

USC School of Dramatic Art

THTR 527 Writing the Pacific Rim: Global and Western Dramatic Writing

Units: 4, Section: 63186D

**FALL 2015—Thursday—Time:
6:00-9:50 pm PST**

Location: McClintock Building (MCC) 102

Instructor: Josefina Lopez

Office: Massman Drama Center (DRC),
josefinl@usc.edu

Office Hours: 12:30 pm - 1:30 pm - by appointment only; 24-
hour business day (M-F) cancellation required

Contact Info: josefinl@usc.edu (will reply within 48
hours), 323 304 9914 (leave a message, will respond within
48 hours)

IT Help: 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

Census figures predict that the Latino population will become the majority in the U.S. by 2046. Already in Los Angeles Latinos are the majority with Mexican/Mexican-Americans making the largest percentage of Latinos. However, myths, stereotypes, and misrepresentation renders this community practically invisible in Hollywood and in the theater world. This course will expose students to the realities of Mexico and the untold stories of Mexicans both living in Mexico and in the U.S. with the primary emphasis on the Southwest and Los Angeles. Students will learn the different ways in which Mexican-Americans attempt to tell their stories beyond those of being the “criminals”, “Latin lovers” and “the help”. By “humanizing the help” and exploring the dignified portraits of Latinos and Mexican-Americans, students will have an authentic understanding of this community who has contributed tremendously to the U.S. and who is shaping the future of this country by being a critical voting bloc in electing the next President.

The course focuses on Mexican/Mexican-American culture with regard to their dramatic subject matter and traditions *toward the creation of a full-length play or instructor-approved dramatic writing project*. This is not a class that will teach you about the depth and breadth of cultural artifacts; this is a writing course. You are absorbing the culture as part of your creative process, but the course remains focused on the art and craft of dramatic writing and *the ways that cultural study can influence, inspire, and/or enrich it*. The class will seek to engage the student in at least three dimensions of a given culture selected from these categories, but the expectation is that the student will seek other resources on his or her own from critical arenas such as art, religion, society, literature, and

cuisine investigating the avenues utilized in the course. *You are expected to learn how to mine life toward the development of character and story.*

This course is for the beginning dramatic writer as well as the advanced dramatic writer from other genres that have completed at least one full-length dramatic writing work. This course is appropriate for students that wish to write a full-length play or other instructor-approved dramatic writing project, but through the added lens of cultural influences. Exposure to the cultural influences are part of the pre-writing and writing processes. Students who only wish to write a play or other dramatic writing project, period, should not take this course unless it is required. If it is required, the student should read this paragraph with care so that he or she understands the scope of the course.

Learning Objectives

The student is expected to learn certain aspects of Mexican/Mexican-American culture, not fully as in an anthropological or sociopolitical or historical manner but in a manner that allows the student to be inspired by an element or several elements of that culture. That inspiration is to be mined by the student toward the writing of a full-length play or an instructor-approved dramatic writing project. These goals fit with the Master of Fine Arts in Dramatic Writing's desires that students mine their literary potential, and that they engage meaningfully in global society and the profession.

The Fall Semester 2015 will focus on Mexico, the Southwest and Los Angeles, regions where Mexicans and Mexican-Americans live. Exposure to the dimensions of a culture are part of the pre-writing process. The development of the writing project will occur along with exposure.

Prerequisite(s): If not in Master of Fine Arts in Dramatic Writing program, a writing sample and instructor approval.

Course Notes

Students must check email and Blackboard regularly, which means at least once every 24 hours for email and at least once a week for Blackboard or when directed by the instructor.

Students are not allowed to use computers, electronic devices, or cell phones in class.

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

Real Women Have Curves & Other Plays, by Josefina Lopez, WPR Press, http://www.amazon.com/Real-Women-Curves-Other-Plays/dp/1889379239/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1440475265&sr=1-1&keywords=Real+Women+Have+Curves+%26+Other+Plays

Detained in the Desert & Other Plays, by Josefina Lopez, WPR Press, http://www.amazon.com/Detained-Desert-Other-Plays-Josefina/dp/188937931X/ref=pd_bxgy_14_img_y

Narcoland, by Anabel Hernandez, [versobooks.com](http://www.versobooks.com), http://www.amazon.com/Narcoland-Mexican-Lords-Their-Godfathers-ebook/dp/B00BVJFN3S/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1440475441&sr=1-1&keywords=narcoland+the+mexican+drug+lords+and+their+godfathers

Recommended Readings and Supplementary Materials

Which is it Hispanic or Latino? <http://www.cnn.com/2014/05/03/living/hispanic-latino-identity/>

Lights, Camera, Struggle, Hollywood Latinos Speak Out, <http://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/lights-camera-struggle-hollywood-latinos-speak-out-n181686>

Minority Women, Media, and Body Image, <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/fy/fy113500.pdf>

What is a Chicano?, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/cheech-marin/what-is-a-chicano_b_1472227.html

