

# USC School of Dramatic Arts

**THTR 501 Poetry & Prose Into Drama 63219D**  
**Spring 2016—Mondays—5:00-7:50 pm**  
**Location:** Kaprelian Hall 150 (KAP 150)

**Instructor:** Velina Hasu Houston, MFA, PhD  
**Office:** Massman Drama Center, 1029 Childs Way  
**Office Hours:** M 10-12 via appointment via email reservations  
**Contact Info:** [greentea@usc.edu](mailto:greentea@usc.edu)

## Course Description and Overview

Plays for the stage shall be written using public-domain poetry and prose as inspiration and source material, complemented with exploring poetry, prose, and varied dramas as context for the student writer. Students should be well versed in literature, and have written in one or more genres. Recommended preparation: reading all required novels and taking notes on key character/story issues.

## Learning Objectives

This course is designed for students in the USC School of Dramatic Arts' Master of Fine Arts in Dramatic Writing program, but also may include graduate students from other writing-related programs at USC at the discretion of the instructor. In spring 2016, the focus is on adapting plays from poetry. Students will read and discuss poetry from various sources and be invited to bring in poetry, too. The objective is to deconstruct the meanings of poetry in ways that translate into drama and use these analyses as points of departure for writing plays for the stage. As a final project, each student will complete a dramatic writing project/script that is inspired by a poem.

The course will aid and encourage students to write plays inspired by a diversity of poetry from around the globe.

**Prerequisite(s):** Enrollment in the USC School of Dramatic Arts Master of Fine Arts in Dramatic Writing program or "D" clearance from instructor. Student must have written a professionally promising play prior to taking this course and/or taken previous courses in dramatic writing.

**Co-Requisite (s):** None

**Concurrent Enrollment:** None

**Recommended Preparation:** Reading/seeing plays, reading poetry, attending poetry recitals or spoken word events.

(1) The course is intended to provide connectivity. The student will better appreciate the connection between poetry and plays with regard to various aspects of the human condition and the ways that poetry and plays attempt to excavate meaning and provide interpretation. (2) The course will provide context. By confronting the artistry of poetry and plays, students will be able to see the powerful roles that poetry can play in connecting with various historical, theoretical, and aesthetic dimensions of humankind both past and present, and how that poetry can be used as a point of departure for artistic inspiration toward the writing of an original play. (3) The course will provide engagement via the reading and deconstruction of poetry and dramas that explore various aspects of the human condition. Engagement will be enhanced via the creation of original art in the writing of new plays. (4) The course will provide analysis. The student will be able to analyze the representations of various aspects of the human condition within the poetry and plays read, using shared vocabulary and focusing on the formal execution of character within the worlds of the poetry and plays.

## Course Notes

Each semester that the course is taught explores a different kind of adaptation. Spring 2016's focus is poetry.

Announcements and course assignments will be posted to Blackboard as well as given in class. 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. There will be minimal online research (links provided by instructor). Please keep up-to-date with your class-related emails and Blackboard postings. For any email you send to the instructor related to this course, this text must be in the header: "THTR 501 Spring 2016."

### Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required

None. The course will take place in a regular classroom setting.

### Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

The books are available in the University Bookstore or at Amazon.com.

*Citizen: An American Lyric* by Claudia Rankine, Graywolf Press

*Commons* by Myung Mi Kim, New California Poetry

*The Beauty of the Husband: A Fictional Essay in 29 Tangos* by Anne Carson, Vintage Books

*The Rag and Bone Shop of the Heart: A Poetry Anthology*; Ed. Robert Bly, James Hillman, and Michael Meade, Harper Perennial

Individual plays and/or poetry suggested to the student by the instructor based on the student's personal artistic vision and writing style/theme

Blackboard <https://blackboard.usc.edu/> (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.)

### Description of Grading Criteria and Assessment of Assignments + Grading Breakdown

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. 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 assessing assignments, writing exercises, and peer dramaturgy of plays-in-process vis-à-vis the adaptation process. If the student is not present, the weekly grade is 0, unless the absence is excused in advance.

**25% - Critical Commentaries.** This evaluates critical commentaries that you will create based on poetry from required reading and class discussion. You will submit these commentaries to the instructor at mid-term and then again at the end of the course. They will be graded on: (1) Knowledge of the poem and its poet, (2) Critical discussion of the poem's protagonist, actions, and meaning, and (3) the student's assessment of a play that could be inspired by the poem. By the end of the term, 14 commentaries must be completed, 7 by mid-term and the remaining 7 by end of term.

