivey, Marcia Gay Harden, and Richard Thomas. Mr. Bell is also an Assistant Professor part-time in the School of the Arts at Purchase College where he teaches directing and screenwriting. He is currently in production on the feature length documentary *3 years 3 months 3 days*.

**Jorge Rivera** teaches *New Media: An Introduction*. He is a multi-platform screenwriter and producer whose work includes a number of award-winning New Media productions. An early adopter of digital narrative media, Jorge's accolades include the 2011 SYFY Network "Imagine Greater" development award, the Independent Film Quarterly's Best New Media / Web Series of 2011, and two 2010 Webby Honorees. His work has included frequent collaborations with Al Thompson (*The Royal Tenenbaums*), Craig "muMs" Grant (HBO's *OZ*), Dorian Missik

(*The Cape, SouthLand*), and Michael K. Williams (*The Wire, Boardwalk Empire*). As an adjunct professor, he teaches a variety of New Media subjects that include screenwriting and video production for the web; and he holds an MFA in Television Writing and Producing via the TV Writers Studio at Long Island University in Brooklyn, New York.

**Kevin Lauth** teaches single camera film style video, and multi camera-studio production classes. Professor Lauth is an experienced television director, videographer, editor, and an authority on cable television programming and regulation. He has worked as a cable television consultant for several New York State municipalities. He currently serves as Associate Dean of Conolly College, LIU/Brooklyn Campus.

Additionally, students will be exposed to industry professionals and guest lecturers such as: Mel Brooks (writer, producer), Andrew Bergman (*Blazing Saddles*), David Frankel (*Devil Wears Prada, Hope Springs*) Jeff Pinkner (*Spiderman 2, Fringe, Lost*) Tom Fontana (*Homicide*), Gail Berman, (BermanBraun) John Markus (*The Cosby Show*), David Picker (studio head/producer), Phil Rosenthal (*Everybody Loves Raymond*), Mike Reiss (*The Simpsons*), Jeff Pinkner (*Fringe, Lost*), Jay Tarses (*Newhardt, Carol Burnett Show, Molly Dodd*), Keith David (*Enlisted, Platoon, Pitch Black, Princess and The Frog*), Terry Minsky (*Lizzie McGuire, The Carrie Diaries*) Allan Burns (*Mary Tyler Moore, Munsters*), Pancho Mansfield, (studio executive), Joseph Wanbaugh (*The Onion Field, Police Story*) Jane Espenson (*Once Upon A Time, Once Upon a Time in Wonderland, Buffy the vampire Slayer, Husbands*), and some "surprise guests".

• CURRICULUM

• COURSES

## CURRICULUM

The MFA in Writing and Producing for Television will use a unique teaching and learning approach that mimics the real world of contemporary television. Students enrolled in the program will be grounded in the structure and theory of dramatic writing. The Cohort will be exposed to the craft of television writing and guided in developing an insider's knowledge of the industry while examining the historical, theoretical, and entrepreneurial issues connected to the field. The curriculum will include graduate level writing, history and theory courses, the opportunity for independent study, and seminars and tutorial conducted by industry professionals.

By the end of two years, candidates for the degree will be required to demonstrate proficiency in the field of television script writing and the craft of producing. They will be expected to communicate their ideas effectively, both orally in class sessions as well as in their writing.

## DISTRIBUTION

Each MFA degree candidate will be required to complete:

- 24 credits in writing and producing practicum
- 3 credits in the ancillary areas of television history
- 3 credits in intellectual property and marketing
- 3 credits in distribution and technology
- 9 credits in moving image production and pre-production craft
- 3 credits in independent study/internship
- 3 credits in capstone portfolio (MFA thesis)

## COURSE TRAJECTORY

FALL		SPRING		FALL		SPRING	
COURSE TITLE	CREDITS	COURSE TITLE	CREDITS	COURSE TITLE	CREDITS	COURSE TITLE	CREDITS
WPT 610 - TELEVISION SERIES & PROGRAMS	6	WPT 620 - TELEVISION SERIES & PROGRAMS - WRITING AND PRE-PRODUCTION	6	WPT 630 - TELEVISION SERIES & PROGRAMS/WRITING AND PRODUCTION	6	WPT 642 - POST-PRODUCTION	3
WPT 611 - THE HISTORY OF TELEVISION	3	WPT 622 - THE NEW MEDIA: AN INTRODUCTION	3	WPT 631 - SINGLE CAMERA FILM-STYLE VIDEO PRODUCTION (3 credits)	3	WPT 643 - INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY AND CUTTING THE DEAL	3
WPT 612 - THE WRITER'S TABLE (January/Winter Intensive)	3	WPT 698 INDIVIDUAL EPISODE WRITING, and WPT 699 INTERNSHIP 0 credits (Summer)	3	WPT 632 - LOCATION PRODUCTION (Winter Intensive)	3	WPT 621 Genre Theory & Writing	3
						WPT 700 - CAPSTONE COURSE	3
Total Credits	12	Total Credits	12	Total Credits	12	Total Credits	12

**Students are required to complete an internship with an industry related entity.**

## COURSES

WPT 610

Writing and Development -The Television Series

An introduction to the basics and complexities of television script writing, and the seamless integration of the written script into the development stage of the television production process. Students begin work on the Central Project pilot script.

