

# USC School of Dramatic Arts

**THTR 501 Poetry & Prose Into Drama 63219D**  
**Spring 2016—Mondays—5:00-7:50 pm**  
**Location:** Grace Ford Salvatori Hall 216 (GFS 216)

**Instructor: Velina Hasu Houston, MFA, PhD**  
**Office:** Massman Drama Center, 1029 Childs Way  
**Office Hours:** M 3-5 via appointment via email reservations  
**Contact Info:** [greentea@usc.edu](mailto:greentea@usc.edu)

## Course Description and Overview

Public-domain poetry and prose and other instructor-designated sources will be used as inspiration for adaptation toward the creation of dramatic writing projects. Students should be well versed in literature (dramatic literature and otherwise) and film; and have written in one or more genres. Recommended preparation: reading source materials, viewing plays, viewing films, and reflecting on key character and story issues.

## Learning Objectives

This course is required and is repeatable in each spring semester that a student is in the USC School of Dramatic Arts' Master of Fine Arts in Dramatic Writing (MFADW) program. Program students must take the course, but the course also may include graduate students from other germane programs at USC at the discretion of the instructor.

In each semester, the nature of 501's source and final project will vary as it has historically in this course.

In spring 2017, the source material focus is short story. Students will read and discuss short stories from required reading as resources for adaptation considerations. The objective is to deconstruct dramatic writing meaning and use these analyses as points of departure for writing; the chief emphases are character and story.

For the final project, students independently select a (public domain) short story to use as source material. They must share the story with the class.

**Prerequisite(s):** Enrollment in the USC School of Dramatic Arts Master of Fine Arts in Dramatic Writing program or "D" clearance from instructor or membership in the MFADW program. Student must have written professionally promising material (at least two scripts) in dramatic writing genres prior to taking this course.

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

**Concurrent Enrollment:** None

**Recommended Preparation:** Reading/seeing plays and screenplays, and reading short stories and poetry.

(1) The course is intended to provide connectivity between source material and adapted texts. (2) The course will provide context. By surveying a diversity of characters, settings, and story lines in short stories, students will expand their perspectives, and fortify their understanding of the possibilities before them in creating their dramatic writing projects. (3) The course will provide engagement via the reading and adaptive analysis of source materials, enhanced via the creation of original art in the writing of new scripts. (4) The course will provide analysis via investigation of the important dimensions of dramatic writing in stories explored.

## Course Notes

Announcements and course assignments will be posted to Blackboard as well as given in class. Students must check email and Blackboard regularly (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 2017." If you do not use this subject line, your email will not be considered submitted.

### **Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required**

None. The course will take place in a regular classroom setting. Students must take notes in a journal, not on a computer or handheld device or computer tablet. No electronic equipment may be used during class.

### **Required Readings and Supplementary Materials**

*The Best American Short Stories 2016*, Edited by Junot Diaz and Heidi Pitlor, Mariner Books 2016,  
[https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0544582896/ref=abs\\_brd\\_tag\\_dp?smid=ATVPDKIKXODER](https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0544582896/ref=abs_brd_tag_dp?smid=ATVPDKIKXODER).

Individual source materials 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.)

### **Recommended Readings and Supplementary Materials**

*America Street: A Multicultural Anthology of Stories*, Edited by Anne Mazer, Persea  
*The Best American Short Stories 2003*, Houghton Mifflin Company  
*The Best American Short Stories 1998*, Mariner Books  
*The Best American Short Stories 1999*, Houghton Mifflin Company

### **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 projects-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, according to the aforementioned exceptions.

**25% - Critical Commentaries.** This evaluates both written and oral critical commentaries that will emanate from short stories that are required reading. You will write three critical commentaries over the course of the term, that you will submit at mid-term. The remaining critical commentary will be an oral analysis of the story that you select as source material. All four critical commentaries will be graded on: 1. Ability to articulate a favorite character in the source material and to articulate what character is inspired by that choice (for your adaptation). 2. Ability to articulate the reasons for selecting the favorite character and the reasons for creating the inspired character in the way that he or she has been created. 3. Ability to articulate what part of a story intrigues you most and why. 4. Ability to articulate different elements of the source material that could be transposed. 5. Ability to create an inspired story and articulate it in fifty words or less. For the written commentaries, type them with standard margins and in Times 12 point font, double-spaced, 3-5 pages, no more, no less.

**25% - Final Project.** Your final project will be a full-length dramatic writing project (for this semester, a full-length play of 45-85 pages or screenplay that of 85-95 pages) that is developed and refined via the work in the course. The projects should be typed in standard manuscript format.

