

USC School of Dramatic Arts

THTR 366 63078R Playwriting II

Spring 2017 Wednesday 2 – 4:50 pm

Location: MCC 102.

Instructor: Paula Cizmar

Office: JEF 201, 950 W. Jefferson, Los Angeles 90089

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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ITHelp: USC Information Technology Services

<http://itservices.usc.edu>; School of Dramatic Arts – Mr. Prakash Shirke; contact info: shirke@usc.edu; 213.740.1288. MCC

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. There are untold stories out there and voices we have not heard from. 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 not 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 the script electronically and I will give you feedback directly on your manuscript via electronic 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

WATER BY THE SPOONFUL. Quiara Alegria Hudes. (Pulitzer Prize winner.)

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

Plus:

Brand new, unpublished play by Los Angeles playwrights, including members of the Dramatic Writing faculty at USC. PDFs to be supplied by instructor.

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. 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

Excellent: A (4) = 100-94; A- (3.7) = 93-90

Good: B+ (3.3) = 89-86; B (3) = 85-84; B- (2.7) = 83-80

Average: C+ (2.3) = 79-76; C (2) = 75-74; C- (1.7) = 73-70

Poor: D+ = 69 – 66; D = 65-64; D = 63 - 60 (1.3) = 60s; F (0) = 59 and below

- “Excellent” indicates that the student couples clear understanding of the class material with original and creative insight; “Good” means that the student demonstrates a clear understanding of the material; “Average” indicates that the student demonstrates a general understanding of the material but with some gaps; “Poor” indicates that there are identifiable gaps in the student’s understanding of the class material; “Failure” is the result of the student not having completed his or her assignments coupled with poor understanding of the material.
- When the average falls between two grades, the final grade will be weighted toward the positive end of the scale for students whose attendance and participation in class have been good, and will be weighted toward the negative end of the scale for those with poor attendance and participation.

Grading Components

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	10 percent
Reading and Presentations; Posts; Quiz; Exercises	20 percent
Ongoing Research, Writing, Revision, Analysis	30 percent
Participation	15 percent
Final Project (revised draft of play) & Final Exam	25 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, Tumblr, 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 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 be presented in class or turned in as PDFs via email or Blackboard, 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, please 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

	Topics/Daily Activities	Readings and Homework	Deliverable/ Due Dates
<p>Weeks 1 – 3</p> <p>Jan 11 to Jan 25</p>	<p>Preparation & Gathering</p> <p>Introduction: Where Are We and Where Are We Going? Assessment & Challenge.</p> <p>Consider: Surprising yourself; writing the best play you <i>can't</i> write; writing beyond your comfort zone.</p> <p>Consider this suggested theme: How Can the American West Save Us – Uncovering the Stories That Haven't Been Told</p>	<p>Discussion:</p> <p>Rituals of Antiquity and Present Day.</p> <p>Elements of drama; elements of ritual.</p> <p>Inspiration – from empathy; archetypes; other art; current/historical events as jumping off points; trends; myths.</p> <p>Why & how's a play's a play—and not a screenplay? Why the West? Writing outside traditional expectations, roles, and rules.</p> <p>Consider: Theatricality, tone, style, and dealing with the impossible.</p> <p>Read: <i>Playwriting Brief & Brilliant</i>; <i>Water by the Spoonful</i>; <i>Mr. Burns</i></p>	<p>Week 1: Begin to collect your resources, e.g., research, burning ideas, poetic impulses, images, emotional foundation, monologues, character banks, music/soundtrack.</p> <p>Week 2: Begin presentation of Inspiration Boards.</p> <p>Week 3: Be prepared to discuss the assigned reading.</p> <p>Week 3: Create four characters for your character bank. Derive and develop at least one from myth, one based on historical research, one based on a current event, and one totally from your imagination.</p> <p>Week 3: Write a monologue for one of your characters. (Hint: Your characters may start to generate story and scene ideas as they talk. Let them!)</p> <p>Weekly Posts: Write a short entry about one of the assigned readings each week. 100 – 250 words.</p> <p>Note: We will be doing many things simultaneously. Some people will be working on different types of material. No worries. Please stay on top of things and continue to develop your work in your way.</p>
<p>Weeks 4 - 6</p> <p>Feb 1 to Feb 15</p>	<p>Exploration</p> <p>Sensory Work/Metaphor: Staying Attuned to the Natural World, the Senses. Translating "Reality" through Imagery.</p>	<p>Discussion</p> <p>Empathy - The Starting Point of the playwright;</p> <p>Metaphor – The Inner Heart of the Playwright's Work.</p>	<p>Week 4: Write an exploratory or experimental scene.</p> <p>Week 5: Write a new exploratory scene for your Final Project Play (FPP). (Note: It may be the first scene of the play, a scene from the</p>

