

Instructor: Paula Cizmar

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Office Hours: Available: Tues 1 - 6 pm ; Wed 10 am – Noon;
Wed 6 – 8 pm; Thurs 9 - 10 am; Thurs 1 – 3 pm; please note that
office hours are by appointment only; contact me via email or phone,
at least 24 hours in advance. For appointments outside these hours, I
am available by videoconference on SKYPE or Google Hangout.

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Course Description and Overview

Catalogue description: 366 Playwriting II (4, FaSp) Continuation of the work begun in THTR 365.
Prerequisite: THTR 365.

Through letters, there is no road too difficult to travel, no idea too confusing to be ordered.
It comes like rain from clouds; it renews the vital spirit. Inscribed on bronze and marble, it
honors every virtue. It sings in flute and strings and every day is made newer.
— Lu Chi, *Wen Fu: The Art of Writing*, 200 A.D.

Learning Objectives

In this workshop, you will experience the creative process firsthand at both the intuitive
and technical level while being guided through the writing of a play.

Playwriting 2 picks up where Playwriting 1 left off and expands on the exploration of the
art and craft of dramatic writing, once again focusing on *process*. To be investigated are:
sources of inspiration and strategies for creativity, character development, generation of
stories, intentional use of language, theatricality/spectacle, empathy and metaphor, plus
analysis and revision. All work is geared toward the completion of a full-length stage play
(55 – 90 minutes long).

Development of the play is essential—as is development of the imagination. Thus, hand
in hand with writing is the course goal of discovering and evolving your own unique,
artistic voice. Each week discussion and writing exercises will accompany the
workshopping of pages, i.e., presenting material for exploration and critique as a prelude
to rewriting, expanding, and polishing.

Remember: We are seekers. Let's take a look at the Western landscape, the people of
the West, and the Western voice. How can we bring this to the stage?

We're also adopting key elements of USC's 21st-century vision as our own by:

- GOING GREEN
- CONNECTING
- TRANSFORMING

What does this mean?

GOING GREEN means that we will save on time, energy, and paper. You will no longer have to print your work; instead, we will project your scenes, brainstorming materials, revision plans, etc. onto a giant screen via laptop computer. You won't have to print your Final Project; instead, you'll turn in a PDF of the script electronically and I will give you feedback directly on your manuscript via electronic Sticky Notes. Handouts and course materials will be paperless, sent via email and available online on BlackBoard.

CONNECTING means that we will make contact in several ways—with each other, with the creative community, with the world at large. We'll connect with each other to form a support network so that everyone feels secure taking artistic risks; plus we'll connect via text message and online to keep up to the minute on what's going on in class; you may even want to try connecting via the free teleconferencing tools available (Google Hangout, Skype). We'll also stay attuned to what's going on in American theatre, and we'll look at what's going on in the world—and explore how we can use art for growth and healing. Also, I want us to look at where we live—the West, in fact, the Western Edge. The Pacific Rim. What stories are unique to this place? How can we make a connection between where we are and the world in general?

TRANSFORMING means that we will be looking at theatre writing as a way to effect transformation in our lives, and in the lives of others; we'll look at creating theatre from a place of empathy, from a place of heart-driven concern for humanity; we'll look at culture and trends and attempt to define and redefine playwriting for the 21st century.

Prerequisite(s): THTR 365, Playwriting 1

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

PLAYWRITING – BRIEF AND BRILLIANT. Julie Jensen

BETWEEN RIVERSIDE AND CRAZY. Stephen Adly Guirgis. (Pulitzer Prize winner.)

DARK MATTERS. Oliver Mayer

MR. BURNS – A POST-ELECTRIC PLAY. Anne Washburn. (One of the most produced plays in the U.S.)

Plus:

A brand new, unpublished play by Luis Alfaro. (PDF supplied by instructor)

A brand new, unpublished play by Paula Cizmar. (PDF supplied by instructor)

A brand new, unpublished play by Velina Hasu Houston (PDF supplied by instructor)

Additional brand new plays TBA. (PDF)

All published texts are available via the USC Bookstore or online at Amazon. I will provide the unpublished plays in PDF form.

The School of Dramatic Arts' Dramatic Writing Program guidelines call for each student in playwriting courses to read at least seven plays as part of the course and to investigate them critically. The Required Reading plays fulfill this requirement. You are also encouraged to read additional plays, particularly contemporary work. Plays will be suggested in class; you may also turn to "Recommended Reading" (see Blackboard). The more you read, the more you will become aware of the diverse styles, voices, and structural forms open to you as a writer.

