

Fourth Year Arts Award: Script Writing Mentorship and Competitions

Thanks to the Miller Arts Scholars Program, I was able to strengthen my script writing skills over the past year through a variety of online mentorships and programs that I otherwise would not have been able to afford. I was able to work with a professional playwriting mentor, take online classes through MasterClass, download a professional scriptwriting software, enter in a local screenwriting competition, and eventually apply for a wide range of national screenwriting competitions that are renown for helping emerging writers get noticed. I am extremely grateful for these opportunities and appreciate both the Miller Arts Scholars program as well as my mentor, Doug Grissom, for guiding me through the process. I chose Doug to be my mentor because he is the drama department's playwriting and screenwriting professor. I have also worked with Doug on my writing over all three years at UVA, so we already had an established meeting-system in place to pursue this project. I am grateful for Doug's willingness to meet bi-weekly and provide detailed feedback on my work both via email and Zoom conferences. Below I have outlined the summary of each experience I used my Artist Award grant for, and at the end of this report is a detailed budget outcome.

I. Script Writing Mentorship at Gotham Writers

First, the majority of my artist award grant was spent working with a private playwriting mentor from Gotham Writers, a renown writing company based in New York City. Due to the pandemic, Gotham thankfully launched virtual mentorships, and I was able to work with the administration to find a playwriting mentor who would best fit my needs. I was most interested in developing a piece I wrote early on in quarantine called *Boys The Musical*. Based on this request, the administration at Gotham writers put me in contact with Richard Caliban, a playwright who has experience in writing and directing musicals. Richard is an Obie Award-

winning director based at the Cucaracha Theater and met with me one-on-one weekly throughout the summer to discuss my work. We focused on writing the play book itself, and my composer, Vaheed Taliban, composed the music separately. Working with Richard was a transformative experience because he pushed me to think about playwriting in ways I had never before. At one of our very first meetings, he said that what makes a really great piece is one that tackles a question that does not necessarily have a concrete answer to it, and both sides are given equal weight. This framework of thinking was very helpful because of my tendency to write endings to my plays that have more reductive, simple morals. Instead, he encouraged me to think about the characters' complexities and struggles in ways that may not necessarily lead to neat endings at the end of the piece.

By the end of the summer, I finished working on *Boys The Musical* with Richard and transitioned into working on a new piece, *23 and More*. *23 and More* was directly inspired by a conversation I had with Richard at one of our earliest meetings, and we had five sessions left to discuss revisions on the piece. By having weekly deadlines, I was forced to revamp my pieces at a much faster rate than I am used to in my classes at UVA. This experience gave me exposure into what writing in a professional environment may look like, and I am thankful to have experienced that level of rigor. After working extensively on both pieces with Richard, I was able to submit the work to the 2021 New Works Festival- a festival hosted by the UVA Drama Department that produces student work. My piece *Boys The Musical* was selected, and I am currently in the rehearsal process to produce the piece into an audio drama.

II. MasterClass, Final Draft, and Adrenaline

Next, I was able to use a portion of the funds in my grant to support smaller, yet very important fees in taking my writing to the next level. First, I purchased MasterClass and was able

to watch virtual lectures from professional screenwriters. I enjoyed Aaron Sorkin's masterclass on screenwriting the most, who is an Academy-Award winning writer of *The West Wing* and *The Social Network*. He discussed the rules of storytelling, dialogue, character development, and what makes a script actually sell. I also enjoyed watching classes from David Sedaris (storytelling and humor), Shonda Rhimes (television writing), and Malcom Gladwell (writing). Further, I used my grant to download Final Draft, the screenwriting software that is the industry standard. This definitely was an upgrade from using free screenwriting software because it adds a level of professionalism that I will need in order to pursue my career. Lastly, I used some of the grant money to register in Adrenaline, a 72-hour-screenwriting competition hosted by Light House Studio. I worked with a peer at UVA to write a short neo-western film which won the audience award at the virtual viewing party. This experience allowed me to meet with industry executives from Hollywood who gave valuable insight and advice for new screenwriters.

III. Competition Fees

Lastly, I used the rest of my artist award grant to pay for emerging-writer competition fees. Many competitions require a hefty submission fee because of the detailed professional feedback included after submitting work. After working with Doug on a television pilot I wrote called *Rich and Skinny*, I entered it in the following competitions listed below. To read more about each competition, the links provide overviews of what each company offers for emerging writers.

