

**The University of Texas at Austin
Department of Radio-Television-Film
Master of Fine Arts Program in Screenwriting
For Students Entering Fall 2019**

I. Program Overview

Upon entering the program, students are introduced to the principles of writing for the screen -- for both features and television -- focusing on characterization, story development and narrative structure. Students will write full-length features, TV specs and Pilots. In addition to their core writing workshops, students enroll in required courses in Film History and Adaptation. During their final semester, M.F.A. candidates work one-on-one with a senior faculty member on their thesis project, leaving the program with polished work suitable for submission to agents, producers, studios and other financing entities.

In addition to writing courses, students are encouraged to use their electives to broaden their critical knowledge and filmmaking experience via the department's film studies and production offerings. The department strongly encourages collaboration between its student screenwriters and filmmakers, which has resulted in award-winning films screening at major festivals worldwide. An internship in the film industry is required as part of the program of work, and past students have interned both in Los Angeles and with Austin-based filmmakers.

II. Academic Plan of Study Overview

The M.F.A. degree requires the successful completion of 42 course hours. Once you enter the program, you must maintain a minimum GPA of 3.0. The 42 course hours consist of the following:

24 RTF screenwriting hours (8 courses):

- 380J (First Year Screenwriting, Fall Year 1)
- 380J (First Year Rewriting, Spring Year 1)
- 380N (TV Specs, Fall Year 1)
- 380N (TV Pilots, Spring Year 1)
- 380M (Advanced Screenwriting I, Fall Year 2)
- 380N (Adaptation, Spring Year 2)
- 380M (Advanced Screenwriting II, Spring Year 2)
- 380N (The Writer's Room, Fall Year 2)

3 RTF 385 History of Film

3 Elective RTF hours (1 course). This may be a production or studies course.

- 3 Internship hours
- 3 Thesis Independent Study hours. You will take an independent study with your thesis supervisor after the completion of your required coursework.
- 6 Supporting Work (2 courses). Any courses outside the RTF Department, or any other RTF are eligible to fulfill this requirement. You will determine which classes will fulfill this requirement in consultation with the MFA Graduate Adviser.

42 Total hours

Undergraduate Courses:

Of the total 42 hours, 6 hours may be from upper-division undergraduate classes (RTF 320 or above).

Credit/No Credit:

Students may take a maximum 9 hours for Credit/No Credit. However, History of Film, and the seven required screenwriting courses may not be taken on a Credit/No Credit basis.

Independent Study:

One independent study (RTF 388) in addition to the Thesis Independent Study may be counted toward your degree.

The Thesis Committee:

Students must choose their thesis committees by Spring Break of their 2nd year, and names of committee members must be reported to the Graduate Coordinator's office. Students are responsible for coordinating all due dates and deadlines with their committees. A committee of two faculty members is standard: a supervisor and reader. The supervisor must be a member of the RTF screenwriting faculty, with the rank of Assistant Professor or higher, while the reader may come from any rank, including lecturer. All members of the committee are required to read and critique the thesis project and may sign off only when the thesis is completed.

The Thesis Project:

The thesis script will be a substantial rewrite of an original work -- either a feature or television pilot -- completed or developed during your two years in the MFA screenwriting program. TV specs may be considered with the approval of the thesis committee.”

Conduct in Workshops:

We expect our screenwriters to be respectful to each other and to instructors both in and out of the classroom. We are training our students not only to be professionals when it comes to your writing, but also how to be collaborative and work well with others. Giving and receiving notes can be challenging and we encourage everyone to “give as you would like to receive” when it comes to notes. If you have an issue with a fellow student, please speak with the instructor or Screenwriting Area Head. Inappropriate and disrespectful behavior won’t be tolerated in the workshops and it will also reflect on whether or not we as a faculty feel you are capable of being a Teaching Assistant.

1st Year

2nd Year

380J: First Year Screenwriting	380J: First Year Rewriting	380M: Advanced Screenwriting I	380M: Advanced Screenwriting II	384N: Internship
380N: TV Specs	380N: TV Pilots	380N: The Writers’ Room	380N: Adaptation	Thesis Independent Study
Elective or Supporting Work	385K: History of Film	Elective or Supporting Work	Elective or Supporting Work	

III. Academic Plan of Study Detailed Description

YEAR 1:

The primary purpose of the first-year screenwriting program is to introduce students to the fundamentals of writing for both film and television.

