

USC School of Dramatic Arts

THTR 590 63280 Directed Research

Spring 2018 TBD

Location: Office

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
Shirke, Contact Info: shirke@usc.edu; 213.740.1288. MCC

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. This course, Directed Research, is a writing workshop focused on that process and tailored to the needs and requirements of each writer and the specific script in process. Writers will meet with the instructor either individually or in small groups, depending on the questions and issues that arise.

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. (Or send via email.) 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

Please make sure you have read:

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)

Additional texts on writing, provided by instructor via Blackboard.

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 and research work	15 percent
Reading/viewing (analysis, discussion, comprehension)	15 percent
Self-assessment and planning	20 percent
Ongoing research	15 percent
Ongoing writing and revision	20 percent
Final Project + Final Exam	15 percent
TOTAL	100 percent

Your Final Project is a script, one that you have worked on and revised under the guidance of the instructor in THTR 590. It may be a play that you are also working on in another class—or one that you are readying for one of the phases of the MFADW New Works Festival.

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: TBD

We will communicate in the first week of classes about when to meet and will develop a schedule of meetings and work to be accomplished for each writer. Occasionally we may opt to meet as a group—either the entire group or smaller iterations of the group. We may establish a Creative Cluster. We'll exchange schedules the first week to determine if there is any time to check-in as a group, in addition to individual meetings.

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.