

USC School of Dramatic Arts

THTR 590 63221D Directed Research

Fall 2017 Thursday 6 – 9:50 pm

Location: MCC 102

Instructor: Paula Cizmar

Office: JEF 201, 950 W. Jefferson, Los Angeles 90089

Office Hours: Available: Tues 1 - 3 pm ; Wed 10 am – Noon;
Wed 1 – 4 pm; Thurs 1 – 3 pm; please note that office hours are by
appointment only; contact me via email or phone, at least 24 hours in
advance. For appointments outside these hours, I am available by
videoconference on SKYPE or Google Hangout.

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ITHelp: USC Information Technology Services

<http://itservices.usc.edu>; School of Dramatic Arts – Mr. Prakash

Course Description and Overview

Catalogue description: THTR 590 Research leading to the Master's Degree in Dramatic Writing. Units which may be applied to the degree to be determined by the department.

I tend to get going on a play when several strands begin to knit together....It's when things turn out to be possibly the same play that I find I can get going...

I read voraciously...I talk about, or [am encouraged] to talk about, a book or a thought which generates everything that follows...It's true in a limited sense, but an alternative way of making a picture of the process would be to say that it's something that starts you up, like a motor gets started up, like a cranking handle. Then you throw the handle away, and drive off down the road somewhere and see where the road goes.

--Tom Stoppard on reading and research, in "Word on Plays," ACT.

Learning Objectives

Writing a play is both intuitive and technical, involving mechanics and magic. Getting to know all the territory around the characters, situation, and story—by deep investigation and doing research—is a way to get the seemingly opposing forces of playwriting to come together. This course, Directed Research, is a writing workshop focused on that process. It offers the opportunity for MFA students in the Dramatic Writing program to take the time needed to deepen the foundation of a play by delving into many different forms of brainstorming, planning, meditation, and research—whether it is reality-based or intuitive, archival or mythological, direct or indirect. This is the time to create the layers that will embed mood, tone, texture, authenticity into the work. Borrowing ideas from other disciplines, the goal is to enhance the storytelling process and to create the world of the play and the lore of this world in all its richness and with great heart.

Emphasis is placed on *empathy* and *metaphor* as each person strives to:

- create a “deep map” of the play, establishing the background, foreground, and various other dimensions of the story;
- experiment with diverse modes of storytelling;

- discover how to achieve balance, i.e., when to let go of the research and let the imagination take over;
- explore the “lore” of the play to expand the viewpoints of the characters and to strengthen theme;
- devise a process for working and reworking a script.

Objectives and Beyond...

We’re also adopting key elements of USC’s 21st-century vision as our own by:

- GOING GREEN
- CONNECTING
- TRANSFORMING

What does this mean?

GOING GREEN means that we will save on time, energy, and paper. You will not print your work; instead, we will project scenes, brainstorming materials, revision plans, etc. onto a screen via laptop computer. You will not print your Final Project; instead, you’ll turn in a PDF of your work electronically, and I will give you feedback directly on your manuscript via electronic Sticky Notes. All handouts and course materials will be paperless, sent via email and available online via Blackboard.

CONNECTING means that we will make contact in several ways—with each other, with the creative community, with the world at large. We’ll connect with each other to form a support network so that everyone feels secure taking artistic risks; plus we’ll connect via text message and online to keep up to the minute on what’s going on in class; you may even want to try connecting via the teleconferencing tools available (Google Hangout, Skype). We’ll stay attuned to what’s going on in American theatre, and we’ll look at what’s going on in the world—and explore how we can use art for growth and healing. Let’s consider the many stories that have gone untold and the people who have gone unrecognized and determine what we can do to change that.

TRANSFORMING means that we will be looking at theatre writing as a way to effect transformation in our lives and in the lives of others; even though we’re using a concrete tool (research), we’ll look at creating theatre from a place of empathy, from a place of heart-driven concern for humanity; we’ll look at culture and trends and attempt to define and redefine playwriting for the 21st century.

Prerequisite(s): None

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

SWEAT. Lynn Nottage. (Pulitzer Prize 2017 and Tony nominee 2017)

INDECENT. Paula Vogel . (Tony nominee 2017)

Additional plays (including unpublished plays to be supplied as PDFs by instructor); determined after discussion with writers)

Published texts available via the USC Bookstore or online at Amazon. Unpublished plays and various articles, essays supplied as PDFs.

