

USC School of Dramatic Arts

THTR 596a Thesis Development & Attainment

Fall Semester

Location: Office

Type of Instruction: Independent
Study/Conferences

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

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 and Overview

Thesis Development & Attainment is designed to guide the student in independent study toward refinement of his or her thesis for the USC School of Dramatic Arts Master of Fine Arts in Dramatic Writing program. The final thesis project is a play. Over the course of a student's three years in the program, he or she will select the play that he or she wishes to foreground in his or her transition to the profession post-graduation. It must be a play written in the program prior to the third year in the program.

The course is an independent study course in which the student prepares his or her thesis play for thesis submission via development that has grown increasingly autonomous over the last two years and should be reaching near full autonomy in the third year.

The student is expected to utilize the dramaturgy that he or she gains over the course of his or her graduate curriculum to bring his or her thesis play to a level of mastery. The course allows the student to devote specific hours to development, nurturing, and maintenance of his or her thesis; fully making use of the dramatic writing knowledge received in THTR 566, 500, 506, 501, and other dramatic writing courses. THTR 596a occurs each fall and THTR 596b occurs each spring.

Learning Objectives

The course includes students from Year Three of the USC MFADW program. Students will focus on organic enhancement of their thesis plays. This will include utilizing dramaturgical skills in practice via peer dramaturgy, mentor dramaturgy, and skills learned in dramaturgy vis-à-vis extracurricular activities such as Feuchtwanger Refreshed, Genji Redux, USC New Works Festival, Western Edge Playwrights' Salon, etc.

These developmental tasks are designed to cultivate the students' advancement of their thesis plays. The thesis play must reflect a high level of mastery and professional promise. This means not only that the quality of the work must have attained master's level; but also that the work includes correct grammar, punctuation, diction, and spelling. (Some students have elected to have their plays reviewed by a professional copy editor before submitting it.)

The thesis play will be submitted to the MFA in Dramatic Writing director and faculty in spring 2018 on the University's thesis submission date (the Spring 2018 thesis submission date will be published on the USC Schedule of Classes under the registration calendar). This full-length play (typed in standard manuscript format with standard top/bottom/side one-inch margins in Courier or Times 12-point type) is due in hard copy.

Because you are emerging playwrights presenting your work to the profession, you are expected to refine your thesis into a play manuscript that is between 60-90 pages. Do not exceed the maximum.

You are encouraged to copyright your play (Electronic Copyright Office:
https://eco.copyright.gov/eService_enu/start.swe?SWECmd=Start&SWEHo=eco.copyright.gov).

Required Readings

Letters To A Young Poet, Rainer Maria Rilke (Available On-line), http://www.carrothers.com/rilke_main.htm

Supplementary:

Poetics by Aristotle

Ghost Light: An Introductory Handbook for Dramaturgy (Theater in the Americas), Michael Mark Chemers

The Process of Dramaturgy: A Handbook, Scott R. Ireland

The Art of Active Dramaturgy: Transforming Critical Thought into Dramatic Action, Lenora Inez Brown

The Art of Dramatic Writing by Lajos Egri

The Penguin Book of International Women's Stories, Ed. Kate Figes

The Vintage Book of Latin American Stories, Ed. Carlos Fuentes

Breaking Ice: An Anthology of Contemporary African-American Fiction, Ed. Terry McMillan

The Oxford Anthology of Modern Indian Poetry, Eds. Vinay Dharwadker and AK Ramanujan

The Ways of White Folks: Stories, Langston Hughes

The Oxford Book of Short Poems, Eds. P. J. Kavanagh and James Michie

Readings in the Philosophy of Language, Ed. Peter Ludlow

Japanese Death Poems: Written by Zen Monks and Haiku Poets..., Ed. Yoel Hoffman

Burnt Sugar Cana Quemada: Contemporary Cuban Poetry, Eds. Carlson/Hijuelos

Screenwriting is Rewriting: The Art and Craft of Professional Revision by Jack Epps

Essentials of Screenwriting: The Art, Craft, and Business of Film and Television Writing by Richard Walter

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 of Grading Criteria and Assessment of Assignments

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 (10%) 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*.

The thesis play shall be graded according to the following rubric:

- 25% Quality of character development.
- 25% Quality of story development.
- 25% Quality of dialogue crafting.
- 25% Originality, overall creative achievement, and professionalism of project.

This will compose 70% of the evaluation of grade. The remaining 30% will be an assessment of the professional development of the student based on observations and analysis of student investment in dramatic writing courses, New Works Festivals, program review and assessments, and thesis preparation.

Overall 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-]

A student must receive a grade of A through C in order to receive a “CR” for the course. In the final semester of the course, which will be in the student’s third year, spring semester, the student must receive a grade of “CR” in order

to graduate from the program. Note that if a grade of INC is issued, you will need to meet with your faculty sponsor and the full-time dramatic writing faculty for an assessment, after which you must refine the thesis until it has reached master's quality; at that time, a grade change will be implemented if so earned. If a grade of NC is earned, you will have to re-enroll in 596b and continue to refine the portfolio until it has reached master's quality (re-enrollment is not supported by tuition remission or any other kind of financial support from the School of Dramatic Arts).

Note that, along with the development of your thesis play, there will be three assessment conferences and a mid-term self-read of your work.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

- ❖ **WEEK 1** – Statement of Plans for thesis. Please develop a plan for your thesis that is 5-10 pages in length. It should include the following information: title of play, brief synopsis, a statement as to why you must write the play, revision plan, production history if any, awards history for the play if any, character breakdowns for all characters in the play, scene-by-scene breakdown of action or (if not yet written) a narrative description of what you believe at this time each scene will explore, exploration of the play's setting and time period, and any other pertinent dimensions that you feel must be included. With regard to planned revisions, create four development phases that you note in the Statement of Plans, i.e. "Phase One: I will be reconsidering Scenes One and Two. Phase Two: I will be reconsidering the remainder of Act I. Phase Three: I will be reconsidering Act II. Phase Four: I will be reviewing the revised play in its entirety and reconsidering it for final refinements." Once you have completed, the plan, please email it to the instructor for review.
- ❖ **WEEK 2** – Development: Phase #1 of thesis.
- ❖ **WEEK 3** – Development: Phase #1 of thesis, continued.
- ❖ **WEEK 4** – Development Phase #1 of thesis.
- ❖ **WEEK 5** – Conferences: meet one-on-one with instructor to discuss the ongoing development of your thesis play.
- ❖ **WEEK 6** – Development Phase #2 of thesis.
- ❖ **WEEK 7** – Development Phase #2 of thesis.
- ❖ **WEEK 8** – Development Phase #2 of thesis.
- ❖ **WEEK 9** – Mid-term self-read of thesis play.
- ❖ **WEEK 10** – Conferences: meet one-on-one with instructor to discuss the ongoing development of your thesis play.
- ❖ **WEEK 11** – Development Phase #3 of thesis.
- ❖ **WEEK 12** – Development Phase #3 of thesis.
- ❖ **WEEK 13** – Development: Phase #3 of thesis, continued.
- ❖ **WEEK 14** – Conferences: meet one-on-one with instructor to discuss the ongoing development of your thesis play.
- ❖ **WEEK 15** – Development: Phase #4 of thesis.
- ❖ **DEC. 1** – Final Project due by 12 Noon PST in hard copy to instructor. This final project is tantamount to your final exam.

Statement for Students with Disabilities

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Website and contact information for DSP: http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html, (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 740-6948 (TDD only), (213) 740-8216 (FAX) ability@usc.edu.

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.

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.