USC School of Dramatic Arts

Dramatic Writing Studio
THTR-566
Fall Term
Mon 12-2:50

Location: Shrine Auditorium SHR 105
661 West Jefferson Blvd
Los Angeles, CA 90007
8-22-16

Instructor: Jennifer Maisel

Office: adjunct office is MCC 214. Please note if we are meeting for an office hour appointment we will agree upon location when we set that up.

Office Hours: Mondays 10:45-11:45. Location TBD. Office hours are by appointment only via email. Cancellations require 24 hour notice via email.

Contact Info: maisel@usc.edu
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http://www.jennifermaisel.com

Course Description

Catalogue description: **THTR 566: Dramatic Writing Studio** Investigates gestalt of the student dramatic writer's professional development from the empty page and writing fundamentals to the first-draft script, business affairs, and dramaturgical advancement.

"Nurture the artist in the room beside you" – Paula Vogel

Learning Objectives

Together we will explore the process of creating the written word with which live theatre begins. Writing exercises will generate the materials to build your play; 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 examine 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 and seeing of new plays. 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 write a full-length play and become familiar champions and dramaturges of your classmates' work.

This course combines students from all three years of the MFA in Dramatic Writing Program into a writing collective. During the semester, you will not only be completing a full-length play, but you will also be reading assigned plays, articles and your fellow students' work. Topics will not only cover playwriting and plays, but also the life of a professional playwright in the American theatre today, including submission models, relationships with other theatre artists, marketing, and production etiquette.

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. NO late assignments will be accepted.

Assignments will be circulated by email to be presented class; you will hand in a hard copy of all assignments. You will keep a portfolio of your on-going dramaturgical work for assessment at the end of the term. At the end of the semester you will hand in this portfolio as well as your full length play.

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

REQUIRED READING:
PLAYWRITING – Brief and Brilliant by Julie Jensen
OUTRAGEOUS FORTUNE – by Todd London
ARISTOTLE'S POETICS – downloadable
(I highly recommend you familiarize yourself with the above before the first class)
INTIMATE APPAREL by Lynn Nottage
THE LANGUAGE ARCHIVE by Julia Cho
THE NETHER by Jennifer Haley
36 VIEWS by Naomi Iizuka
HOW I LEARNED TO DRIVE by Paula Vogel
(Please don't download randomly from the internet – often the pdfs you discover are the wrong drafts.)

I may also assign new unpublished plays (PDFs will be provided) by contemporary playwrights. We may even get them in as guest/Skype artists. I may assign more than one draft of the same play to be read and examined. This syllabus is subject to change due to the nature of the flow of a writers' collective.

REQUIREMENT BY CLASS 3:
1a) read: http://www.suilebhan.com/playwrights-and-the-new-play-exchange/
1b) Join and create a profile on the National New Play Exchange
https://newplayexchange.org/

2) purchase a copy of the Dramatists Guild Resource directory.
https://www.dramatistsguild.com/resourcedirectory/
If you are a member of the Dramatists Guild you can access this on line and you do not need to purchase.

RECOMMENDED READING/RECOMMENDED SEEING:
(we will add favorite plays to this list collectively)

Any and all plays (published and unpublished) by Velina Hasu Houston, Oliver Mayer, Luis Alfaro, Paula Cizmar and Jennifer Maisel. It is important that you know what your mentors write.
LEVELING UP by Deborah Zoe Laufer
ARCADIA by Tom Stoppard
DRY LAND by Ruby Rae Spiegel

Weekly writing assignment:
Writing exercises will be given in class and/or as homework. The aim is that these exercises will be used as the springboard for your final play. Ongoing work will be read aloud in class for feedback. Your being absent is your responsibility, not mine, and be advised, because of the manner in which I conduct the class, the entire workshop being present makes for the best experience for all of you. I will not reprise lectures for you. If you are absent you must contact me that you will not be attending and your work must be emailed in. Students who are absent must contact fellow students for the in-class assignments and homework and hand that in on time at the next class. The University expects that you will spend about 8 hours per week on this class, outside of classroom time.

Scenes should be emailed in as a pdf titled "566playtitlelastnamedate" i.e. 566OUTOFORBITMaisel8-17-16.pdf. If your response is not accurately titled it will not be considered. A hard copy must be provided to me.

Play reading and critical feedback:
As a playwright in a writers' collective, you need to become familiar with your fellows' work. To this end you will be reading a play (at least 50 pages) by each of your fellow writers and write a response that will be handed in as part of your grade. I will not be responding to these plays but will be reading your responses. This response consists of a logline, short summary and feedback according to what we talk about when we talk about plays. These will be emailed to both the writer and myself as a pdf titled 566DRPlayTitleYourLastName.pdf for example 566DRRomeoandJulietMaisel.pdf. If your response is not titled accurately it will not be considered. At the end of the semester you will be handing in a hard copy portfolio of these to me, along with a logline and short summary of your class play.