For play formatting please consult the current *Dramatists' Guild Resource Directory*:  
<http://www.samuel french.com/content/files/upload/General%20SFI%20Formatting%20Guidelines%20Complete.pdf>.

For screenplay format: use a software program such as Final Draft or view this example:  
<https://www.writersstore.com/how-to-write-a-screenplay-a-guide-to-scriptwriting/>.

Use a clean 12-point font (Courier, Times, Times New Roman), bound in standard manuscript format (card stock cover, *all-brass* professional brads). (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.)

Please do not plagiarize.

**Note that lack of adherence to these guidelines will lower your grade, as they are professional standards to learn.**

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 short story workshop. Note that the date/time of final examinations are set by the University so please check the USC Schedule of Classes for the date/time for 501.

#### Final Grades

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. See aforementioned penalties.

#### Assignment

	<u>% of Grade</u>
Participation/Weekly Engagement/Exercises	20%
Critical Commentaries	20%
Final Project	30%
Final Examination	30%

#### Assignment Submission Policy

In hard copy only including pages of projects presented in class. In addition, to reiterate, any course-related emails must be sent with this header: "THTR 501 Spring 2017."

#### Additional Policies

- Please do not be late.
- Please do not have computers in class unless I ask you to do so for a specific exercise.

- Please do not use cell phones in class for any reason. Use of computers or cell phones will constitute lack of participation, and the student will receive a “0” for participation on that given week.
- Please do not have personal conversations during instruction time because it interferes with the presentation of other students’ work and with classroom instruction.
- 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; consult the USC Schedule of Classes for information.* 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 1/09	No class. Conferences Will be held to reconcile time.	N/A	Deliverable: Read assigned short stories. Assignment on Blackboard as of 1/09/2017.
Week 2 1/16	Martin Luther King, Jr. Day – USC holiday.  No class. Conferences.	N/A	Deliverable: Oral analyses of assigned short story from 1/09.
Week 3 1/23	Discussion of 1/09 story. Writing exercises extrapolated from reading. Sharing of scenes; peer and mentor dramaturgy.	Short story exercise in class.	Deliverable: Read assigned short stories.
Week 4 1/30	Discussion of stories. Writing exercises extrapolated from reading. Sharing of scenes; peer and mentor dramaturgy.		Deliverable: Read assigned short stories. Develop play idea in outline or narrative form based on assignment. One story is not in the book, but available on line as a PDF. This will be noted on Blackboard.
Week 5 2/06	Screening of “Brokeback Mountain.”  This may take place in a MCC screening room. You will be advised.		Deliverable: Utilizing the outlines/ narratives/exercises, write two scenes of your project, not necessarily for the beginning or in chronological order.
Week 6 2/13	Project designations stipulated.	Project writing workshop.	Deliverable: Write two more scenes of your class project.
Week 7 2/20	Conferences. These will take place during class time and also at other times	Conferences.	Conferences.

	based upon instructor availability and your schedules.		
Week 8 2/27	Conferences.	Conferences.	Deliverable: The draft of your class project is due on 3/06.
Week 9 3/06	Class readings. 20 minute-segments. Please select the scenes that you feel require the most dramaturgical support at this juncture.	N/A	Deliverable: Refine and polish your class project. Next week is Spring Break.
Week 10 3/13	Spring Break. No class.	N/A	Deliverable: Continue the refinement and polishing of your class play.
Week 11 3/20	Readings of class projects, 55-minute segments.  Student 1: _____ Student 2: _____ Student 3: _____	N/A	Deliverable: Readings of class play.
Week 12 4/4/2016	Readings of class play, 55-minute segments, continued:  Student 4: _____ Student 5: _____ Student 6 _____	N/A	N/A
Week 13 4/11/2016	Writing workshop: table readings. See 4/4 notes.  Student 7: _____  Discussion.	N/A	N/A
Week 14 4/17/2016	Writing workshop: table readings, problems/ issues. Adaptation principles in review.	N/A	Deliverable: Continue the refinement and polishing of your class projects. Prepare a 9-minute segment from your project to present to Guest Artist.
Week 15 4/24/2016	Guest Artist. 9-minute-segment presentations.	Instructional Review: Review adaptation notes from outset of semester in preparation for final exam.	Deliverable: Full-length project, fully revised from mid-term submission, is due on 5/08 at 4:30 pm. Note pagination requirements.

## **FINAL EXAM**

### **Final Examination Date:**

Please note that the Final Exam is mandatory on a day and time set by the University (5/8/2017, 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.