Description of Grading Criteria and Assessment of Assignments

Grading criteria: *The quality of work for the inspiration board, the reading and discussion segment, and the ongoing writing segment is determined by the thoroughness of the effort, the continuing process, and the imagination displayed. (More information below under the description of the inspiration board.) The rubric for determining the quality of work for the Final Project is described below in the detailed description of the project.*

Grading Scale for SDA: **A** indicates work of excellent quality; **B** of good quality; **C** of average quality; **D** of below average quality; and **F** indicates inadequate work.

Grading Breakdown

Your grade will be based on multiple components: a source/inspiration board (this is a presentation), ongoing writing and revision of your play, completion of reading assignments and presentations re: the reading (may be oral; may be written; may be quizzes), participation in class exercises and discussion, providing feedback for other students' works-in-progress, and completion of your Final Project.

Please bear in mind that you earn your grade based on the timely completion of your work, plus the quality of your work. Late assignments are marked down due to missed deadline. Assignments are accepted only within one week of due date. After that, they are considered a missed assignment, which counts as zero.

Components of the overall grade are weighted as follows (see below for details):

Inspiration Board (see below)	15 percent
Reading and Presentations; Posts; Quiz	25 percent
Ongoing Research, Writing, Revision, Analysis, Participation	30 percent
Final Project (revised draft of play) & Final Exam	30 percent
TOTAL	100 percent

The Inspiration Board is your starting point for what you will be writing about; it is part of your research. It's a presentation of the things that move you; it can be a combination of poetry, photos, doodles, news reports, artwork, charts and data, archival material, music, video—any kind of source material. It may be done as a simple projection of various items from your computer, or it may be done in a distinct format, such as Keynote, Glogster, Pinterest, Prezi, Power Point; it may include items that inspire you in general, or items that relate particularly to what's on your mind right now (even if you don't know what to do with them), or items that are even more specific and directly relate to a play you want to write. The Inspiration Board is a tool with which you tap into your imagination; you can use it as an active, multimedia form of brainstorming, as a way to start to explore ideas, as a way to begin to frame your thoughts, and as a way to promote discussion with other artists to enhance your vision. The "board" part of the Inspiration Board is virtual—we'll project your inspirations onto the screen from your laptop.

Your Final Project is a REVISED draft of your play. You may not have time for a completely polished rewrite of your script, but you should at least take steps to begin the revision process. The project will be graded on both artistic merit AND progress, i.e., growth from early exploratory work to final draft. Elements to be assessed are: character development - 25 percent; language (distinct character voice; rhythm, pace, metaphor) – 25 percent; story/structure/theatricality – 25

percent; overall achievement (includes how well script works as a whole, plus professional appearance of script) – 25 percent.

Extra Projects: For extra opportunities, you will be challenged to write a short play for the Judith Barlow Prize (details will be available on Blackboard) and/or you may also want to contribute a piece to the Deep Map Theatre project (the Deep Map pieces will be two- to three-minutes long and will be about climate change; they should be written to be performed street-theatre style).

HINT: Keep a Creative Journal! This is an archive of your explorations for writing; it may include jottings off the top of your head, stuff from your Inspiration Board, research, ideas, resources for current and future writing, and exercises and raw material from class. NOTE: It's no longer necessary to keep an actual journal, on paper. Due to the proliferation of smart phone and tablet apps for storing notes, etc., the Creative Journal may now be electronic. But do keep one. It will make your writing so much easier!

Note: *The SDA GUIDELINES on GRADING state that:*

- *There shall be no unexcused absences.*
- *No late assignments, projects, exams, papers, or exercises shall be accepted unless advance extensions have been arranged between the student and the teacher or unless exceptional circumstances occur.*

Assignment Submission Policy

Assignments will either be presented in class or turned in as PDFs via email, depending on the project.

Additional Policies

Participation is essential and figures into your grade. This course is modeled along the lines of a professional, artistic workshop; thus, as a member of such a workshop, your participation is necessary not only for the development of your own work, but for the development of your colleagues' work as well. Theatre is a highly collaborative, community-oriented medium and play development is a key part of the life of a playwright. Indeed, in this class, one of our projects depends upon collaboration. Please honor your obligation to your colleagues' work. Absences must be for reasons of illness or emergency and must be accompanied by a written explanation; in your absence, please prepare the assigned work that is due and turn it in immediately upon return to the workshop.

1. You are entering into a collaborative relationship with fellow writers and, thus, it is your responsibility to be available to your workshop colleagues for feedback, analysis, and support.
2. All workshop members must be treated with respect.
3. You are required to attend the workshop and to be on time. Tardiness is defined as being 15 minutes late or more. Excessive tardiness will affect your ongoing writing and participation grade. Only one (1) unexcused absence is allowed.
4. Other absences must be for reasons of illness or emergency, and you must notify me in writing (preferably in advance).
5. All assignments, written and/or otherwise, must be prepared on time and turned in (or presented) on the deadline date. Late assignments will be marked down due to the missed deadline. Assignments not turned in within a week of deadline count as missed assignments (zero credit).