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. You will be presenting scenes in progress for feedback according to the sign-up provided. A protocol for in class feedback will be followed.

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 tardiest equals an absence. Being more than 15 minutes late will be regarded as an absence.

Keep a "Notebook"

There is an ongoing value of recording and storing that which moves and inspires you. MANDATORY: ***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. I also recommend you keep a notebook of inspiration, character bios, photos, articles, dreams that form the infrastructure of your play.

Grading Breakdown:
Play responses: 40%
Participation: 15%
Presentation: 20%
Final Full Length Play/logline/synopsis: 25%

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown (subject to change due to class needs)

Prior to CLASS 1:

Read scene 1 of The Nether, Intimate Apparel, How I Learned to Drive, The Language Archive, 36 Views.
Read Aristotle's Poetics (downloadable)
Read Jose Rivera: 36 Assumptions about Writing Plays
http://allbleedingstopseventually.blogspot.com/2007/01/jose-riveras-36-assumptions-about.html
Read about Liz Lerman critical response: http://www.writersdigest.com/editor-blogs/there-are-no-rules/guest-post/4-steps-to-useful-critiques-the-lerman-method
http://www.communicatingdance.eu/blog/49-practicing-useful-feedback-liz-lerman-s-critical-response-process

AUG 22: CLASS 1
Introductions to us. Introductions to plays:
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: how did you get here?
Overview. Syllabus
How to Hand in Assignments. Assignments will not be accepted if they do not follow these guidelines.

Assignment:
Writing Assignment: Play Proposal (2 page max). Character bios (1 page each): To be emailed to classmates and me by 10pm 8/26.
566Assignment1lastname.pdf for example 566Assignment1Maisel.pdf (Assignment # links to week of class. This is not how you hand in scenes from your plays)Inspiration "board" for your play: to be presented in class.
Read:
Classmates' play proposals/character bios for discussion on Monday.
36 Views by Naomi Iizuka
Read:http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/cover_story/2016/06/oral_history_of_tony_kushner_s_play_angels_in_america.html
Read:
http://www.upa.pdx.edu/IMS/currentprojects/TAHv3/Misc_Docs/2009_Conf/EFs_Visit_to_Small_Planet.pdf

Read any additional Handouts/Links posted on Blackboard
Read assigned classmate's play and submit synopsis/feedback (due 8/29) to classmate and to me via email. Keep for hard copy final portfolio submission.

AUGUST 29th CLASS 2:
Talk about Slate article and journey of a play
Talk about Visit to a Small Planet
Writing exercise: Character journey. Photo exercise.
Sharing of Play Proposals, Character bios, Inspiration "board".
Discussion of play read: Beginnings. Exposition. How do they start? How are you drawn in? What are the worlds we are invited to live in.
Response. Discussion of voice. Period. How do we know who were are hearing – how language and dialogue immediately gives us time/place/culture.

Assignment (due September 12th. Class 3/week 4):

The world of your play – 5 minute presentation of images, words, music, drawings.
Two new scenes from Final Project play

Read Intimate Apparel
Read unpublished play (will be given to you in pdf form)
Read any Handouts/Links posted on Blackboard

Read **2(!)** assigned classmates' plays and submit dramaturgical response (due 9/12 to classmates and to me. Keep for final portfolio submission.
1a) read: http://www.suilebhan.com/playwrights-and-the-new-play-exchange/
1b) Join and create a profile on the National New Play Exchange
https://newplayexchange.org/

2) purchase a copy of the Dramatists Guild Resource directory.
https://www.dramatistsguild.com/resourcedirectory/
If you are a member of the Dramatists Guild you can access this on line and you do not need to purchase.

SEPTEMBER 5th – NO CLASS. LABOR DAY

SEPTEMBER 12th - CLASS 3:

In class writing exercise
Discussion: Intimate Apparel/other play
Desires and Inhibitions. Wants and Needs. Talisman. Ritual.

World of the play presentations. 5 min per student.
Writing Workshop (4 students' scenes. 10 minutes of presentation)

Assignment (due class 4):

Writing assignment:
Continue writing your play.
Read Playwriting: Brief and Brilliant
Read any additional Handouts/Links posted on Blackboard
Read assigned classmate's play and submit synopsis/response (due 8/29) to classmate and to me. Keep for final portfolio submission.

Read The Language Archive by Julia Cho.
Handout.