RTF 380J FIRST-YEAR SCREENWRITING (Fall)

The gateway course for entering MFA Screenwriters, this class focuses on writing the feature-length screenplay, which means delving into the three primary elements of screenwriting: story, character and structure. Students discuss and evaluate each other's work on a weekly basis, developing their critical skills as screenwriters. By the end of the semester, each student will have a completed treatment, step-outline, and Act I of a

feature-length screenplay. RTF Screenwriters will complete-and-revise their screenplay during the Spring, in the 380J companion course.

RTF 380N TV SPECS (Fall)

Introduction to the fundamentals of writing for television where students will develop and write both a one-hour and half-hour television 'spec' based on an existing series.

RTF 380J FIRST-YEAR REWRITING (Spring)

A continuation of the first-year screenwriting class taught in the Fall, this course will focus on the process of revision. As a part of developing an organized strategy for approaching their second drafts, students will also be introduced to the "sequences" method of screenplay structure. All students must have a completed feature-length screenplay ready on the first day of class.

RTF 380N PILOTS (Spring)

Each student will create a new original television show (30 or 60 minute, network or cable) from the ground up: researching the setting and historical moment, inventing the characters and relationships, and ultimately designing the conflicts necessary to propel a show through multiple seasons. Students will then distill all of this work into a single showpiece episode - a pilot - that demonstrates the artistic and commercial potential of the new show. We'll also be looking at a range of produced pilots (both aired and unaired) and discussing what makes the best of them work.

RTF 385K FILM HISTORY FOR MFAs (Spring)

This course is a survey of international film history for graduate students who have not taken previous work in the history and aesthetics of the motion picture. It is required of all RTF MFA students in production and screenwriting. The course will cover the development of the medium from Thomas Edison to Robert Rodriguez. The history of cinema will be looked at from various perspectives (as a technology, an industry, an entertainment medium, and a mode of personal and national expression) and particular attention will be given to the evolution of film's formal elements. Several assignments are designed to acquaint students with how research in film history is conducted.

Year-end Review. At the conclusion of Year 1, you will participate in a faculty review of your first-year work in order to monitor your progress and determine suitability for continuation in the M.F.A. program. Attendance is required of full-time screenwriting area faculty, but these reviews are open to any interested faculty and any fellow students you wish to invite. The review will include:

- A. a discussion of your work from your first year, and
- B. faculty review of the first ten pages of your Feature, Spec and Pilot written during the first year.

Your pages must be submitted to the Graduate Coordinator at least one week prior to your review for distribution to the screenwriting faculty.

YEAR 2:

The primary purpose of the second-year screenwriting courses is to expand upon the fundamentals of screenwriting, and to prepare students creatively and professionally for careers as screenwriters after graduation.

RTF 380N WRITERS ROOM WORKSHOP (Fall)

The class will develop and write an entire season of an original Television series with the Instructor and a known Hollywood Showrunner. At the end of the semester, the entire show will be sent out for consideration by every major network and the students will get full writing credit for their episodes.

RTF 380M ADVANCED SCREENWRITING I (Fall)

The goals of this course are as follows: That you complete a feature script or television pilot suitable for submission to agents, production companies and/or contests. That you leave this course a better writer than when you entered. That you help your fellow classmates achieve the above two goals and vice-versa.

RTF 380M ADVANCED SCREENWRITING II (Spring)

In this advanced screenwriting workshop, students write either a feature-length screenplay or an original television pilot (30 or 60 minute). With instructor's permission, students may also write TV specs and revise previous work. Students will continue their exploration of the craft of screenwriting, while finishing polished, professional work that can serve as a calling-card.

RTF 380N ADAPTATION (Spring)

This course will provide a pragmatic, hands-on approach to several skills crucial to the screenwriter's craft: adapting a screenplay from existing material, and executing creative work "on assignment". Students will write a film adaptation of a short story or similar source material, which will be assigned by the instructor. Students will also create an outline or treatment, revise their writing extensively, and engage in weekly discussions of each other's work.

RTF 384N INTERNSHIP (Summer)

We require students to complete the *RTF 384N Internship Request to Enroll* form before we authorize registering for the course. Typically, internships are done the summer after the 2nd year, but can be fulfilled anytime over the two-year program. Internships may be

be done anywhere (ie: NYC, Austin, LA, etc.) as long as it's industry related and it is up to students to seek out their own internships. The purpose of the internship is to help bridge the gap between leaving the program and entering the industry as an opportunity not only for training but for connections. Your conduct in workshops and demonstrated work effort will also impact instructor's decisions when asked for recommendations for interns from our program by industry professionals.