The School of Dramatic Arts' Dramatic Writing Program guidelines call for each student in playwriting courses to read at least seven plays as part of the course and to investigate them critically. You are also encouraged to read plays in addition to those on the Required Reading list; in particular, read contemporary work. Plays will be suggested in class; you may also turn to "Recommended Reading" (see Blackboard). The more you read, the more you will become aware of the diverse styles, voices, and structural forms open to you as a writer.

Special Note

All students enrolled in MFADW are required to attend program events. This includes all of the New Works Festival events (NWF I, II, and III), all Western Edge Playwrights' Salon events, and the student orientation held in late August. While some of these dates are not yet solidified, please put the times/dates in your calendar as soon as you can. Because we are monitoring professional development in the program and in every course that you take in the program, your participation in these program events will have a direct impact on you.

Heads up for Spring: Please make any and all travel plans for after the New Works Festival III.

Description of Grading Criteria and Assessment of Assignments

Grading criteria: *The quality of work for the various components of the grade is determined by the thoroughness of the effort, the continuing process, and the imagination displayed.*

- **Grading Scale for SDA:** **A** indicates work of excellent quality; **B** of good quality; **C** of average quality; **D** of below average quality; and **F** indicates inadequate work.
- "Excellent" indicates that the student couples clear understanding of the class material with original and creative insight, as demonstrated by their work; "Good" means that the student demonstrates a clear understanding of the material and has done the work well; "Average" indicates that the student demonstrates a general understanding of the material but with some gaps; "Poor" indicates that there are identifiable gaps in the student's understanding of the class material; "Failure" is the result of the student not having completed his or her assignments coupled with poor understanding of the material.

Grading Breakdown

Your grade will be based on multiple components set forth in the table below. Please bear in mind that you earn your grade based on the timely completion of your work, plus the quality of your work. Late assignments are marked down due to missed deadline. Assignments are accepted only within one week of due date. After that, they are considered a missed assignment, which counts as zero. Please strive for excellence—it's a wonderful goal, even if elusive. So what is excellence? It is based on effort and intent and some ephemerals. I am interested in risk-taking. After all, if not now, when? And I am interested in writing that explores the human spirit, the heart, the place in us we can't describe. If you are willing to go there, you can't go wrong.

Components of the overall grade are weighted as follows (see below for details):

Inspiration board	15 percent
Reading/viewing assignments (analysis, discussion & posts)	15 percent
Research plan	10 percent
Participation	15 percent
Ongoing research	15 percent
Application of research to scenes	15 percent
Final Project + Final Exam	15 percent
TOTAL	100 percent

The Inspiration Board is an intuitive brainstorming tool—a way to get in touch with your unconscious motivators. This is a creative project in which each writer presents various sources that are inspiring him/her at the moment; the inspiration board will provide the fuel for creating the world of the play. (The inspiration board could tap into either general inspirations or be directed toward a specific work.) These presentations will be supported by video projection and may include the various components of a deep map approach to a story: visual art, musical inspirations, charts, graphics, articles/news stories/essays, photographs, podcasts, archival documents—any kind of source material. If desired, the presentations may be done in a specific format, such as Powerpoint, Prezi, Keynote, etc. Be prepared to discuss your resources and inspirations for your characters/story both in a creative/metaphoric language, as well as pragmatically. Note that this presentation, also known as a “vision board,” is useful whenever beginning a creative work; it may include items that inspire you in general, or items that relate particularly to the characters/theme/story you have in mind right now (even if you don’t know what to do with them), or items that are even more specific and directly relate to a play you want to write. Again: This a tool with which you can tap into your imagination; you can use it as an active, multimedia form of brainstorming, as a way to start to explore ideas, as a way to begin to frame your thoughts, as a way to visualize characters, and as a way to promote discussion with other artists to enhance your vision. The “board” part of this vision board presentation is virtual—we’ll project your inspirations onto the screen from a laptop.

Reading plays, seeing plays, and critical analysis is vital to every writer because it provides a process for assessing artistic work; in the analysis of already published plays, you gain experience in taking a deeper look at character, language, and structure—which can then be applied to evaluating your own work, to assist you in drafting and revision. In this class, you can also attempt to assess the way research supported the writing of the required-reading plays and the required viewings. Two short critical analysis posts in which you address components of the assigned reading are required for this course. (These will be posted on BlackBoard; deadlines TBA.)

