

# USC School of Dramatic Arts

## **THTR 574a 63239D Dramatic Writing Across Media for Playwrights**

**Fall 2018 Thursday 6 – 7:50 pm**

**Location:** MCC 102

**Instructor: Paula Cizmar**

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

**Office Hours:** Available: Tues 3 – 4:30 pm; Wed Noon – 2 pm; Thurs 3 – 4:30 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**

**Catalogue description: THTR 574a** *Intensive overview of career paths for playwrights in a wide array of media as they exist now, and as new opportunities arise.*

First, I would find an object which I would think is suitable for my characters and stories, then write about it, and in the end, I ended up with a house full of thousands of objects.

--Orhan Pamuk

A scrap or cell of talk you barely remember  
is growing into a weird body with many demands.  
One day soon it will stumble up the walk and knock,  
knock hard, and you will have to answer the door.

-- Naomi Shihab Nye

### **Course Overview**

In this course, students are expected to learn about different kinds of media, the social impact of new media, and how to apply their dramatic writing work to different media forms—including forms that exist already and those that are emerging. This is a process-oriented class in which students will create a project from one or more new/alternate media. In this class, we place a great deal of emphasis on flexibility. As the world changes, as media and delivery systems transform, as theatre itself comes to take on new dimensions, how do dramatic writers continue to grow both in the field and in related arts? We'll also look at the Writing Life and how we can put dramatic writing skills to work to maintain it in an evolving world.

*THTR 574a Dramatic Writing Across Media for the Playwright explores digital, alternative, and new media writing integrated with dramatic writing. The terminology "digital, alternative, and new media writing" includes an array of original content that can be delivered on mobile devices, the internet, audio-visual devices, iPads, notebooks, computers, or technology that is emerging. Though we will touch on the wide range of media in general, each specific semester will focus on just a few particular types of media.*

*(This class repeats—and different media will be highlighted in subsequent years.) Some of the topics to be covered include: documentaries, blogs, hypertext, gaming, audio-performances, websites. The course also will confront sociopolitical issues that are complicated or created by digital and new media such as free speech, bullying and violence, intellectual property, cybersecurity, and on-line privacy. The desire is to draw upon linear or non-linear original artistic creations that have an impact on how audiences experience and engage in the dramatic art; and to encourage creating well-considered, unchaotic, unconfusing frameworks without compromising artistic freedom. Furthermore, while digital and new media companies may hire a writer to create content, these platforms also provide avenues for dramatic writers to become producers of content. The content creator should strive for excellence in content and an ethical mode of operating.*

### **Learning Objectives**

By the end of this course, participants will gain knowledge of other media in a way that intersects with the learning objectives of the MFADW in which students pursue a level of mastery of the elements of dramatic writing, including:

- Character development, focusing particularly on creating unique, multidimensional characters;
- Creation of the world of the play;
- Story development, including an understanding of progressive action and the nature of conflict;
- Distinctive dialogue, including knowledge of the difference between dialogue and conversation, plus an ability to wield language to create rhythm, pace, sound, to produce emotional expression.
- Metaphor and imagery to expand subtext and the internal life of the play.
- A distinctive and authentic voice and vision;
- Point of view—the playwright's own and that of the play;
- Mood, tone, atmosphere, environment;
- Research and a wide range of tools for preparation;
- Assessment and revision.

At all times, but especially when dealing with alternative and/or emerging media, it is important to have an awareness of dramatic writing's capacity for connecting to all disciplines in the investigation of the critical questions of humanity. This is important now more than ever.

A wide range of processes will be explored, as well as a wide range of media types. This class is in conjunction with 574b, and each class will intersect with and expand on the other. Both 574a and 574b aim to guide the dramatic writer toward being adaptable to evolving media and opportunities.

## **Musings**

Here are some questions to consider:

How can you think in terms of total theatre—utilizing other arts as well as sports or even social behaviors or political actions—to explore form and function?

How can you come to understand the process of presentation and production, and what are your responsibilities as a writer in that process?

Does the writer become producer?

How do you work toward greater professional excellence if you wear multiple hats during the process?

How can you adapt to changing media and changing trends?

How can you be proactive creatively and intellectually?

What does the writer do in the face of ethical and/or political challenges?

How do you think critically—about your own work, about work for which you might provide dramaturgical input, about the world, about various crises?

Why is it so important to operate as a good citizen, both in the world and also in the art form?

How do we ensure our projects have meaning, that we are exploring issues of great significance, that we are using our work for the advancement of tolerance and love?

And yet: How do we make sure that the work is still fun?

## **And Beyond...**

We're also adopting key elements of USC's 21<sup>st</sup>-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. Turn in work electronically. 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 free teleconferencing tools available (Google Hangout, Skype). We'll also 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 also take a look at where we are—the American West—and consider how the stories of this region have gone untold and the people have gone unrecognized and determine what we can do to change that.

TRANSFORMING means that we will be looking at dramatic writing as a way to effect transformation in our lives, and in the lives of others; we'll look at making art 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 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Prerequisite(s):** None

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

Unpublished plays and various articles, essays supplied as PDFs.

### **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 every course that you take, and in the MFADW overall, your participation in these program events will have a direct impact on your annual review.

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 all components (see Grading Breakdown) 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 acceptable quality; **D** of below average quality; and **F** indicates inadequate work.

#### *USC GRADING SCALE*

Overall grading is determined on the following scale:

96-100%=A	95-91%=A-	
88-90%=B+	85-87%=B	81-84%=B-
78-80%=C+	75-77%=C	71-74%=C-
67-70%=D+	66-64%=D	61-63%=D-      F = 60 and below

[Failing Grade for Graduate Credit = C-]

- "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; "Acceptable" 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.
- When the average falls between two grades, the final grade will be weighted toward the positive end of the scale for students whose attendance and participation in class have been good, and will be weighted toward the negative end of the scale for those with poor attendance and participation.