**25% - Final Project.** Your final project will be a full-length play that is developed and refined via the work in this course. The projects should be typed in standard manuscript format (for plays please consult the current *Dramatists' Guild Resource Directory 2012* for formatting example: <http://www.samuel french.com/content/files/upload/General%20SFI%20Formatting%20Guidelines%20Complete.pdf>, using a clean 12-point font (Courier, Times, Times New Roman), bound in standard manuscript format (card stock cover, *all-brass* professional brads); suggested length 45-85 pages. Note that lack of adherence to these guidelines will lower your grade, as they are professional standards to learn. 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/B000061BK1>; you will need 1¼ inch or 1½ inch depending on the thickness of your manuscript.] Please note that any brads that are not all-brass will not hold a script together, resulting in possible loss pages and jeopardizing your work. The final project grade is evaluated on a percentage scale (the same as the Weekly Grade) with the grade breaking down as follows: 25% Quality of structure/through-line/plotting, 25% Quality of character development, 25% Quality of dialogue development, and 25% Quality of overall creative achievement and professionalism of project.

**25 % - Final Exam.** Two-hour writing from poetry workshop.

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.

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.

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>% of Grade</u>
Participation/Weekly Engagement/Exercises	25%
Critical Commentaries	25%
Final Project	25%
Final Examination	25%

#### **Assignment Submission Policy**

In hard copy only except for pages of plays presented in class. Students may access these page presentations electronically – but a hard copy must be provided for the instructor. In addition, to reiterate, any course-related emails must be sent with this header: “THTR 501 Spring 2016.”

#### **Additional Policies**

- Late assignments will not be accepted.
- You are expected to attend all classes except in the case of doctor-documented illness or family crisis. There are 15 weeks of classes. Beginning on the third week of classes and ending on the 14<sup>th</sup> week of classes, participation will be graded.
- Please do not be late.
- Please do not have computers open in class unless I ask you to do so for a specific exercise.
- Please do not use cell phones in class for any reason.
- Please do not have personal conversations during instruction time because it interferes with the presentation of other students’ work and with classroom instruction.
- Use of computers or cell phones will constitute lack of participation, and the student will receive a “0” for participation on that given week.
- The final exam is required. Its date and time are determined by the University and cannot be changed. *Please reserve that time on your calendars now.* You must be present for the final. If you miss the final, you will receive a grade of “0” for the final exam.

#### **Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown**

The course calendar below provides a list of course activities and expectations, and a list of deliverables.

	Topics/Daily Activities	Readings and Homework	Deliverable/ Due Dates
Week 1 1/11/2016	Process. Discussion of process of class. Discussion of nature of adaptation in the creative process. Writing exercise re: Spotlight event.	Write a scene inspired by observations made at the Spotlight event.	Deliverable: Participation in class discussion this week. On 1/25, bring your Spotlight-inspired scene to class to share. Read "Citizen" and select a poem that speaks to your artistic interests. Due on 1/25.
Week 2 1/18/2016	Martin Luther King, Jr. Day – USC holiday.  No class.	Refine your Spotlight-inspired scene. Complete the reading of "Citizen" and select a poem that speaks to your artistic interest.	Deliverable: Spotlight-inspired scene and "Citizen" poem. Due on 1/25.
Week 3 1/25/2016	Discussion of "Citizen." Writing exercises extrapolated from poetry readings. Sharing of Spotlight-inspired scenes; peer and mentor dramaturgy.	Read "Beauty of the Husband" and select two poems that speak to your artistic interest.	Deliverable: Two poems from "Beauty of the Husband" that speak to your artistic interest. Due on 2/1.
Week 4 2/1/2016	Discussion of "Beauty of the Husband." Writing exercises extrapolated from poetry readings and discussion of narrative poetry related to both "Citizen" and "Beauty..." Sharing of writing exercises, peer and mentor dramaturgy.	Bring in three poems from any source that speak to your artistic vision. The poems must be published in print or on-line.	Deliverable: Bring in three poems from any source that speak to your artistic vision. The poems must be published in print or on-line. Due on 2/8.
Week 5 2/8/2016	Analysis and assessment of adaptive changes from poetry to drama regarding "Citizen" and "Beauty..." Utilization of this analysis with regard to the three poems brought into class. Sharing and discussion of those poems, discussion of transformations.	Read the "The Rag and Bone Shop of the Heart." Select four poems that speak to your artistic vision.	Deliverable: Read "The Rag and Bone Shop of the Heart" and select four poems that speak to your artistic vision. Due on 2/22.
Week 6 2/22/2016	Project designations made validated. Discussion of poems from "The Rag and Bone Shop of the Heart." Writing exercises extrapolated from poetry readings, peer and mentor dramaturgy.	Write the first two scenes of class play.	Deliverable: Write the first two scenes of your class play. Bring the pages to class on 2/29 for your instructor (one hard copy for the instructor; you may use electronic access for students if all students have a personal computer – otherwise you must provide hard