What is the research plan?

Upon completion of your inspiration board/vision board, each of you will devise some sort of strategy or process-oriented plan for further meditating on and exploring the story, theme, and characters of your play. The detailed plan will be presented in the workshop. These plans will be individualized to your needs/desires as a writer (and perhaps, also, individualized to the requirements of the play you’re working on).

What does participation entail?

Participation includes presentations; in-class exercises; discussion of assignments; and, most important, feedback provided to other writers’ work.

Your Final Project is a creative presentation illustrating your understanding of the various aspects of the research, brainstorming, and foundational work of playwriting. You can opt to discuss how you researched sections of a play and then present a scene, or talk through problems you had with a script, or describe your process in full. Details for the Final Project will be offered as the semester proceeds and as the work develops. Hint: Keep a creative journal of some kind. It can be a hard copy old-school paper journal, or it can be electronic. Just find a place to store your thoughts, ideas, visions, brainstorms on the play(s) you’re working on—as well as a place to

download your feelings and meditations as your work progresses. This will be helpful in creating a presentation for the Final Project. The Final Exam will consist of presenting your portfolio of work for the semester. You can be creative in how you go about presenting it. We'll take time to discuss the Final Project in the workshop and you can pitch your ideas to me. Anything goes—as long as it's clear to me that you are working diligently and the work you're doing is meaningful.)

AGAIN, REMINDER! Keep a Creative Journal! This is an archive of your explorations for writing; it may include jottings off the top of your head, stuff from your Inspiration Board, research, ideas, resources for current and future writing, and exercises and raw material from class. It will make your writing—and rewriting--so much easier!

Note: The SDA GUIDELINES on GRADING state that:

- *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.*

Additional Policies

Participation is essential and figures into your grade. This course is modeled along the lines of a professional, artistic workshop; thus, as a member of such a workshop, your participation is necessary not only for the development of your own work, but for the development of your colleagues' work as well. Theatre is a highly collaborative, community-oriented medium and play development is a key part of the life of a playwright. Indeed, in this class, one of our projects depends upon collaboration. Please honor your obligation to your colleagues' work. Absences must be for reasons of illness or emergency and must be accompanied by a written explanation; in your absence, please prepare the assigned work that is due and turn it in immediately upon return to the workshop.

1. You are entering into a collaborative relationship with fellow writers and, thus, it is your responsibility to be available to your workshop colleagues for feedback, analysis, and support.
2. All workshop members must be treated with respect.
3. You are required to attend the workshop and to be on time. Tardiness is defined as being 15 minutes late or more. Excessive tardiness will affect your ongoing writing and participation grade.
4. Absences must be for reasons of illness or emergency, and you must notify me in writing (preferably in advance).
5. All assignments, written and/or otherwise, must be prepared on time and turned in (or presented) on the deadline date. Late assignments will be marked down due to the missed deadline. Assignments not turned in within a week of deadline count as missed assignments (zero credit).
6. IF YOU MISS CLASS: It is your responsibility—and SOLELY YOUR RESPONSIBILITY—to make up work you have missed and to obtain information about missed class discussions or missed assignments from your classmates or Blackboard, not from me. I will not be repeating lectures or class discussion; you will need to make arrangements to do independent research on whatever topics you have missed to keep up with the workshop. You will also need to keep in contact with your classmates to obtain notes and/or information re: what you missed. Again: Do not request notes

or information from me. Course materials can be found on the Blackboard site for this course. For your syllabus, handouts, etc., go to Blackboard.

7. Please check your e-mail regularly to see if there are any changes in class meeting place, etc. On rare occasions, it becomes necessary to schedule a new location for class meeting. If I am unable to provide you with this information in the preceding class, I will send you the information via e-mail and/or text message.
8. We're going green in this classroom, so you will be providing all workshop members with copies of your work by **projecting your documents onto the screen in the classroom from your computer**, thus eliminating the need for paper. Instructions on how to do this will be provided.
9. If you desire an appointment with me, you are required to contact me via e-mail or text message at least 24 hours in advance, otherwise there is no guarantee I will receive your message with sufficient time to make arrangements to meet with you. Please note that I have included multiple ways to contact me on the front page of this syllabus.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

Note for MFA2s: You may opt to use this workshop to delve deeper into your script for *NWFII*, which will occur in the Spring. If so, we will tailor your research & explorations & guided meditations toward revision of that particular play. If you choose this option, your assignments will differ somewhat from what is laid out here. We will revise accordingly. But in general, we'll work from preparation and gathering, through exploration and transformation, to insight and evaluation.