### **Grading Breakdown**

Your grade will be based on multiple components: the inquiry into various digital, alternative, and new media forms and theories; inspiration/research presentation for your project; critical analysis (which includes reading and discussion of assigned texts as well as other participants' work); the development of a project plan; check-ins on your continuing process; ongoing writing and revision; completion of your Final Project.

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. (Note: A late assignment is marked down one grade notch, approximately 5 points; i.e., an assignment that would have earned an A receives an A- for missing the deadline; an assignment that would have earned a B+ receives a B for missing the deadline, etc.)

Components of the overall grade are weighted as follows:

Inquiry into Digital, Alternative, New Media	5 percent
Inspiration Board/Research Presentation	10 percent
Critical Analysis (reading and discussion)	10 percent
Personalized Project 1 Plan (Game)	10 percent
Presentation Project 1	10 percent
Personalized Project 2 Plan (Testimony play)	10 percent
Presentation Project 2	10 percent
Personalized Project 3 Plan (Audio play)	10 percent
Check-Ins	5 percent
Ongoing writing and development—however that is applicable	10 percent
Final Project Portfolio	10 percent
TOTAL	100 percent

**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. Under such exceptional circumstances, no late penalties will accrue.*

### **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 and contribute to the discussion. 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. Though SDA's policy states that there are no unexcused absences, please note that I will excuse absences for certain specific reasons, such as a valid professional development opportunity, provided you make arrangements with me in advance. For other absences to be excused, the absences must be for reasons of illness or emergency, and you must notify me in writing (preferably in advance). For the most part, if you are doing your work diligently and if you communicate with me, I will excuse a legitimate absence.
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. For collaborations, you may work on Google documents that may be team-edited via Google Drive.
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

	Topics	Activities, etc.	Deliverable/ Due Dates
<b>Week 1</b>  Aug 23	<b>An Introduction</b>  <b>Why Dramatic Writing Across Media?</b>  <b>A joint session with THTR 574b</b>	<b>Discussion:</b>  Some of the trending terms; some of the various options; the relevance of the various media.	
<b>Weeks 2 - 6</b>  Aug 30 to Sep 27	<b>Games</b>  An introduction to creating characters and story lines for games.	<b>Discussion</b>  Applying the Elements of Dramatic Writing to Game Creation.	Week 3: Inspiration/vision board for a potential game project.

	<p>Who are the game creators?</p> <p>How does the dramatic writer collaborate with programmers and video developers?</p>	<p>Guest speakers (an expert on game narratives and an expert on the tech of it).</p> <p>Getting started.</p>	<p>Weeks 4, 5: Prepare an oral pitch for a game project.</p> <p>Week 6: Prepare a personalized project plan for a game.</p> <p>Week 6: Complete reading assignments. See handouts on Blackboard.</p>
<p><b>Weeks 7 - 9</b></p> <p>Oct 4 to Oct 18</p>	<p><b>Writing from Testimony</b></p> <p>An introduction to the Shoah Foundation Project: Diversity Through Testimony</p>	<p><b>Discussion</b></p> <p>The Search for Meaningfulness and Authenticity.</p> <p>Maintaining integrity when using testimony for theatre, film, multimedia.</p> <p>Guest speaker: Sara Brown, Shoah Foundation, head of DIT at Shoah</p> <p>Demonstration of archive retrieval methods.</p>	<p>Week 7: Turn In: Work-in-Progress for Project 1.</p> <p>Week 8: Inspiration Board and/or pitch/plans for Testimony plays.</p> <p>Week 9: Present rough drafts of Testimony plays.</p>
<p><b>Weeks 10 – 12</b></p> <p>Oct 25 To Nov 8</p>	<p><b>Audio Plays</b></p> <p>An introduction to the world of audio plays.</p> <p>Why/what are the opportunities in this field?</p> <p>What are the technical limitations and advantages of audio work and dramatic work that is broadcast?</p>	<p><b>Discussion</b></p> <p>Trends in audio work.</p> <p>Site visit: Recording of an LATW audio play, and, if possible, visit to post-production studio.</p> <p>Create a schedule for presentations for Weeks 13 &amp; 14.</p>	<p>Week 10: Brainstorming possibilities for audio play. (include ideas on how to handle technical limits and advantages.)</p> <p>Week 11: Pitches and plans for audio play (include ideas on how to handle technical limits and advantages). Note: You will not need to turn in this play—only an annotated play for it.</p>
<p><b>Weeks 13 - 14</b></p> <p>Nov 15 &amp; Nov 29</p>	<p><b>WIP &amp; Presentations</b></p> <p>Opportunities to workshop audio plays, Shoah plays, and/or finish up games.</p> <p>Present the various projects in the workshop.</p>	<p><b>Discussion</b></p> <p>What's working, what's not working, what do we fix?</p>	<p>Week 12: Present scenes, sections, chunks, questions.</p> <p>Keep working.</p> <p>Weeks 13, 14: Present projects as scheduled on the calendar.</p>
<p><b>Reminder</b></p>	<p><b>NO CLASS 11/22</b></p>	<p><b>Thanksgiving.</b></p>	<p><b>Keep working on your projects.</b></p>

<b>FINAL</b>  Thursday Dec 6	<b>FINAL EXAM</b>  7 – 9 pm	<b>Artistic Review: Group Feedback &amp; Critique of Projects.</b>	Date: For confirmation of the date and time of the final for this class, consult the USC <i>Schedule of Classes</i> at <a href="http://www.usc.edu/soc">www.usc.edu/soc</a> .
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### 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, <https://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



***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.