

USC School of Dramatic Arts

THTR 566 Dramatic Writing Studio, 63213D
Units: 4
Fall 2017—Mondays—Time: 12 Noon-2:50 pm

Location: Massman Drama Center (DRC) 120

Instructor: Velina Hasu Houston, MFA, PhD

Office: Massman Drama Center

Office Hours: 10:30-12 M by appointment only via email to the instructor (other times can be negotiated); 24-hour cancellation via email to the instructor required

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

Teaching Assistant: N/A. **Research Assistant:** Samantha Cavalcanti

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, professionally promising script, including professional development with regard to operating in the field with integrity. 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 Year One, Year Two, and Year Three. Recommended preparation: An open mind, a positive attitude, humanity, reasonableness, and the willingness to learn.

This class continues through your residency in this program. This first class focuses on not only writing your play, but also on your professional development as an artist.

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, at the discretion of the instructor, may include graduate students from other writing-related programs at USC. The course takes place each fall and spring, combining the MFA in Dramatic Writing cohort in a writing collective in the hopes of enriching and deepening educational experience. The course will survey the essentials of the life of a dramatic writer with each semester foregrounding the continued development of a play written in the first phase of the Studio.

Over the course of the Studio, students also will 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, and business affairs. The investigation may include discussion, readings of plays, workshopping of writing, field trips and guest artist integration.

Course Notes

- Regularly check the Blackboard site for this course. See note below under "Required Readings." If you are unfamiliar with Blackboard: <http://itservices.usc.edu/blackboard/> and <https://blackboard.usc.edu/webapps/login/>.
- For each unit of in-class time, the university expects 2 hours of out of class student work per week over a semester.
- The final is on December 8 from 11 am-1 pm. Note this date and time in your calendars now. They are set by USC and students are required to participate.

Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required

See Blackboard note under "Course Notes" and "Required Readings."

Required Readings

(1) *The Little English Handbook: Choices and Conventions* 8th Edition, By Edward P.J. Corbett and Sheryl L. Finkle; Publisher: Longman Pub Group; 8th edition (August 1997).

(2) *The Art of Dramatic Writing: Its Basis in the Creative Interpretation of Human Motives* By Lajos Egri; Publisher: Touchstone; Revised edition (February 15, 1972).

(3) *The Art and Craft of Playwriting* Paperback – March 1, 2000; By Jeffrey Hatcher; Publisher: Story Press; New edition (March 1, 2000).

(4) *Blood Wedding/Yerma* by Federico García Lorca; TCG Translations.

(5) Blackboard Readings. Our Blackboard page will provide links to pertinent readings, syllabus (also on USC Schedule of Classes), essays, and resources. Blackboard and e-mail are means of communication for this course. Furthermore, in the event of an emergency, continuation of curriculum for all USC courses is via Blackboard.

Description and Assessment of Assignments

This course will include lecture, discussion, readings, and dramaturgical feedback (mentor/peer). Our learning objectives are as follows:

- I. Learning to be an artist (PPTs, Being an Artist, Letters to Artists (4), grammar/spelling, formatting, professional development, pages from the student's course play, peer dramaturgy (participation means being present and engaging in dramaturgical discussion regularly, viewing of contemporary adaptations of *Blood Wedding/Yerma*).
- II. Learning from the past (*Blood Wedding/Yerma/Notes on the Playwright*) (Assignments to be noted by instructor: Analysis of Character, Analysis of Actions, Analysis of Themes, Report on Playwright, Report on Playwright's Other Plays – brief synopses).
- III. Writing the Play: Mid-term Self-reads and Final Projects
- IV. Final Exam: Overview of learning foci of course
 - **Section I** will be illustrated via lectures, visual aids, readings, supplements, and the students' writing of their course plays; and will be assessed on a weekly basis. With regards to grammar, focus will not be on grammar in its entirety, but on major grammatical errors made by graduate dramatic writing students that can create speed-bumps for them in the submission process.
 - **Section II** will be achieved via readings of plays and oral presentation assignments (slots will be filled in class only).
 - **Section III** will be achieved by a mid-term self-read of the student's class play plus a final, revised draft of the play submitted on the last day of the course. Slots will be filled in class only.
 - **Section IV** will be comprised of a take-home exam.

Grading Breakdown

<u>ASSIGNMENT</u>	<u>POINTS</u>	<u>% OF GRADE</u>
Weekly Grade – Sections I and II	100	15% + 15% = 30%
Mid-term Self Read Examination	100	25%
Final Project	100	25%
Final Examination	100	20%

Remember that grades are not given, but earned.

