

USC School of Dramatic Arts

THTR 566 Dramatic Writing Studio

Units: 4

Fall 2015—Mondays—Time: 12 Noon-2:50 pm

Location: Shrine (SHR) 105

Instructor: Velina Hasu Houston, MFA, PhD

Office: Massman Drama Center

Office Hours: 9-11:45 am by appointment only via email; 24-hour cancellation via email required

Contact Info: greentea@usc.edu, (213) 740-8686

Teaching Assistant: N/A

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

Dramatic Writing Studio focuses on the gestalt of the professional development of the student dramatic writer from the empty page and writing fundamentals to the first-draft script, business affairs, and script development including professional development with regard to operating in the field. Emphasis is on the writing of a new play for the legitimate stage in the context of the nature of the discipline in preparation for extracurricular presentation dimensions in New Works Festivals I-III. At the discretion of the instructor, the course also may address alternative dramatic writing genres, spaces, media, and styles. Recommended preparation: Complete Required Readings, Tier 1, prior to first class.

Learning Objectives

This course includes students from Years One, Two, and Three in the USC School of Dramatic Arts' Master of Fine Arts in Dramatic Writing program, but may include graduate students with playwriting experience from other writing-related programs at USC at the discretion of the instructor. The course takes place each fall and spring, combining the MFA in Dramatic Writing cohort in a writing collective in order to enrich and deepen educational experience. The course will survey the essentials of the life of a dramatic writer with each semester foregrounding the writing of a new play. Over the course of the studio, students will also investigate various elements of professional dramatic writing including: production etiquette, commitment and discipline, pre-writing, idea development, how to conduct creative research, plagiarism, the development and execution of character and story, submission materials preparation [synopsis, character breakdown, biography], formatting and script presentation, director relationships, dramaturge relationships, business affairs [health insurance, correspondence, agents, copyrights, marketing, networking], professional transition, post-graduate workshops rehearsal processes/readings/productions, etc. The investigation may include discussion, reading, workshoping of writing, field trips and guest artist integration.

Course Notes

- See Blackboard note under "Required Readings and Supplementary Materials."
- For each unit of in-class contact time, the university expects two hours of out of class student work per week over a semester.
- The final is on December 11 from 11 am-1 pm. Please make note of this date and time in your calendars now. The date and time are set by USC and students are required to be present.

Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required

See Blackboard note under "Required Readings and Supplementary Materials."

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

Required Readings

Tier 1

"Letters to a Young Poet" by Rainer Maria Rilke

"Poetics" by Aristotle -- <http://www.iep.utm.edu/aris-poe/>

"Oedipus Rex" by Sophocles

"Who'd Have A Career As A Playwright" -- <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2013/jan/11/trials-life-playwright-john-osborne>

"Playwrights on Writing" -- <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/la-et-playwrights-sg-storygallery.html> (Joseph and Hwang)

"The Real Life Drama of Being A Playwright" -- http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/entertainment-jan-june11-playwrights_06-10/

"The Dramatists Guild Resource Directory 2014: The Writers Guide to the Theatrical Marketplace" (2015 may be available too)

Required Readings

Tier 2

"'Writer's Block' Busters 101 Exercises to Clear the Deadwood and Make Room for Flights of Fancy" by Velina Hasu Houston

"The Writers Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers" by Christopher Vogler

Various plays as determined by instructors (assigned in class, specific to a student's play)

Blackboard <https://blackboard.usc.edu/> provides additional links to pertinent readings, essays, and resources. (Blackboard, in addition to being the site that contains some course materials is also the means of communication and continuation of curriculum in the event of an emergency. If you do not know how to use Blackboard, visit the site and follow links to USC Blackboard Help.) The syllabus is posted on Blackboard as well as on the USC Schedule of Classes.

Description and Assessment of Assignments

This course will include lecture about the nature of dramatic writing, accounts of professional activity relevant to writing problems encountered by students or that could be encountered by students, writing workshop, writing exercises, in-class presentations of work, Peer Critical Analyses, Artistic Presentations, guest artist(s), and business affairs discussion. Please see below for breakdown of assignments and deadlines. The final project will be a full-length play. Peer Critical Analyses are peer evaluations of colleagues' work in the course. Each student will be assigned a colleague's work for this analysis project. Each week, that student will be responsible for presenting to the colleague a copy of his or her Peer Critical Analysis of the colleague's work. At the end of the term, the student will submit a packet of his or her 8 Peer Critical Analyses to the instructor. In the analyses, each student will evaluate the character, story, and dialogue of a colleague's work. The weekly breakdown and class sign-up will indicate deadlines for the analyses. The Artistic Presentations will be in-class readings from students' plays that are produced by the students, which means overseeing the presentation of one's scene in every way (direction, casting, rehearsal if desired, program, etc.). Participation means being present and engaging in dramaturgical discussion regularly.