		<p>Taking on language: sound, rhythm, meaning, hidden life.</p> <p>Putting it all together: A preliminary look at structure and plot variations.</p> <p>Writing X's: 6 Items/10 Minutes Visualization Six Plots</p>	<p>middle, or the last scene of the play. It's not necessary that you write in order at this point. You may also write a scene that is purely exploration and ultimately doesn't make it into the play.</p> <p>That's fine. This is all part of the process.)</p> <p>Week 6: Story meeting. Brainstorm further ideas for your Final Project Play.</p> <p>Read: The remainder of the assigned plays (given to you via PDF from instructor).</p> <p>Weekly Posts: Write a short entry about one of the assigned readings each week. 100 – 250 words.</p> <p>Hint: Look at your writing exercises and monologues for possible raw material for your play.</p>
<p>Weeks 7 - 8</p> <p>Feb 22 to Mar 1</p>	<p>In Progress</p> <p>The Fun Stuff: Subtext, Contradictions, Misdirects, Miscommunication, and the Unreliable.</p>	<p>Discussion</p> <p>The Worst-Case Scenario—Pushing Your Character to the Edge. Anticipating an Ending.</p>	<p>Weeks 7 and 8: Workshop new scenes for your FPP. Present discussion/new ideas/plans for FPP.</p> <p>Weekly Posts: Write a short entry about one of the assigned readings each week. 100 – 250 words.</p> <p>Midterm, due week 8: Turn in script pages from your FPP for midterm assessment. <i>What does this mean?</i> Turn in as much as you can to show what you are working on; if possible, turn in a raw draft of the entire play-- which might mean that there are some scenes that are written and some that are merely ideas or early versions of what you may write. If, for example, 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.</p>

Week 9 Mar 8	The Ongoing Writing Going Beyond: Ways to Risk, Ways to Play, and Looking for a Challenge	Discussion The Pitfalls of the Middle. Staying Motivated. Q&A: Feedback on the midterm pages.	Week 9: Present new scenes and project plans. Keep working on your play.
Mar 15	NO CLASS	SPRING BREAK	Keep working on your play.
Weeks 10 - 11 Mar 22 To Mar 29	Continuing & Preparing Exploration of Rewrite Tools. Traditional and Non-, Mechanical and Non-.	Discussion What is missing? What does the play need? How to go deeper?	Week 10: Present scenes from FPP. Week 11: Present scenes from FPP. Week 11: Self-help. 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 FPP. Discuss. Do revisions as needed.
Week 12 Apr 5	Brainstorming/Problem Solving Continue assessment of raw material, script pages, inspirational material, and imagine your way to a play.	Discussion Scheduling the Art: Creating a timetable for whose work will be presented in the final weeks.	Week 12: Present new and/or revised scenes. Prepare for presentations. Note: Depending on the length of the plays and the number of writers in the workshop, we may not be able to read entire plays during the final weeks. If that is the case, please select the material you would most like to present.
Weeks 13 - 15 Apr 12 to Apr 26	Works in Progress	Workshop In-class presentations of full scripts or large segments of scripts from each writer. Schedule TBA.	Weeks 13, 14, 15: Present your script or script segment according to the schedule as created in class. PROVIDE FEEDBACK to the other writers as their work is presented. Continue to refine, revise, rework your script. TURN IN: Your Final Project Play. Due April 26, 2017.
FINAL Monday May 8	FINAL EXAM 2 – 4 pm	Artistic Review: Group Feedback & Critique of Scripts. Plus: End Game. Last Look Q&As. Where to go next—how to submit a script.	Date: For confirmation of the date and time of the final for this class, consult the USC <i>Schedule of Classes</i> at www.usc.edu/soc .

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

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.