6. IF YOU MISS CLASS: It is your responsibility—and SOLELY YOUR RESPONSIBILITY—to make up work you have missed and to obtain information about missed class discussions or missed assignments from your classmates or Blackboard, not from me. I will not be repeating lectures or class discussion; you will need to make arrangements to do independent research on whatever topics you have missed to keep up with the workshop. You will also need to keep in contact with your classmates to obtain notes and/or information re: what you missed. Again: Do not request notes or information from me. Most course materials can be found on the Blackboard site for this course. If you lose your syllabus or handouts, go to Blackboard.
7. Please check your e-mail regularly to see if there are any changes in class meeting place, etc. On rare occasions, it becomes necessary to schedule a new location for class meeting. If I am unable to provide you with this information in the preceding class, I will send you the information via e-mail and/or text message.
8. We're going green in this classroom, so you will be providing all workshop members with copies of your work by **projecting your documents onto the screen in the classroom from your computer**, thus eliminating the need for paper. Instructions on how to do this will be provided and it is possible for us to create a schedule of volunteer scribes to assist in this area so that it will not be necessary for everyone to carry a laptop to all class meetings.
9. If you desire an appointment with me, you are required to contact me via e-mail or text message at least 24 hours in advance, otherwise there is no guarantee I will receive your message with sufficient time to make arrangements to meet with you. Please note that I have included multiple ways to contact me on the front page of this syllabus.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

Weeks One to Three Jan 13 - Jan 27, 2016 Preparation & Gathering

Introduction: Where Are We—And Where Are We Going? Assessment & Challenge.

Consider: Surprising yourself; writing the best play you *can't* write; writing beyond your comfort zone. Consider the theme: *The Contemporary American West – The Stories That Don't Get Told*

Discussion topics:

Rituals of Antiquity and Present Day. (Discussion: elements of drama, elements of ritual; empathy, archetypes, current/historical events as jumping off point, trends, myths.)

Why & How a Play's a Play—And Not a Screenplay?

Why the West? Writing Outside Traditional Roles and Rules.

(Consider: Theatricality, tone, style, and dealing with the impossible on stage.)

Writing Xs may include:

Soundtrack/What's Happening?/Guided Tour

Ritual Character Encounter

Dreams & Dreams

Assignments:

Collect your resources, e.g., research, character bank, burning ideas, poetic impulses, images, emotional foundation, monologues, music/soundtrack, etc., and create an Inspiration Board. Due for presentation: Week 2.

Read selected scenes from required reading plays (as designated in class). Prepare to discuss. Write 100-word post about plays. Due Weeks 2 and 3.

Read *Playwriting – Brief & Brilliant*.

Create a character bank and develop characters for your play using a variety of techniques: Derive and develop at least one from **myth**, one based on **historical research**, one based on a **current event** person or topic, and one totally from your **imagination**.

Consider **theme** and how a character can humanize a theme. (Imagine a world in which the theme could reside. How can a character populate the world of a theme?)

Create **exploratory** monologues/scenes/sketches for each of these designated characters.

Hint: Your characters will probably be starting to generate story (and/or scene ideas). Let them. Take notes! Due Week 3.

(An additional hint: You do not need to wait for the day the pages or explorations are due. Start creating and keep writing. Everyone will probably be on a slightly different schedule.)

Using ideas/images/intuitions generated thus far, explore and experiment with your Final Project play. Due Week 4.

Workshop:

Present Inspiration Boards and Character Bank Monologues.

Weeks Four to Six Feb 3 - Feb 17, 2016 Exploration

Discussion topics:

Sensory Work/Metaphor: Staying Attuned to the Natural World, the Senses/ Translating “Reality” through Imagery.

Empathy & Metaphor: The Foundation of the Playwright. (And how there cannot be too much of either.)

Language: Sound, Rhythm, Meaning, Hidden Life.

Putting It All Together—Investigating Structure, Looking at Plot Variations.

Writing X’s may include:

6 Items/10 Minutes.

Visualization

Six plots

Workshop: Present explorations/experiments on Final Project Play.

Read aloud: Scenes from required reading plays.

Assignments:

Write new exploratory scene. (Note: Your exploratory scene may be the first scene of your Final Project play—or a later scene. It’s not necessary that you write in order, at this point. It may also be a scene that is merely pure exploration and ultimately doesn’t make it into the play. That’s fine. It’s part of the process.) (Due Week 5.)

Brainstorm further ideas for your Final Project play. (In class).

Read the remainder of the assigned plays. Write a weekly post about the plays. Due Weeks 4 -7.

Write new scene(s). Continue research. (Due Week 6.)

