Location: Grace Ford Salvatori Hall (GFS) 216  
901-999 W 36th St  
Los Angeles, CA 90089  
University Park

Instructor: Jennifer Maisel
Office: Please note if we are meeting for an office hour appointment we will agree upon location when we set that up.
Office Hours: Available Tuesday, 1:30-2:30 pm. Location TBD. Office hours are by appointment only with a 24 hour lead time on scheduling and cancelling. If this time does not work we will find another time to meet, talk on the phone or Skype. Telephone 213-804-5703.
Contact Info: maisel@usc.edu 213-804-5703
http://www.jennifermaisel.com

Course Description
Catalogue description: 365 Playwriting 1. Essential elements of playwriting through weekly assignments, students’ initiative, occasional productions of scenes, and extensive classroom analysis.

Learning Objectives
Together we will explore the process of creating the written word with which live theatre begins. In-class and out-of-class writing exercises will generate the materials to build theatre pieces; analysis, feedback and study of other theatre texts will help guide the organic framework we build our plays upon. We will write from the heart and rewrite from the head. Assignments will be read aloud in class and your critical response will be key to each other’s processes. We will explore the creative process from different angles to find your best way of working. We will begin with examining how we find inspiration and how we cultivate that inspiration into pages, turn those pages into scenes and turn those scenes into plays. To understand and broaden our knowledge of dramatic form, we will be reading plays (both published and new) that explore dramatic structure in varying ways; you are encouraged to supplement required reading with recommended reading. Additional handouts will also be supplied, as well as links to articles relevant to writing plays and class discussions. A close reading of these articles is also expected. Over the course of the semester you will create a portfolio of monologues, scenes and either a 10 minute play or a final scene which will constitute your final project.

Prerequisite(s): none
Assignments
Completing your work on time is one criteria for your grade; others are the effort, passion, risk-taking and quality shown in your work. Aim high. Be daring. Late assignments will be accepted one week after their due date but will be marked down; after that they will be considered missed and you will receive a zero.

Assignments will either be presented in class or handed in via email. You will keep a portfolio of your ongoing work for assessment at the end of the term as detailed below.

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials
REQUIRED READING:
INTIMATE APPAREL by Lynn Nottage
THE LANGUAGE ARCHIVE by Julia Cho
THE NETHER by Jennifer Haley
36 VIEWS by Naomi Iizuka
LEVELING UP by Deborah Zoe Laufer
ARCADIA by Tom Stoppard
HOW I LEARNED TO DRIVE by Paula Vogel
(All of the above are available on Amazon (new and used), the Sam French bookstore at 7623 Sunset Blvd and many might be available at the library. Acting editions are fine and most likely the most economical.)

2 new unpublished plays (may be early drafts of plays of published plays we are reading; PDFs will be provided.)

Weekly writing assignment:
Writing exercises will be assigned in class and as homework. These exercises can be used as the springboard for the polished monologues and scenes that will comprise your portfolio at the end of the semester, as well for the 10 minute work (either a short play or a portion of a longer play) that will be your Final Project. Ongoing work will be read aloud in class for feedback. If you are absent your work must be emailed in by classtime that day. Students who are absent must contact fellow students or me for the in-class assignments and homework and hand that in on time at the next class.

Handing in Assignments:
As we will be presenting our work in class and reading it, you must bring hard copies of the assignments to class, as well as emailing me a copy by classtime as a pdf. Please title it with your last name, the name of the assignment, draft #, and date. For example: MaiselFamilyLoreDraft1/1-9-16. Please bring enough hard copies to class that you can give each person reading a character a copy, plus one for stage directions and one for me. If stage directions or a character’s dialogue is minimal you can bring a hard copy for two people to share.

You are expected to keep a copy of all of your drafts of all of your assignments in a portfolio or file (on-line or physical) that will be handed in to me twice – at the middle and at the end of the semester.

In class participation:
Much of this class will be run as a writers workshop which requires all members to actively participate by honoring their fellow members and their work with discussion and feedback. Attendance, enthusiasm and cogent attentiveness is key. There will be at least one collaborative writing assignment. There will be in-class writing exercises and out-of-class writing assignments; both will be shared in class.
The work you create in this class will be shared with your classmates. Your participation grade will be reflective of how you share your work and how you give feedback on others' work, as well as what you bring to class discussion of plays and articles. Theatre is about empathy, courage, communication, trust, honesty. It is important that we engender those qualities in our classroom and between us. The writers in this room may become your touchstones in the future. Let's foster sharing and connectivity between us using technology (email, texting, Skype) and live interaction (class time, out of class meetings, theatre-going time).

