

October 11, 2020

To: Steve Anderson, Interim Chair, FTVDM

From: Troy Carter, Grievance Advisory Committee Chair

Re: TV Screenwriting Workshops for Third-Year Students

I am writing regarding third-year TV Screenwriting students who have been in preliminary consultation with the Grievance Advisory Committee. These students, as you are aware, do not have access to enrollment in a TV Screenwriting workshop during the Fall 2020 term, which is currently underway. I know that you have been engaged in addressing this issue and I understand that Professor Huang has kindly offered to make room in his 434 or in an independent study class (596). This is a positive development. However, this offered resolution to the problem still misses key issues. I understand that offering 434 or independent study with Prof. Huang to students interested in TV screenwriting is equivalent to offering courses in condensed matter physics to a PhD student focusing on astrophysics: while the course might be excellent, it is not well aligned with their career goals. I have heard from the students that they would be happy with access to Independent Study courses, but would prefer to be able to work with an instructor whose interests and expertise are more aligned with writing for TV. In particular, the students have been in touch with Linda Voorhees, and I understand that they are interested in the possibility of being added to her 298A course. Alternatively, individual instructors of the 283B and 284B TV workshop courses could be asked to accommodate a ninth student in each of their 8-person workshop courses. The students have conveyed that they are “not allowed” to request access to courses of individual instructors, which seems to be part of a more concerning structural issue.

Under the circumstances and given that the quarter is already underway, we ask that you to move urgently to make accommodations for these students.

As for the larger structural issue, according to the Faculty Code of Conduct, the University’s central functions are teaching, learning, research, and public service. All faculty rights and responsibilities exist for the furtherance of these central functions. Giving “access to instruction” is a central part of the University’s mission and therefore one of the core responsibilities of faculty. It is therefore a violation of the Faculty Code of Conduct (FCC) to arbitrarily deny access to instruction (FCC II.A “Teaching and Students” §1.a).

These practices follow from this principle:

1. Students who have been accepted into a program have the right to enroll in their choice of courses and instructors. Department chairs (working with division leaders where appropriate) have the responsibility to assign courses to faculty. However, faculty may not choose which students may take which course as such a practice would by its nature become arbitrary and personal and potentially an abuse of the unequal institutional power of faculty over students. Within their courses, faculty have the right to evaluate student achievement, but there is no

faculty right, or faculty-administrator privilege, to pick and choose which students take which courses, theirs included.<sup>1</sup>

2. Students should be given reasonable consideration for access to courses in their area of study, especially during their final quarters. This should include:
  - a. A period of open enrollment
  - b. A due process for access to the course, including a reasonable number of waitlist spots
  - c. An opportunity to ask the individual instructor directly for access to the course.
  - d. Individual instructors, including temporary faculty, should have control over their own waitlists, especially if there are no added cost factors (such as equipment or enrollment numbers that would require hiring TAs).

In the case in question, it appears that the Screenwriting Area Head effectively has denied students in the program access to instruction in at least two ways:

(1) The area does not allow open-choice enrollment for any screenwriting courses, including the particular workshops that some of these students are seeking to take. Rather, students list what they would like to take and the area head places students in all screenwriting courses. This practice also appears to have unreasonably limited other opportunities for students who must adjust their schedules to the courses chosen for them.

(2) As a corollary to this process, there is no waitlist for the courses or apparent process to appeal directly to a course instructor for access to the course, even after the Area Head has placed students in courses. One student stated they are not allowed to ask individual instructors for access to courses and must go through the Area Head.

Both of these practices constitute potential violations of the Faculty Code of Conduct responsibility not to deny arbitrarily access to instruction. They also may be violations of the academic freedom of individual course instructors if instructors are not permitted to give students who ask access to their courses.

As these issues merit a larger conversation, I am copying the Graduate Council Chair so that the issue of student choice and access to courses in FTVDM can be examined further in the context of the current eight-year review.

It appears that not only this quarter, but also throughout their time in the program these students have been denied reasonable access to choose and enroll in courses. Therefore, as a proactive, protective measure, I ask that you work directly with instructors to give "seventh-quarter" screenwriting students immediate access to enroll in a screenwriting workshop appropriate to their concentration.

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<sup>1</sup> (a) Departments may, of course, have course prerequisites and cap course enrollment. (b) Ideally the student-faculty advisee-advisor relationship should be by mutual agreement. Because the University, and by extension, departments to ensure that graduate students admitted to a program have access to an advisor, faculty should not refuse to advise a student without a reasonable justification.

Cc:

Brian Kite, Interim Dean, School of Theater, Film and Television

Susan Ettner, Interim Dean, Graduate Division

Andrea Kasko, Graduate Council Chair