September 19th CLASS 4
In Class Writing Exercise: Language
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?
Writing Workshop: (5 students' scenes. 10 minutes of presentation. Response.)

Read The Nether
Read any Handouts/Links posted on Blackboard

Read assigned classmate's play and submit synopsis response (due 9/26 to classmate and to me. Keep for final portfolio submission.
Continue writing your class play.
Hand in Two Scenes from your class play

SEPTEMBER 26th. CLASS 5
Writing Exercise: *Talking about what isn't talked about.* Silence on the stage.
Writing Workshop – per schedule
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Assignment: Due class 6.
Read How I Learned to Drive
Read The Nether
Read any Handouts/Links posted on Blackboard

Read assigned classmate's play and submit dramaturgical response (due 10/3 to classmate and to me.)
Keep for final portfolio submission.
2 scenes from final play handed in by class 6
sign up for 20 minute one-on-one meeting: via Skype/in person/phone

OCTOBER 3rd. CLASS 6.
ONE-ON-ONE MEETING AS PER SIGN UP

Assignment (due class 7)
Read any Handouts/Links posted on Blackboard
Read assigned classmate's play and submit synopsis response (due 10/10 to classmate and to me) Keep for final portfolio submission.
Continue writing your play

OCTOBER 10th. CLASS 7.
Writing Exercise: Backstory. Impossible scene. Ritual
Class discussion of The Nether and How I Learned to Drive
Ritual (personal and public)

Writing Workshop - per schedule

Assignment – Due Class 8
Read any Handouts/Links posted on Blackboard
Read assigned classmate's play and submit synopsis response (due 10/17 to classmate and to me). Keep for final portfolio submission.

Continue writing. Hand in first 30 pages or Act 1 by email (566TITLEOFPLAYLASTNAMEDATE 566EDENMaisel8-22-16.pdf)and hard copy

OCTOBER 17th. CLASS 8.

Midterm: Hand in Act 1 or 30 pages
Writing Workshop - per schedule

Assignment: (due Class 9)
Read two drafts of new unpublished play in development. Will be provided in pdf form.
Read any Handouts/Links posted on Blackboard

Read assigned classmate's play and submit synopsis response (due 10/24 to classmate and to me). Keep for final portfolio submission.
Prepare hard copy of collected responses for submission.

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OCTOBER 24th. CLASS 9
Writing exercise: rewriting
Discuss new unpublished play – draft 1 and 2.
Writing workshop – per schedule

Assignment: (due Class 10)
Read The Nether – early draft (will be provided)
Read any Handouts/Links posted on Blackboard
Continue writing play for class
Hand in hard copy of collected responses to me.

OCTOBER 31st. CLASS 10.
Writing exercise: rewriting/editing
Discuss rewriting
Class discussion (with playwright, if possible) of having a play in development.
Rewriting and revising.
Writing Workshop – as per schedule

Assignment:
Read Outrageous Fortune by Todd London
Read any Handouts/Links posted on Blackboard
Continue writing play for class

NOVEMBER 7th. CLASS 11.
In Class writing exercise: Real Time/Unreal time.
The Business of Playwriting
Possible Guest/Skype Artist
Writing Workshop – per schedule

Assignment: due class 12

Write logline, synopsis and query letter for one of your plays.
Prepare for your final project reading: You are responsible for all of the elements of putting together a reading of a 20 minute excerpt of your play as per schedule.

NOTE: FINAL SCRIPTS ARE DUE NOVEMBER 28th.

Read: https://womenwhosubmitlit.wordpress.com/2016/06/29/building-up-to-emerging-tips-for-applying-to-fellowships-residencies-and-workshops/

Read any Handouts/Links posted on Blackboard
Prepare for your final project reading

NOVEMBER 14th. CLASS 12
Writing Exercise. Character Therapy

Readings of 3 Final projects. You are responsible for all of the elements of putting together a reading of a 45 minute excerpt (timing will be discussed) of your play as per schedule. Details to follow.

Assignment:
Continue writing your play for class.
Read and post about one play on the New Play Exchange

NOVEMBER 21st. CLASS 13
Readings of 3 Final projects. You are responsible for all of the elements of putting together a reading of a 45 minute excerpt of your play as per schedule. Details to follow.

ASSIGNMENT: FINAL SCRIPTS DUE NOVEMBER 28th.

NOVEMBER 28th Class 14

Readings of 3 Final Projects. You are responsible for all the elements of putting together a reading of a 45 minute excerpt of your play as per schedule. Details to follow.

FINAL SCRIPTS DUE TODAY.

FINAL EXAM
FRIDAY DECEMBER 9th - 11am-1pm As per USC: Attendance Mandatory

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.htmlprovides 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.