--- Absences. There are no unexcused absences. Absences must be due to illness or emergency and excuses must be made, in writing, prior to class. After two absences, the third will affect your grade. Be on time. Three tardies equals an absence. Being more than 15 minutes late will be regarded as an absence.

The “Notebook”:
This class will stress the ongoing value of recording and storing that which moves and inspires you. Bring a notebook or sketchbook and pen for in class writing exercises; if you prefer a laptop that is fine, but at times pen and paper will be needed. You will also be creating a notebook of inspiration that will include photographs, pictures, articles, scribbles, dreams, links/references to video – anything that fed you information that you either used or didn’t use in your play(s). These will be presented in class and you are welcome to show them in whatever form works best for you (I’m old-school and like to use a notebook but you might prefer another form of archiving and presentation) – from physical notebooks and clippings to a presentation from your laptop. What’s in the notebook might be useful to you in the play(s) you are creating at this moment – or the habit of creating your notebook may be one that serves you in the future.

Portfolio:
Over the course of the semester you will be creating a writing portfolio of monologues, characters, scenes and, as a final project, one ten minute play or ten minute scene that is part of a longer play. You will keep a copy of all of your work in your portfolio and it will be turned in upon request. Your portfolio will be assessed as part of your mid-term grade; the expectation is at that point that it will be in-process. Everyone’s final project will be read aloud and the final will consist of revised plays and responses to your classmates’ plays.

Grading Breakdown:

“Notebook” presentation: 10%
Overall weekly grade (assignments, reading 15% and participation 15%): 30%
Midterm Quiz/Portfolio: 15%
Final Scene Presentation: 30%
Final Exam/Portfolio: 15%

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

JAN 12: CLASS 1

Introductions.
Go over syllabus.
What we talk about when we talk about plays. Introduction to plays.
Why write for theatre. What can happen in theatre that can’t happen anywhere else? In-class writing exercise.
Inspirations. Notebook assignment.
Portfolio and Final play discussion
Read in class: Jose Rivera: 36 Assumptions about Writing Plays
Assignment (due class 2).

Writing Assignment. Family lore Writing Exercise.

Read scene 1 of The Nether, Leveling up, Intimate Apparel, How I Learned to Drive, Arcadia, The Language Archive, 36 Views.

**JAN 19 CLASS 2:**
Discussion of plays read: Beginnings. Exposition. How do they start? How are you drawn in?

Student Reading of Family Lore monologues. Response. Discussion of voice. Period. How do we know who were are hearing – how language and dialogue immediately gives us time/place/culture.
Introducing your characters.
In-class: Photo Exercise. Introducing your characters.
In class: Exposition exercise. How do you tell without telling?

Writing Assignment. Due week 3: Family Lore scene(s).
Talisman
Read Handout. Read the rest of Intimate Apparel
Start putting together your inspiration notebook.

**JANUARY 26 CLASS 3:**
Discussion: Intimate Apparel.
Talisman. Ritual.

In class writing exercise: Wants and Needs.
Family Lore scenes read aloud in class for response.

Assignment (due week 4):
Continue to build your notebook with inspiration, dreams, images, links. Bring these to class week 4.

Writing assignments: Love scene. Vying.

NOTE: Any scene/monologue written by this point that has been responded to should be in the process of a second draft. You are welcome to share new drafts with the class or keep both in the portfolio.

Read The Language Archive by Julia Cho.
Handout.

**FEBRUARY 2 CLASS 4 (Groundhog day)**
Discussion: The Language Archive by Julia Cho
Requited love, unrequited love. Language as artistry.
How do we use language on stage? How do you differentiate characters?

In Class Writing Exercise: Writing loud. Writing quiet. How do you make yourself understood by someone who doesn’t speak your language?

Sharing your notebooks.

Last week’s scenes (Love/Vying) read aloud for response.
Writing Assignment: (Due class 5) The Overheard.

Assignment: Read the first half of The Nether. Read the first half of How I Learned to Drive.

Handout: conversation with Paula Vogel/article about Jen Haley

Continue rewriting and polishing scenes and monologues in your portfolio.