Write another section of your play. (Hint: Look at writing exercises and monologues for possible raw material.) (Due Week 7.)

Weeks Seven to Eight Feb 24 - Mar 2, 2016 In Progress

Discussion topics:

Refinements: Subtext, Contradictions, Misdirects, Miscommunication, and the Unreliable. The Worst-Case Scenario. Pushing Your Character to the Edge/Anticipating an Ending

Workshop: Present scenes. Readings/discussions of Final Project plans/scenes.

Assignments:

Write your last post on the Required Reading plays. Due Week 7.

Write another section of Final Project play. Prepare to turn in pages. (Due Week 8.)

Reminder – Turn in script pages for midterm assessment WEEK 8.

Discuss: *Playwriting-Brief and Brilliant*, and plays from reading list. Compare and contrast. Explore style, content, significance.

TURN – IN: Portfolio for midterm evaluation and script pages written so far for your Final Project play. If possible, turn in a RAW DRAFT of the entire play. What does this mean? Write as much as you can. If there are scenes that you know you can write, even if out of order, write them. If there are scenes that you intend to write but haven't gotten around to writing, add a placeholder in the script or describe it in theatrical terms. This is a raw draft, not a first draft. Let's see how far you can get with your script.

Week Nine Mar 9, 2016 The Ongoing Writing

Discussion topic:

Going Beyond: Ways to Risk, Ways to Play, and Looking for a Challenge

Workshop: Present scenes and Final Project plans. Discuss feedback, etc.

QUIZ: On plays assigned for Required Reading.

Assignment:

Keep working on your play. (Due Week 10.)

No Class Mar 16, 2016 - SPRING BREAK.

Weeks Ten – Eleven Mar 23 - Mar 30, 2016 Continuing & Preparing

Discussion topic:

Exploration of Rewrite Tools: Traditional and Non-, Mechanical and Non.

Workshop: Present scenes from Final Project play.

Assignments:

Assess the raw material you've created, along with the pages you've generated.

Assess risk-taking and construct a challenge.

Look to your sources of inspiration for your Final Project; discuss.

Keep working on your play; write new scenes; do revisions as needed. (Due Week 11.)

NOTE: Complete drafts of FINAL PROJECTS that are ready may be turned in and presented today—allowing you to get additional feedback (and have extra time) for further revision and final polish.

Week Twelve Apr 6, 2016 Brainstorming/Problem-Solving

Workshop: Present workshop members' scenes.

Schedule: Plays (or large segments of plays) to be presented. (Note: In-class presentations of full scripts—or large segments of scripts—will be scheduled for weeks thirteen, fourteen, and fifteen; be ready to sign up for a particular week.)

Assignment: Continue to workshop Final Project plays.

Weeks Thirteen Apr 13, 2016 Works in Progress 1

Workshop: In-class presentations of full scripts (or large segments). (Schedule TBA)

Week Fourteen Apr 20, 2016 Works in Progress 2

Workshop: In-class presentations of full scripts (or large segments). (Schedule TBA)

Week Fifteen Apr 27, 2016 Works in Progress 3

Workshop: In-class presentations of full scripts (or large segments).

End Game: Last Look Q&As. Where to go next—how to submit a script.

TURN IN: Your Final Project play, Wednesday, April 27, 2016.

REMINDER: Use Blackboard as a resource. Class materials, information, handouts, additional essays, source materials, etc., are posted on the class site on Blackboard.

[W]e write because it gives us courage, and if courage, why not life? Because somehow finding ourselves repeatedly visa-less on the borders of love, we seek to write our way back in.—Ehud Havazalet, "To Live in Tiflis in the Springtime"

By failing to read or listen to poets, a society dooms itself to inferior modes of articulation--of the politician, or the salesman, or the charlatan--in short, to its own. It forfeits...its own evolutionary potential.—Joseph Brodsky, *On Grief and Reason*, 1996

Final Examination Date:

FINAL EXAM: Feedback & Critique of Scripts. **MONDAY MAY 9, 2016 2 – 4 pm**

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 <https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions/>. 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.

Any student requesting academic **accommodations based on a disability** is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in GFS 120 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Website and contact information for DSP: http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html, (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 740-6948 (TDD only), (213) 740-8216 (FAX) ability@usc.edu.

Statement on Academic Integrity

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one's own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another's work as one's own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. *SCampus*, the Student Guidebook, (www.usc.edu/scampus or <http://scampus.usc.edu>) contains the University Student Conduct Code (see University Governance, Section 11.00), while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A.

Emergency Preparedness/Course Continuity in a Crisis

In case of a declared emergency if travel to campus is not feasible, USC executive leadership will announce an electronic way for instructors to teach students in their residence halls or homes using a combination of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technologies.