- **Sections I and II** are evaluated weekly. This weekly evaluation includes the October 23 play analysis presentations.
- **Mid-term Self Read Examinations** take place on October 2-16; each student will be assigned a slot and will present as much of her or his play that is completed at the time.
- The **Final Project**, a full-length play (typed in standard manuscript format with standard margins in Courier or Times 12-point type) is due by noon on the Friday following the last day of class in hard copy (December 1). The play manuscript formatting template located on Blackboard is required for any course work submitted, including pages. Any variations from the template, however slight, must be approved in advance by the instructor or *the student will have a point removed for each unapproved modification*. You also may utilize the play manuscript template found on Final Draft software (https://www.amazon.com/Final-Draft-FDX-CARD-10/dp/B01L8QHP6G/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1501092633&sr=8-1&keywords=final+draft+software). For the entire play manuscript, do not exceed eighty-five (85) pages. For each page beyond 85, *one point will be subtracted from the grading assessment*. If you copyright your play (Electronic Copyright Office: https://eco.copyright.gov/eService_enu/start.swe?SWECmd=Start&SWEHo=eco.copyright.gov), you may add an 86th page with the copyright information on it as the last page in the manuscript. Note that you cannot add a copyright page until you have received your copyright registration from the U.S. Library of Congress.
- The **Final Examination** is a take-home exam that covers all four foci of the course – Sections I-IV. It is due electronically on December 8 between 11 am and 1 pm. Do not submit it before or after that time. The page limit is five (5) pages in 12-point Times/Courier/Calibri with standard margins on the top, bottom, and sides of the paper.

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 09-29-2017, etc.)." *If that header is not used, then the assignment is not considered submitted.*

Additional Policies

See sections below for other USC policies.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

For all dates, the year is 2017. Any questions about the syllabus will be addressed during the syllabus review on 8/21.

- 8/21** Prior to 8/21, read Corbett. Review of syllabus. Course goals, overview of dramatic storytelling, *Being An Artist* lecture and discussion, review of USC Code of Ethics; discussion of Corbett, pre-writing and writing fundamentals. Read *The Art of Dramatic Writing* for 8/28-9/18.
- 8/28** Discussion of *The Art of Dramatic Writing*. Letter #1 viewing and discussion. Writing exercise regarding character development. Continue to read *The Art of Dramatic Writing*. For 9/18, read *The Art and Craft of Playwriting*.
- 9/4** University holiday. No class.
- 9/5-10** Class field trip determined by mutual scheduling. (The class selected *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Gynecologic Oncology Unit at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center of New York City* by Halley Feiffer, Geffen Playhouse. Instructor will look at nights of production and Doodle class to find a common night to attend.)
- 9/11** Writing week. No class. TBA. Please work on the opening scenes of your play, to be workshopped in class on 9/18.
- 9/18** Discussion of *The Art and Craft of Playwriting*. Letter #2 viewing and discussion. Writing workshop: pitching your character and story, the first scenes of your plays, readings with mentor and peer dramaturgy. Determine mid-term examination schedule for 10/2-16 slots below; definition of a self-read. Letter #2 viewing and discussion. Writing workshop: working on the second scene of your play, readings with mentor and peer dramaturgy. Continue working on your play for workshop on 9/25.
- 9/25** Writing workshop: working on the remaining first act of your play, readings with mentor and peer dramaturgy.
- 10/2** Mid-term examination: Self-readings 1, 2, and 3. Each student will be given one hour to conduct her or his self-read.
- Slot #1: Hannah Langley Slot #2: Mary Kamitaki
- Slot #3: John E. Allis
- 10/9** Mid-term examination: Self-readings 4, 5, and 6.
- Slot #4: Aja Houston Slot #5: Joshua Fuentes Smith
- Slot #6: Amanda Andrei
- 10/16** Writing week. No class. TBA.
- 10/23** Mid-term examination: Self-readings 7, 8, and 9.
- Slot #7: Mariana Carreño Slot #8: Noah Gardner
- Slot #9: Gideon Wabvuta
- Read *Blood Wedding* and *Yerma* for 10/30, and prepare analysis presentations to present to class on 10/30.
- 10/30** Play analysis presentations:

Students 1 & 2: **Noah Gardner, Aja Houston** – Characters and Actions

Students 3 & 4: **Mariana Carreño, Mary Kamitaki** – Themes, Current Events of Time Period of Plays

Students 5 & 6: **Gideon Wabvuta, Hannah Langley** – History of Playwright and of his writing of *Blood Wedding* and *Yerma*

Students 7 & 8 & 9: **Amanda Andrei, John E. Allis, Joshua Fuentes Smith** – The Playwright's Other Plays: Brief Synopses of Character, Actions, and Themes

Please begin Act II of your play if you have not already done so – workshop on 11/6.

11/6 Writing workshop: Scene readings (beginnings of Act II), mentor and peer dramaturgy. Letter #3 viewing and discussion.

11/13 Writing workshop: Scene readings (continuation of Act II), mentor and peer dramaturgy.

11/20 Writing workshop: Scene readings, mentor and peer dramaturgy.

11/27 Writing workshop: Scene readings, mentor and peer dramaturgy. Letter #4 viewing and discussion. Last day of class. Business affairs discussion. Guest speaker.

Reminder: Final projects due on 12/1 at noon, hard-copy bound and in Times/Calibri/Courier font 12 pt., not to exceed 85 pages (remember: 1 point off for each page over 85, as well as other grading guidelines noted above).

12/8 Final examination. Take home, due as noted above under "Grading Breakdown."

Other USC Policies

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.