

# USC School of Dramatic Arts

**Dramatic Writing Studio, THTR-566 63256D**  
**Spring Term – Tuesdays 7:30-9:55pm**  
**Location: PIRC 1013**

**Instructor: Oliver Mayer**  
**Office: PIRC #1007: MCC #101C**  
**Office Hours : by appointment or walk-in (call first).**  
**Contact Info: [omayer@usc.edu](mailto:omayer@usc.edu), 310 867 9192**

## **Course Description and Overview:**

Investigates gestalt of the student dramatic writer's professional development from the empty page and writing fundamentals to the first-draft script, business affairs, and dramaturgical advancement.

## **Learning Objectives:**

This course will attempt to unleash your poetic voice as a dramatist, preferably through work on a new original play. The goal is for you to be able to account for every syllable, much less word, in your text through a focus on musicality, word choice, research on place and history, and attention to the soul of your play idea. Successful outcomes will include the discovery that your play's language is indelibly yours.

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

TROILUS AND CRESSIDA, Shakespeare  
MOTHER COURAGE AND HER CHILDREN, Brecht

## **Description of Grading Criteria and Assessment of Assignments:**

Remember that professors do not "give" grades: students earn grades. Your final grade is up to you. Meeting course requirements does not equal excellence; I am looking for uncommon effort and commitment in each assignment. Dramatic writing demands bravery, chance-taking, and an active sense of play. The writing exercises will be your opportunity to be brave on the page. Students will be evaluated based on individual progress, receiving extended feedback for each assignment. Late assignments (weekly exercises) can be emailed to me at [omayer@usc.edu](mailto:omayer@usc.edu); the midterm and final exams are mandatory and cannot be missed or made up at a later date.

## **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.

## **Grading Breakdown:**

Your final grade consists of:

**Overall Weekly Grade: 30%**  
**Midterm Exam: 15%**

**Final Scene Presentation: 30%**  
**Final Exam 25%**

School of Dramatic Arts classes use the University's grading scale:

<b>96-100%=A</b>	<b>95-91%=A-</b>	<b>88-90%=B+</b>	<b>85-87%=B</b>
<b>81-84%=B-</b>	<b>78-80%=C+</b>	<b>75-77%= C</b>	<b>66-64%=D</b>
<b>71-74%= C-</b>	<b>67-70%=D+</b>	<b>61-63%=D-</b>	

### **Weekly Writing/Discussion Assignments:**

These are given both in-class or as homework. Students must be prepared to read aloud their work, for both peer review and my feedback. Absent students should email me or their fellow students about assignments given in-class and/or as homework. Individually and as a group, you will also be asked to discuss and analyze poetry and play texts on a weekly basis. PLEASE DO THE READING. Rather than quantity of pages, I will do my best to focus on texts that effectively demonstrate an aspect of teachable poetics.

### **New Works Festival 1:**

At the end of the Spring Semester, the Dramatic Writing cohort's 1<sup>st</sup> Year writers present their new plays at the New Works Festival 1 (NWF 1). All three plays will be read on the same day by a company of professional actors chosen expressly for the event. This makes for a long day, but an exciting and memorable one. ATTENDANCE IS MANDATORY. As of today, the event date and time is TBA. We are planning for an acting company of 6-8 actors depending on cast size. Each of the three MFA 1s will have two actors chosen specifically for the roles in the text, with the other roles filled out by the company. I will be producing and curating the event.

### **Attendance:**

While you are not graded on attendance, you will be graded on participation which requires your being in class. After two absences, excused or not, the third absence will affect your grade. Three tardy tallies will count as an unexcused absence. Be on time.

### **Midterm Exam:**

Midterm occurs in class on **Tuesday, February 27th at 8pm**. Be on time and be prepared to define specific terms used in class **IN YOUR OWN WORDS**.

### **Final Exam:**

NWF 1 will serve as the official final exam, although I will wish to convene once more after the readings to discuss the course. This will take place either at my on-campus apartment or at an eatery on or off campus, TBD.

### **THTR 566 Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown:**

**January 9**      **The Troubadour Spirit. Introduction of themes, free discussion. EACH WEEK each writer will highlight a kind of poetry – found, original, or otherwise -- to explore the world of the play, theme, soul of the characters, interior/exterior voice, and tone. Explorations will include *Lyric, Narrative and Descriptive* poetic forms.**

- January 16 Reading of Oliver Mayer's THE SINNER FROM TOLEDO at the McClintock Theatre at 7:30pm. Meet at 7:15 pm in front of the venue, short discussion after the play.
- January 23 What you write is who you are: So who do you want to be? How do you wish to be discussed? In-class exercise. Scene work.
- January 30 THE WHITE GODDESS. Discussion of Robert Graves' book in relation to the writer's process. In-class exercise. Scene work.
- February 6 The War in Heaven. TROILUS AND CRESSIDA discussion. Scene work.
- February 13 The Battleground. Writing the scenes that define the war. Scene work.
- February 20 The Return of the Goddess. MOTHER COURAGE discussion. Scene work.
- February 27 MIDTERM EXAM.
- March 6 MIDTERMS RETURNED. Getting hold of one's own poetic voice and using it to discover story, character and theme in the new play. Scene work.
- March 13 SPRING BREAK, no class. Sleep and write!
- March 20 Building plays from scene work, establishing larger symphonic and orchestral themes in the storytelling. Scene work.
- March 27 Falling in Love/out of Love/in Love again with the Work. Scene work.
- April 3 FIRST DRAFTS DUE.
- April 10 In-class readings of plays by non-MFA 1s.
- April 17 In-class readings of plays by non-MFA 1s.
- April 24 In-class readings of plays by non-MFA 1s.
- May 8 Tuesday, 5-7pm FINAL EXAM, TBA.

**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/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home\\_index.html](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.

### **Libraries:**

Need to do research but don't know where to start? Searching for a book, article, or data to support your argument? Not sure how to cite a source in your bibliography?

Ask a librarian! Research help is available:

- In person and by phone, chat and email at Ask a Librarian
- Through research guides and FAQs
- By contacting your subject librarian