Grading Breakdown

How will students be graded overall, including the assignments detailed above. Participation should be no more than 15%, unless justified for a higher amount. All must total 100%.

<u>ASSIGNMENT</u>	<u>POINTS</u>	<u>% OF GRADE</u>
Peer Critical Analysis	5	5%
Peer Critical Analysis	5	5%
Peer Critical Analysis	5	5%
Peer Critical Analysis	5	5%
Peer Critical Analysis	5	5%

Peer Critical Analysis	5	5%
Peer Critical Analysis	5	5%
Peer Critical Analysis	5	5%
Participation	10	10%
Artistic Presentation	25	25%
Final Project (Full-length Play)	25	25%

Assignment Submission Policy

Assignments are to be submitted on due dates noted in Course Schedule. No late assignments accepted; if an assignment is not received on-time then a grade of "0" will be recorded. Assignments under 10 pages may be submitted to instructor's email, but ONLY with the following header: "Homework – Assignment Name – Date (as in 09-29-2015, etc.)." If that header is not used, then the assignment is not submitted.

Additional Policies

See other sections.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

	Topics/Daily Activities	Readings and Homework	Deliverable/ Due Dates
Week 1 8/24/2015	Introduction, overview, scene examples, NWF play plan, discussion of Required Readings Tier 1	Per preparatory guidelines, today is the day by which students will have read the Required Readings Tier 1	Deliverable: Character and story breakdown of proposed play, due
Week 2 8/31	Story presentations and dramaturgical investigations; project commitments		Deliverable: Peer Critical Analyses of colleague's work. Due weekly.
Week 3 9/7	Labor Day Holiday	Homework: Continued writing of class plays (USC guidelines = about 8 hours a week outside of class)	Deliverable: At least two scenes from your class play on 9/14. Deliverable: Peer Critical Analyses of colleague's work. Due weekly.
Week 4 9/14	Writing workshop: scene presentations and dramaturgical investigations	Homework: Continued writing of class plays (USC guidelines = about 8 hours a week outside of class)	Deliverable: Peer Critical Analyses of colleague's work. Due weekly.
Week 5 9/21	Writing workshop continued: scene presentations and dramaturgical investigations	Homework: Continued writing of class plays (USC guidelines = about 8 hours a week outside of class)	Deliverable: At least two new scenes from your class play on 9/28. Deliverable: Peer Critical Analyses of colleague's work. Due weekly.
Week 6 9/28	Writing workshop: new scene presentations and dramaturgical investigations	Homework: Continued writing of class plays (USC guidelines = about 8 hours a week outside of class)	Deliverable: Peer Critical Analyses of colleague's work. Due weekly.
Week 7 10/5	Writing workshop continued: new scene presentations and dramaturgical investigations	Homework: Continued writing of class plays (USC guidelines = about 8 hours a week outside of class)	Deliverable: Act I or first 30 pages of play, due as mid-term on 10/12, hard copies, clipped or bound, in professional manuscript format.

			Deliverable: Peer Critical Analyses of colleague's work. Due weekly.
Week 8 10/12	Mid-term examination: Act I or first 30 pages of play; discussions of encountered problems; writing exercises	Homework: Continued writing of class plays (USC guidelines = about 8 hours a week outside of class)	
Week 9 10/19	Writing workshop and exercises.		Deliverable: Peer Critical Analyses of colleague's work. Due weekly.
Week 10 10/27	Writing workshop and exercises.		Deliverable: Peer Critical Analyses of colleague's work. Due weekly.
Week 11 11/2	Business Affairs presentation and workshop.		
Week 12 11/9	Business Affairs presentation and workshop continued.		
Week 13 11/16	Guest Artist		Deliverable: Packet (hard copy only) of Peer Critical Analyses due to instructor on 11/30. Deliverable: Artistic Presentations due on 11/23 and 11/30.
Week 14 11/23	Artistic Presentations: Final projects readings excerpts 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Packet (hard copy only) of Peer Critical Analyses due to instructor.		Deliverable: Peer Critical Analyses of colleague's work. Due weekly.
Week 15 11/30	Artistic Presentations: Final projects readings excerpts 6, 7, 8, 9		Deliverable: USC-required presence and participation in Final Exam on 12/11. Deliverable: Peer Critical Analyses of colleague's work. Due weekly. Deliverable: Packet (hard copy only) of Peer Critical Analyses due to instructor.
FINAL Date	Friday, December 11, 11 am – 1 pm. Date and time of final examination determined by USC. Site TBD.		

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.