WPT 611

The History of Television

An examination of the development and evolution of television as a creative medium, with an emphasis placed on the role of the writer and producer. How did we get from the dawn of the medium of TV to the digital age? Influential TV programs will be screened and technological advances will be highlighted. Important TV scripts of historical and contemporary importance will be studied.

WPT 612

The Writers' Table - Revising & Delivering the Pilot

Students enter the inner sanctum of the creative television-scripting world, the writer's table. During this course students revise and complete a draft of the Central Project pilot script.

WPT 620

Television Series and Programs- Writing & Pre-Production

The completed draft of the Central Project has been submitted. Students will start to explore the intricacies of production as the pilot moves from the development stage into pre-production.

WPT 621

Genre Theory & Writing

This course will examine the concept and theory of genre as it applies to well-known television and film forms, with an emphasis placed on authoring creative works within

and beyond the confines of specific genres.

WPT 622

The New Media

This introductory course deals with the tectonic impact that the Internet and New

Media and the New Distribution Technologies have had on the television industry.

WPT 698

Individual Episode Writing

During the Summer session students, with the help of their mentors, will complete the individual episode script and refine their treatments for an original TV series together with a verbal pitch that could be made to a broadcast or cable network. A completed episode script must be submitted by the end of the first month of the Fall Term.

WPT 699

Internship

Students will have the opportunity to do a prestigious internship at a media production company, or media organization. Internship placements must be cleared in advance with MFA Advisor.

WPT 630: Television Series and Programs - Writing & Production: During this course, students see their words and images come alive as the creative process transitions from the page to the screen.

WPT 631

Single Camera Film-Style Video Production

Using state of the art digital video cameras and non-linear editing systems (Final-Cut Pro), students will explore the basic aspects, procedures and stages of the video production process from "development to distribution." Students will work in small production teams, creating EFP style, short-dramatic sequences.

### WPT 632

#### Location Production

Intensive five (5) day shoot of two scenes from the Central Project pilot episode at locations in Brooklyn. Students will not only observe, but will function as members of the crew on the shoot. There will be ongoing discussions with the director, DP and editor about each take and whether everything that is needed to assemble a great scene has been captured on film. During the process, the cohorts will view "dailies" and participate in the decision as to which takes should be used to compile the scenes. At the end of the week a first assemblage of both scenes will be viewed.

### WPT 642

#### Post Production

Students will expand upon the knowledge and skill sets they acquired in WPT 631 and 632 as they delve into the world of High Definition video editing or post-production. Topics to be covered include: Non-linear editing systems (Avid, Final-Cut, Vegas), SFX generation, color correction, audio sweetening techniques and aesthetics, advanced shooting for the edit techniques, advanced editing aesthetics, motion graphics and motion capture.

### WPT 643

#### Intellectual Property and Cutting the Deal

The "property"—the script or the concept has been created, and there is someone or some entity actually interested in producing it. That means money will be changing hands and rights and ownership will have to be granted and retained. What rights? What ownership? Who gets what? This segment of the MFA is about those issues and self-defense.

### WPT 644

#### The Internet and New Distribution Technologies

This course deals with the tectonic impact that the Internet and New Media and the New Distribution Technologies have had on the television industry.

### WPT 700

#### The Capstone Portfolio

This is the MFA project.

## CAPSTONE PORTFOLIO PROJECT GUIDELINES

The Capstone project will consist of the following elements:

- 1) The Central Project Pilot Script.
- 2) An individual four act episodic script of at least sixty (60) properly formatted pages in length.
- 3) A treatment for an original TV series including the premise, character breakdowns and story synopsis.
- 4) A verbal network "pitch."
- 5) A half hour genre script at least 25 properly formatted pages.

All elements of the Capstone Project must be delivered by April 30<sup>th</sup>.

## Contacts:

Norman Steinberg, Director

[Norman.steinberg@liu.edu](mailto:Norman.steinberg@liu.edu)

718.780.6596

Humanities Building

Media Arts Dept. – HC 220

Stephen Molton, Assistant Professor

[Stephen.molton@liu.edu](mailto:Stephen.molton@liu.edu)

718.488.3365

Humanities Building

Media Arts Dept. – HC 218

Kmur Hardeman, Assistant Director

[Kmur.hardeman@liu.edu](mailto:Kmur.hardeman@liu.edu)

718.488.3491

Humanities Building

Media Arts Dept. – HC 212

## BROOKLYN CAMPUS

Long Island University

1 University Plaza

Brooklyn, NY 11201