Description and Assessment of Assignments

Academic integrity is important to the University. The student is urged to remember that professors do not “give” grades; students *earn* grades. Thus, a final grade is entirely up to the student with regards to the effort he or she chooses to expend to meet course requirements. Please note that late work is given a ten percent (20%) penalty and is accepted only within one week of its due date (see “Grading Breakdown”). The only exception is illness or personal crisis. Here are USC’s definitions of grades: “A” for work of excellent quality, “B” for work of good quality, “C” for work of fair quality for undergraduate credit and minimum passing for graduate credit, “C-” as a failing grade for graduate credit, “D-” for work of minimum passing quality for undergraduate credit, “F” for failure, “IN” for incomplete work, *student-initiated after 12th week and only awarded under exceptional circumstances*. There will be three categories of grading:

25% - Weekly Grade. This evaluates your engagement in reading and writing assignments, writing exercises, and evaluative discussions in class. This grade will include your cultural analyses, which at a minimum must be five pages of writing. This also includes your progress in your Tour Journal. Students will maintain a Tour Journal, a research journal comprised of text and images gathered on the “tour,” and scenes written from knowledge gained on the “tour.” The objective is to enrich artistic expression and expand artistic perspective by looking beyond one’s own cultural geography, and then using this absorbed knowledge to enrich the writing process.

25% - Professional Development and Constructive Criticism. This evaluates professional behavior as a writer in class including behavior toward peers as well as the quality of your giving/receiving of constructive criticism.

50% - Completed Project/Final Exam. Your final project will be a full-length play or otherwise instructor-approved dramatic writing project typed in standard manuscript

format (for plays, consult the current *Dramatists' Guild Resource Directory* or *Samuel French*: [http://www.samuel french.com/content/files/upload/General%20SFI%20Formatting%20Guidelines%20Complete.p df](http://www.samuel french.com/content/files/upload/General%20SFI%20Formatting%20Guidelines%20Complete.pdf). Suggested lengths: 45-85 pages for a play (max. 85), 90 for a screenplay, 50-60 for other. The manuscript will be professionally presented with card stock covers and genuine brass brads or silver rings. Note that lack of adherence to these guidelines will lower your grade, as they are professional standards to learn for professional development. Please do not plagiarize. [Many of you have trouble locating professional brass brads. Here is a link: <http://www.amazon.com/Solid-Brass-Fasteners-Capacity-A7071505/dp/B00006IBK1>; you will need 11/4 inch or 11/2 inch depending on the thickness of your manuscript.] If your project falls apart due to poor presentation, it cannot be evaluated. Be mindful of the fact that if this happened in a professional setting, your work probably would not be considered.

Grading is determined on the following scale:

96-100%=A 88-90%=B+ 81-84%=B- 75-77%= C 67-70%=D+ 95-91%=A- 85-87%=B 78-80%=C+ 71-74%= C- 66-64%=D 61-63%=D- [Failing Grade for Graduate Credit = C-]

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 has been good, but will be weighted toward the negative end of the scale for those with poor attendance and participation.

The final project grade is evaluated on a percentage scale with the grade breaking down as follows: 25% Quality of structure/through-line/plotting, 25% Quality of character development, 25% Quality of dialogue development, 25% Quality of overall creative achievement and professionalism⁵ (i.e. editing, presentation, length, etc.).

Grading Breakdown

25% Weekly Grade (cultural analysis, writing exercises, etc.)

25% Writing Workshops and Project Cultivation, Professional Development and Constructive Criticism

50% Final Project

In keeping with SDA guidelines on grading:

- 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 are to be submitted in class for weekly assignments and in hard copy,

professional format as noted above, for the final projects.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

8/27 Part I: Introduction and overview. Discussion of syllabus, plays, field trips, final projects, watch *Harvest of Empire* Documentary
9/3 – *The Bronze Screen* Documentary - Discussion. Cultural analysis writing exercise.
9/10 – *Beyond Reel* Documentary - Discussion. Cultural analysis writing exercise.
9/17 – *Simply Maria or the American Dream* VIDEO Discussion. Cultural analysis writing exercise.
9/24 – *Real Women Have Curves* at the Pasadena Playhouse - Field Trip
10/1 – *Real Women Have Curves* Discussion. Cultural analysis writing exercise.
10/8 – *Trio Los Machos* Discussion. Cultural analysis writing exercise.
10/15 – *Confessions of Women from East L.A.* Discussion. Cultural analysis writing exercise.
10/22 – *Detained in the Desert* Film Discussion. Cultural analysis writing exercise.
10/29 – *Food for the Dead* Discussion. Cultural analysis writing exercise.
11/5 – *Boyle Heights* at CASA 0101 Theater - Field Trip
11/12 – *Narco Cultura* Film & *Narcoland* Discussion. Cultural analysis writing exercise.
11/19 – *Culture Clash, Teatro Campesino - Comedy, Courage & Chicanos* Discussions, Cultural Analysis writing exercises.
11/26 – Holiday. No class. (THANKSGIVING).
12/4 – Final Thoughts, Writing workshop. Last day of class. Final projects due by 6 pm on 12/9. No projects accepted after deadline.
12/9 FINAL EXAMINATION DATE, from 7 pm to 9 pm. Please note that the Final Exam is mandatory on a day and time set by the University. Site TBD.

Statement for Students with Disabilities

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 as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 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.

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.