FEBRUARY 9th CLASS 5: *Talking about what isn’t talked about.*
Writing what people don’t talk about.
Silence on the stage.
In class writing: Fairy Tales: Myths. Modern adaptations that push the envelope.
Magic on the stage. Theatricalization of the ordinary.
In class writing: Write a scene in which no one talks.
Share student scenes.

Assignment: Due class 6.
Finish reading The Nether and How I Learned to Drive
Writing assignment: Myths and Fairy tales.

FEBRUARY 16 CLASS 6
Class discussion of The Nether and How I Learned to Drive
Ritual (personal and public)
Writing exercise in class: Ritual
Student scenes/monologues on myth read aloud
Start discussion of Organizing Structure/Principals

Assignment (due class 7)
Read Leveling Up
Handout
Writing Assignment: Rules of the game.
Continue your notebook. Continue revising and polishing scenes.

FEBRUARY 23 CLASS 7
Midterm given in class.
Progress report/evaluation of portfolio. Student scenes read in class.

Assignment. (Due class 9) Backstory. Impossible scene.
Handout

Read 36 Views
Bring in an example of Variations in a different art form: Music, fiction, photography. Put it in your notebook.

MARCH 1 CLASS 8

Midterm returned
Discuss 36 Views and discuss Variations on a Theme
Commence La Ronde (groups/deadlines dependent upon class enrollment):
Schedule La Ronde.
Collaborative project. To be discussed in class. Appropriating characters, unanticipated directions, expectations and inevitability.
Read Student Scenes aloud for response.

Assignment: (due Class 9)
Read two drafts of new unpublished play in development. Will be provided in pdf form.
Handout
Writing: One scene three ways.
Continue La Ronde.

MARCH 8 CLASS 9
Discuss new unpublished play – draft 1 and 2.
In class writing exercises: writing blast
Student work shared in class

Assignment: (due Class 10)
Read two drafts of new unpublished play in development. Will be provided in pdf form.
Start adding a dream journal to your notebook. Write down your dreams the moment you wake up in the morning.
Writing exercises: writing blasts. Adding to and refining your portfolio.

NO CLASS MARCH 15!

MARCH 22 CLASS 10:
Discuss new play – difference between the two drafts
Class discussion (with playwright, if possible) of play in development.
Rewriting and revising.
In class exercise: Editing
Student scenes read aloud for response: one scene 3 ways; writing blast scenes

Assignment:
Rewrite your one scene three ways into one scene, polish.
Continue to polish other scenes.
Continue La Ronde.
Bring in two images that spark you (print them out or a way you can show them on laptop).
Read Arcadia

MARCH 29 CLASS 11
Discuss Arcadia
Time on the stage.
How do we handle time on stage?
In Class writing exercise: Real Time/Unreal time.
Student Scenes read aloud for feedback

Assignment: due class 12
Continue La Ronde. Continue polishing and revising plays/pieces for your portfolio.
Write a scene that plays with Time.
First draft of Final Scene/Play ready to be handed in.

APRIL 5 CLASS 12
First draft of Final Scene/Play turned in.
Discussion: Deepening of character. Character analysis discussion based upon what we’ve read this semester. Surprises that seemed inevitable within each one.

Writing Exercise: Character therapy in class.
La Ronde readings and student discussion/feedback in class

Writing Assignment (Due Class 13): Character therapy. Minor character

APRIL 12 CLASS 13
First draft of Final scene returned with notes.
Discussion – Approaches to Structure in Playwriting. Guiding forces.
Finish La Ronde
Reading of Student Scenes and response.

Writing Assignment : (due class 14)
Rewrite Final Scenes to hand in.
Write a scene without words
Guiding Forces

Handout.

APRIL 19 CLASS 14:
Final scenes handed in.
Notebooks brought in for presentation.
Guiding Forces scenes brought in for reading and response
In class writing exercise: endings

April 15 CLASS 15: Final scene/play presentation
Portfolios handed in.

MAY 10th. Final Exam. 2-4pm. Required.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct
Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in Scampus in Section 11, Behavior Violating University Standards. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in Scampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct/.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the Office of Equity and Diversity http://equity.usc.edu/ or to the Department of Public Safety http://capsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us. This is important for the safety whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. The Center for Women and Men http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/ provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage sarc@usc.edu describes reporting options and other resources.
Support Systems
A number of USC’s schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the American Language Institute http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students. The Office of Disability Services and Programs http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, USC Emergency Information http://emergency.usc.edu/ will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.