			<p>copies for any student that does not have a computer or that prefers hard copies).</p> <p>In addition, the first set (7) of critical commentaries is due. Please analyze critically (in dramatic terms so especially with regard to character, story, theme) at least 7 of the poems required in class (not the poems brought in by students). Due on 2/29.</p>
<p>Week 7 2/29/2016</p>	<p>First 7 critical commentaries due. Please submit to instructor.</p> <p>Writing workshop: presentation of scenes; dramaturgical discussion of scene/character/ action. Objective is to continue writing process from pre-writing to crafting character and story.</p>	<p>Write two more scenes for your class play.</p>	<p>Deliverable: Write two more scenes of your class play. Bring the pages to class on 3/7 for your instructor (one hard copy for the instructor; you may use electronic access for students if all students have a personal computer – otherwise you must provide hard copies for any student that does not have a computer or that prefers hard copies). Due on 3/7.</p>
<p>Week 8 3/7/2016</p>	<p>Writing workshop: presentation of scenes; dramaturgical discussion of scene/character/ action. Objective is to continue writing process from pre-writing to crafting character and story.</p>	<p>Complete the first act or 50% of your class play.</p> <p>Read “Commons” and select a poem that speaks to your artistic vision.</p>	<p>Deliverables: The first act or 50% of your class play must be completed. Read “Commons” and select a poem that speaks to your artistic vision. Due on 3/21.</p>
<p>Week 9 3/14/2016</p>	<p>Spring Break – USC holiday. No class.</p>	<p>Complete the first act or 50% of your class play.</p> <p>Read “Commons” and select a poem that speaks to your artistic vision.</p>	<p>Deliverables: The first act or 50% of your class play must be completed. Read “Commons” and select a poem that speaks to your artistic vision. Due on 3/21.</p>
<p>Week 10 3/21/2016</p>	<p>Reading and discussion of student writing. A scene will be shared in class. The entire 50% shall be submitted to the instructor in hard copy. Sharing of poems from “Commons.”</p>	<p>Complete your class play in preparation for table readings in class.</p>	<p>Deliverable: Complete your class play in preparation for table readings in class. Due on 4/4.</p>

<p><b>Week 11</b> 3/28/2016</p>	<p>Field Trip on campus to a Visions and Voices event.</p> <p>Class will be from 6-9. We will meet outside of KAP and go as a group to the Visions and Voices event: "Rolling the R's: Literary Revolutions in the Asian Pacific Diaspora". The event features three writers whose work has been adapted to the stage. "Dogeaters" was produced in Los Angeles, directed by Jon Lawrence Rivera, at Center Theatre Group's Kirk Douglass Theatre. Doheny 240.</p>	<p>Homework: reading preparation.</p>	<p>Deliverable: reading preparation. Due starting on 4/4.</p>
<p><b>Week 12</b> 4/4/2016</p>	<p>Writing workshop: table readings of 2 plays.</p> <p>All casting must be completed PRIOR to your reading. If you desire having actors in your play, you must obtain them on your own and make all arrangements. The objective is to present a reading of your play CURATED BY YOU, which is often the demand made on artists in the professional arena. You also may opt for a table reading, which can be more productive in terms of the writing and rewriting process, but that is your prerogative.</p> <p>Please prepare to share as of your work that can be sh in 60 minutes.</p> <p>You will be evaluated on preparedness, timing, and quality of work as part</p>	<p>Homework: reading preparation.</p>	<p>Deliverable: reading preparation.</p>

	of your weekly grade. Student 1: _____ Student 2: _____		
Week 13 4/11/2016	Writing workshop: table readings. See 4/4 notes. Student 3: _____ Student 4: _____	Homework: reading preparation.	Deliverable: reading preparation.
Week 14 4/17/2016	Writing workshop: table readings. See 4/4 notes. Student 5: _____ Student 6: _____	Homework: reading preparation.	Deliverable: reading preparation.
Week 15 4/24/2016	Guest Artist	Review adaptation notes from outset of semester in preparation for final exam.	Deliverable: Review adaptation notes from outset of semester in preparation for final exam. Due on 5/9.

## **FINAL EXAM**

### **Final Examination Date:**

Please note that the Final Exam is mandatory on a day and time set by the University (5/9/2016, 4:30-6:30 pm). Please make a note of this in your calendar now. If you miss the final exam, 25% of your grade will be a 0.

### **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](mailto: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/academicssupport/centerprograms/dsp/home\\_index.html](http://sait.usc.edu/academicssupport/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.