	Topics/Daily Activities	Readings and Homework	Deliverable/ Due Dates
Weeks 1 – 3 Aug 24 Aug 31 Sept 7	Preparation & Gathering Introduction: Who are We? What do we care about? What inspires us? What do we need as artists? What does the world need from us? Consider: Surprising yourself and taking on writing the best play you <i>can't</i> write; writing beyond your comfort zone. Consider uncovering the people whose stories haven't been told.	Discussion: The Deep Map Approach. Assessment, Diagnosis, and Challenge. Introduction to Tools: The Inspiration Board; creative journal; research strategies. Read: SWEAT and INDECENT. <i>TBD: The "assessment-challenge" plays, i.e., who should read what?</i>	Week 1: Begin to collect your resources, e.g., burning ideas, poetic impulses, images, emotional foundation, music/soundtrack. Read the materials on Blackboard; read the plays. <i>NOTE: For all upcoming presentations, we'll set up a calendar of who is presenting when.</i> Week 2: Present Inspiration Boards/Vision Boards and prepare to begin direct research. Week 3: Finish presentation of Inspiration Boards. Begin direct research as guided. Prepare to create a research plan. Week 3: Write exploratory monologues if possible and allow characters to help you along. (Hint: Characters may begin to emerge. Pay attention to them—what they say, along with the sound and

			<p>rhythm their voice. Your characters may start to generate story and scene ideas as they talk. Let them!)</p> <p>Note: We will be doing many things at once. We will be exploring inspirations, brainstorming, undertaking direct research, possibly developing characters, analyzing what emerges, beginning to create a specific research plan. Some people will be working on different types of material—and I will be saying different things to different people. Sometimes you will not be able to present your work—but don't wait! Don't stop working on your research, poetic explorations, and generation of material. Sometimes you will be the only one working in a particular mode. No worries. Be prepared to be flexible. Remember that there is no one way of writing a play, no one way of getting there. Please stay on top of things and continue to develop your work in your way—but on time and diligently.</p>
<p>Weeks 4 - 8</p> <p>Sept 14 Sept 21 Sept 28 Oct 5 Oct 12</p>	<p>Planned Exploration, Experimentation, and Transformation</p> <p>Focus on What the Play Needs, How it May Grow.</p> <p>Engage in Planned Creative Anarchy.</p> <p>Sensory Work/Metaphor: Staying Attuned to the Natural World, the Senses. Translating "Reality" through Imagery.</p> <p>The World of Your Play. The "Lore" of That World.</p> <p>The Opportunity for Transformation.</p>	<p>Discussion</p> <p>Empathy - The Starting Point of the playwright; Metaphor – The Inner Heart of the Playwright's Work.</p> <p>Explore: Dream Time - Waking Dreams, Day Dreams, Dreamspace, Nightmares.</p> <p>Explore: Archival, documentary, and other real-life situations that relate to your work.</p> <p>Consider: How did Nottage and Vogel use research to create SWEAT and INDECENT? Where does it work? Where does the research show? Where does it go off the rails?</p>	<p>Weeks 4 & 5: Create a distinct research plan for a specific play and present it for discussion. Include Deep Map components.</p> <p>Weeks 4 - 6: Write the BFF interviews. "Interview" the people around your characters; "interview" the people in the location you are researching. Write up the interview sessions.</p> <p>Read: The "assessment-challenge" plays.</p> <p>Week 6: September 28. Meet for part of class, then attend AN OCTOROON. Discuss post-show.</p> <p><i>Hint: Look at all the material you have generated in Inspiration Board, writing exercises, research reports, and monologues for possible raw material for scenes.</i></p>