Diverse Voices:

<https://writers.coverfly.com/competitions/view/wescreenplay-diverse-voices>

Slam Dance

<https://writers.coverfly.com/competitions/view/slamdance>

Screen craft Comedy

<https://writers.coverfly.com/competitions/view/screencraft-comedy>

Genre

<https://writers.coverfly.com/competitions/view/ES-genre-screenplay-competition>

Creative screenwriting unique voices

<https://writers.coverfly.com/competitions/view/creativescreenwriting>

The Golden Script

<https://writers.coverfly.com/competitions/view/golden-script-competition>

Script Pipeline

<https://writers.coverfly.com/competitions/view/scriptpipeline-tv>

The Writers Lab US

<https://writers.coverfly.com/competitions/view/the-writers-lab-us>

Humanitas New Voice

<https://writers.coverfly.com/competitions/view/humanitas>

BOLT (\$30)

<https://writers.coverfly.com/competitions/view/bolt-by-barnstormfest>

Inroads Fellowship

<https://writers.coverfly.com/competitions/view/inroads>

Carol College

<https://writers.coverfly.com/competitions/view/carol>

Big Apple

<https://writers.coverfly.com/competitions/view/bigappleff>

Save the Cat

<https://writers.coverfly.com/competitions/view/stc>

New Media Film Festival

<https://writers.coverfly.com/competitions/view/newmediafilmfestival>

Budget Outcome

Item	Cost	Link
Gotham Writer's One on One Playwriting Mentorship	\$1745	https://www.writingclasses.com/classes/description/playwriting
Final Draft	\$249.99	https://www.finaldraft.com/
Adrenaline Fee	\$35	https://lighthousestudio.org/
MasterClass	\$180	https://www.masterclass.com/
Competition Fees (Broken down) Diverse Voices (60) Slam Dance (30) Screencraft Comedy (70) Genre (39) Creative screenwriting (59) The Golden Script (36)	\$848	https://www.coverfly.com/

<p>Script Pipeline (40) The Writers lab US (40) Humanitas (75) BOLT (30) Inroads (25) Carol College (30) Big Apple (90) Save the Cat (144) New Media (80)</p>		
---	--	--

TOTAL= \$3,057.99

(for remaining funds over grant I used my personal savings)

EXAMPLES OF WORK

Excerpts from *23 and More* (left) and *Boys The Musical* (right)

<p style="text-align: center;">SCENE ONE.</p> <p>A modern middle class kitchen. ZOE (22) and JAMES (24), non-white sit with their eyes glued to a computer.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">JAMES</p> <p>There is <i>no</i> way. I just don't buy this stuff.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">ZOE</p> <p>What do you mean <i>buy</i> this stuff? This is like... government regulated.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">JAMES</p> <p>What?! What part of the government exactly do you think regulates your take home DNA test?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">ZOE</p> <p>The important part!</p> <p style="text-align: center;">JAMES</p> <p>So, is it a presidential duty or more for the supreme court?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">ZOE</p> <p>Well someone has to!</p> <p style="text-align: center;">JAMES</p> <p>Yeah, someone who wants your money, and who is targeting dumb people like you who will buy into all this.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">ZOE</p> <p>Well it's science!</p> <p style="text-align: center;">JAMES</p> <p>It's a scam. Do you really think that you spit in a dumb tube, and then suddenly we have a sister out there who we've never met?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">ZOE</p> <p>Apparently, yeah!</p> <p style="text-align: center;">JAMES</p> <p>That's what they want you to think.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">ZOE</p> <p>Because we share 50% DNA with this girl on Dad's side.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">SCENE 1</p> <p>A college dorm room mounted on a platform center stage. One side is decorated over the top with cat decorations, the other is bare. HANNAH (18), NY accent - is inside dorm room. MELISSA (50) and Abigail (18) walk up to the door with suitcases in hand.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">MELISSA</p> <p style="text-align: center;">(Overly emotional)</p> <p>Here it is. 404. Oh Abigail...</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Melissa starts tearing up.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">ABIGAIL</p> <p>Mom, no.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">MELISSA</p> <p style="text-align: center;">(Collecting herself)</p> <p>I know. I know.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Beat</p> <p>It just all happened so fast-</p> <p style="text-align: center;">ABIGAIL</p> <p>Stop.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Beat, Melissa bursts.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">MELISSA</p> <p>It feels like yesterday you were just getting on the bus for kindergarten.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">ABIGAIL</p> <p>Stop it.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">MELISSA</p> <p>And you wore that little pink corduroy dress.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">ABIGAIL</p> <p>I thought we were done with this.</p>
--	---