

USC School of Dramatic Arts

Dramatic Writing Studio, THTR-566 63256
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, 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:

Love is our semester's unifying theme. "The greatest stories are love stories." How does love work in your play in terms of plot, story, character, theme? And how does love connect to the other themes in your play? Expectations: Year Ones will be writing a new original play for the NWF 1 requirement. Year Twos will be working on NWF 2 scripts, whether rewrites or new scenes. Year Threes will be writing toward their NWF 3 presentations. New writing and brave choices will be celebrated and welcomed. By semester's end, each of you should expect to have created new writing that extends the themes of your plays in unexpected new ways.

Required Readings:

Annie Baker, **THE VERMONT PLAYS** (TCG)
Brian Friel, **TRANSLATIONS** (Faber & Faber)
Athol Fugard, **STATEMENTS** (TCG)
Marlene Meyer, **ETTA JENKS** (DPS)
Jose Rivera, **CLOUD TECTONICS** (Broadway Play Publishing)
Martin Sherman, **BENT** (Applause)

These play scripts, along with other supplementary materials, will provide context for prompts and exercises throughout the semester that deepen investigation of your own plays and their relation to love.

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; 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% **Completed Draft of Play: 30%**

Midterm Exam: 15% **Final Exam 25%**

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

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

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 1st Year writers present their new plays at the New Works Festival 1 (NWF 1), co-produced by Playwrights' Arena's artistic director Jon Lawrence Rivera. Both NWF 1 plays will be read on the same day by a company of professional actors chosen expressly for the event. ATTENDANCE IS MANDATORY. The event takes place on **Monday, April 29, from 11am-3pm**, venue TBA. We are planning for an acting company of 4-6 actors depending on cast size. Each writer will choose two actors specifically for the roles in the text, with the other roles chosen by Jon Lawrence Rivera and me.

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 will be given on **Tuesday, March 5th at 7pm.**

Final Exam:

Final Exam will be given on **Tuesday, May 7th at 5pm.**

THTR 566 Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown:

- January 8** Love. Introduction of themes, free discussion on definitions of aspects of love on stage. Each writer will highlight a kind of love in a scene to explore the world of the play, theme, voice, and tone. Each week we will discuss required reading with a particular interest in how it addresses the themes and complications of love. Business affairs/dramaturgical advancement will also be addressed, particularly through guest speakers who will join us at several points in the semester.
- January 15** Love and Sex. **ETTA JENKS** by Marlene Meyer. Guest speaker: Jose Luis Valenzuela, Artistic Director, Latino Theater Company, LATC.
- January 22** Love and Danger. **STATEMENTS AFTER AN ARREST UNDER THE IMMORALITY ACT** by Athol Fugard.
- January 29** Love and Identity. **BENT** by Martin Sherman.
- February 5** Deep Dives. Scenes about love, sex and danger from your new plays. Dramaturgical Advancements: Guest speaker TBA.
- February 12** Romantic Love. **CLOUD TECTONICS** by Jose Rivera.
- February 19** Entanglements. **CIRCLE MIRROR TRANSFORMATION** by Annie Baker.
- February 24** Sunday 2-7pm, NWF 2 writers, LATC, Founders Room. Writers read NWF plays aloud to their directors and professors.
- February 26** Deep dives. Scenes about romance, complexity and entanglements from your new plays.
- March 5** Love and Language. **TRANSLATIONS** by Brian Friel. Midterm assignments based on particular student plays in process utilizing the theme of love.
- March 12** **SPRING BREAK, no class. Sleep and write!**
- March 19** Midterms returned. How does love work in your play?
- March 26** The Play Business: Guest speaker TBA.
- April 2** **ROUGH DRAFTS DUE.**
- April 9** In-class readings of plays by non-MFA 1s.

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- April 21** Sunday, LATC, 2-7pm. Master Class with TBA, followed by USC MFA DW Alumni play reading.
- April 23** Last Class: Endings, and Beginnings. How best to use the summer.
- April 29** NWF 1, Monday 11am-3pm, TBA. Attendance mandatory.
- May 7** Tuesday, 5-7pm FINAL EXAM. Attendance mandatory.

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” 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>.

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 for DSP and contact information: (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 740-6948 (TDD only), (213) 740-8216 (FAX) ability@usc.edu.

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. See the university’s site on Campus Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

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.
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. www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Relationship and 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. 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: 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. 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. studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support

The Office of Disability Services and Programs Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. dsp.usc.edu

Student Support and Advocacy – (213) 821-4710

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

Diversity at USC

Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. diversity.usc.edu

USC Emergency Information

Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible. emergency.usc.edu

USC Department of Public Safety – UPC: (213) 740-4321 – HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24-hour emergency or to report a crime. Provides overall safety to USC community. dps.usc.edu