		<p>Where does it blend seamlessly?</p> <p>Look at the world of this play—including the dark side. Take note of the illuminating parts. Consider: What is the lore of the play?</p> <p>Where is transformation occurring naturally in your play? What else does the play need?</p> <p>Process: How do other writers manage their process? How do other writers research a work? How do other writers jumpstart a play from an idea?</p>	<p>Weeks 7 and 8: Present explorations of the world of your play, and explorations of the lore. This may take the form of scenes, or it may be something else. Conduct a Mutual Mentoring session—in which you are the expert and you teach some aspect of the lore/background/poetics to the others. Assist each other in diagnosing what to research/investigate next relative to their exploratory work, monologues, scenes.</p> <p>Week 8: October 12. Meet for part of class, then attend PASSION PLAY. Discuss post-show.</p> <p>Midterm, due week 8: Create two short commentaries on SWEAT and INDECENT. Post on Blackboard for midterm evaluation. Create a short report on your process thus far. Post on Blackboard for midterm evaluation.</p>
<p>Week 9</p> <p>Oct 19</p>	<p>The Ongoing Work</p> <p>Going Beyond: Look for Ways to Risk, Ways to Play, and Ways to Challenge Yourself</p>	<p>Discussion</p> <p>The Pitfalls of the Middle. Staying Motivated.</p>	<p>Week 9: Continue Mutual Mentoring. Present new scenes, project plans, ask questions.</p> <p>Keep working.</p>
<p>Weeks 10 - 11</p> <p>Oct 26 Nov 2</p>	<p>Insight & Evaluation</p> <p>Evaluate: What did you intend—and where are you now? (For good or for bad.)</p> <p>What is missing? What does the play need? How to go deeper?</p> <p>-.</p>	<p>Discussion</p> <p>What changes everything?</p> <p>What do you dare not change? What happens if you change it?</p> <p>What does YOUR process need—that perhaps is different from what the play needs?</p>	<p>Weeks 10-11: Present scenes, ideas, or conduct a story conference.</p> <p>Week 11: Self-help. Assess the raw material you've created, along with the research you've conducted and the pages you've generated. Assess risk-taking and construct a challenge. Look to your sources of inspiration. Discuss. Then: Do revisions as needed.</p> <p>Week 11: Nov 2. Meet for part of class, then attend WILD HONEY. Discuss post-show.</p>

Week 12 Nov 9	Brainstorming/Problem Solving Continue assessment of raw material, script pages, inspirational material, and imagine your way to an expanded view of the play. What does the project NEED?	Discussion The Wrench in the Works— When is it time to throw it? Or not? Upping the Ante, Raising the Stakes.	Week 12: Present new and/or revised scenes based on the work thus far, or present questions. Week 12: Present and/or turn in a short report on your own personal process.
Weeks 13 - 15 Nov 16 Nov 23 Nov 30	Works in Progress	Workshop In-class presentations of large segments of scripts from each writer. Schedule TBA.	Weeks 13, 14, 15: Present your script or script segment according to the schedule as created in class. PROVIDE FEEDBACK to the other writers as their work is presented and provide suggestions for continued investigation, research. Continue to refine, revise, re-invent your work. TURN IN: Your Final Project. Due November 30, 2017.
FINAL Thursday Dec 7	FINAL EXAM 7 – 9 pm	Artistic Review: Group Feedback & Critique of Final Projects. Plus: End Game. Last Look Q&As. Where to go next.	Date: For confirmation of the date and time of the final for this class, consult the USC <i>Schedule of Classes</i> at www.usc.edu/soc .

REMINDER: Use Blackboard as a resource. Class materials, information, handouts, additional essays, source materials, etc., are posted on the class site on Blackboard.

We all have two heads and two memories. A head of clay, which will turn to dust; and another, forever invulnerable to the gnawings of time and of passion. One memory that death kills, a compass that expires with the journey, and another memory, the collective memory, which will live as long as the human adventure in the world lives. –Eduardo Galeano, *Memory of Fire: Faces and Masks*

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 Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” <https://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b/>. 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>.

Support Systems:

Student Counseling Services (SCS) - (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling/>

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1-800-273-8255

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. <http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org>

Relationship & Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-4900 - 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. <https://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp/>

Sexual Assault Resource Center

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: <http://sarc.usc.edu/>

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX compliance – (213) 740-5086

Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. <https://equity.usc.edu/>

Bias Assessment Response and Support

Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support/>

Student Support & Advocacy – (213) 821-4710

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. <https://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa/>

Diversity at USC – <https://diversity.usc.edu/>

Tab for Events, Programs and Training, Task Force (including representatives for each school), Chronology, Participate, Resources for Students

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.