THESIS COMMITTEE SELECTION:

Who can I ask?

Your thesis committee supervisor must be from the tenured and tenure-track RTF writing faculty. The second member of your committee, sometimes referred to as your "reader," can be any GSC member. Translated, this means anyone who regularly teaches grad students, so it can be a tenured/tenure-track faculty member OR a lecturer who teaches grad students.

Am I imposing on faculty?

***NO.** For tenured/tenure-track faculty, serving on student thesis committees is part of the job. It is an expected duty of tenured/tenure-track faculty, so there is no need to be shy about asking. **HOWEVER**, please know that thesis committee work is not expected of lecturers. We have great lecturers and most enjoy working with grad students on their thesis scripts, so feel free to ask them to be your reader. Keep in mind though that their serving on thesis committees is going above and beyond what is expected of them and that they are free to decline your request.*

Can a tenured/tenure track faculty member say "no" to my request?

Yes. This would be unusual but for a variety of reasons (usually because the faculty member is already overbooked with thesis committees, or will be on extended leave and thus unable to help you), faculty sometimes have to decline a student's invitation to serve on a thesis committee.

What's the functional difference between a supervisor and a reader?

Your thesis supervisor will work with you over the course of the summer (or whatever semester you're graduating) and supervise your rewrite of your thesis script. How often your supervisor reads and responds to your pages will be determined by you and your supervisor. A reader will typically only read and respond to your script twice — once at the start of your rewrite process and then at the conclusion.

Can I have more than two faculty on my committee?

Yes, but all members of your committee are required to sign off on your thesis script.

IV. Grading

Students must maintain a minimum GPA of 3.0. A student who receives a grade lower than a C (including a grade of C-) in a required class will be required to take the class again, and achieve a grade of C or better, prior to graduation. Note carefully that, in the case of the core required

screenwriting classes, this effectively means that a student who receives a grade lower than a C in one of these courses will be held back a full year, since these courses must be taken in a specific order, as detailed above.

If course requirements remain unfulfilled at the conclusion of a semester, instructors have the discretion to award a temporary grade of “Incomplete.” However, many instructors will not award an incomplete under any circumstances, and students should never assume that this is an option. Additional rules with regard to grades of Incomplete:

- You may only carry one incomplete at a time.
- Incompletes may not be awarded in the required first year screenwriting courses

V. Employment by the Department

Employment in the Department, as Teaching Assistants or in other positions, offers M.F.A. students excellent opportunities to hone their technical and teaching skills. However, the Department does not *guarantee* employment to any M.F.A. student. A number of factors, including academic progress and performance in previous positions, will determine whether the Department offers positions during a student's second year in the program. Students who have more than one Incomplete from previous semesters are generally not eligible for employment.

Eligible MFA Screenwriters will be offered Teaching Assistant positions for the undergraduate course - 333: Introduction to Screenwriting in the fall and spring of their second year. Duties include overseeing a weekly three-hour workshop with up to twelve students where they lead discussions, lecture, maintain a grade book, give professional notes and helping the instructor with other class duties.

The Department expects all students to demonstrate standard workplace professionalism during their employment here. For example, employees are expected to notify their faculty supervisor of anticipated absences*, arrange for substitutes as appropriate, and fulfill their required duties during work time instead of working on their own projects. Employees who fail to meet the appropriate standards will not be reappointed in subsequent semesters.

* Please note that employees who fail to attend the first class meeting each semester shall forfeit the offer of employment. Employees may not arrange for substitutes at the first class meeting.

LEAVES OF ABSENCE:

Students desiring a leave of absence must petition the Graduate Advisor for MFA students.

ORIGINAL WORK:

It is expected that the screenplays and teleplays you write in this program will be new projects.

IX. Certification

I have read the 2018-19 Edition of the Handbook of the Master of Fine Arts Program in Screenwriting and have reviewed carefully:

- the Screenwriting program plan of study,
- its associated policies on grading and teaching assistantships,
- the descriptions and requirements of relevant RTF courses, and
- the policies, rules and regulations of the RTF Department,

and I agree to abide by them.

Student signature

Date: _____

Student name (printed)