

USC School of Dramatic Arts

THTR 596b Thesis Development & Attainment

#63289D - Spring Semester 2019

Mondays 12-1:20 pm

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: 3:30-4:30 W 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

Catalogue Description

Designed to guide the MFADW student toward refinement of thesis including vision, development, and execution.

Course Description and Overview

Thesis Development & Attainment is designed to support the student in his or her refinement and completion of the 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 with concentrated focus on character development and story execution. This focus is based upon weaknesses reflected in previous work that require buttressing.

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. If you feel that will help you, I urge you to secure those services.

The thesis play will be submitted to the MFA in Dramatic Writing director and faculty in spring 2019 on the University's thesis submission date (published on the USC Schedule of Classes under the registration calendar, see below). This full-length play must be typed in standard manuscript format with standard top/bottom/side one-inch margins in Courier or Times 12-point type. You may submit it electronically, but only as a Word doc/docx document so that commentary also may be provided electronically, too. If you submit it as a PDF, you are stating that you do

not want written dramaturgical feedback. For this class, you will have time to continue to refine your thesis play after the University thesis submission date and submit it as your final project for THTR 596b on the designated date below.

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

Intimate Apparel by Lynn Nottage

Her Portmanteau by Mfoniso Udofia

Roosters by Milcha Sanchez-Scott

Miriam's Flowers by Migdalia Cruz

Supplementary:

Poetics by Aristotle

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

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*.

50% of Grade

Protagonist Report, Week 2

Protagonist Report, Week 4

Protagonist Report, Week 6

Protagonist Report, Week 8

50% of Grade

Final Project Play

Protagonist's Reports will consist of deep writing work that you will be prompted to undertake to investigate different dimensions of your protagonist. The prompts will be posted to Blackboard and due as noted in the schedule below. As you work on the prompts, please understand that you are WRITING YOUR PLAY. Whether you are reading work to inspire you to cultivate your writing or enriching dimensions of your play, you are still WRITING YOUR PLAY. They are all critical parts of the process. The more you understand about the nature of your protagonist and how that determines the execution of your story, the stronger your play will be.

Each Protagonist Report will be evaluated on these points: Does the response address the prompt? Is the response a serious consideration of the respective dimension of the protagonist? Are there new, viable discoveries about the protagonist? Does the student adequately explain how the discovery can be applied to his or her thesis play?

The Final Project 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.

Overall grading is determined on the following scale:

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|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|--------------------|
| 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 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" 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 must 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).

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

1/7 – Thesis assessment. One-on-one conferences to review the theses. Student also must provide a written description of the thesis project. Please bring a copy of this to class and submit it to the instructor. Collective meeting. Check Blackboard for the prompt for Protagonist Report, Week 2, which his due next week; and timing of individual conferences.

1/14 – Protagonist Report, Week 2 is due. Individual meetings during class time.

1/21 – Holiday. No class. Martin Luther King, Jr., Birthday. Please check Blackboard for the prompt for Protagonist Report, Week 4, which his due next week; and timing of individual conferences.

1/28 – Protagonist Report, Week 4 is due. Individual meetings during class time.

2/4 – Writing workshop – individual prompts specific to writing issues. Collective meeting. Please check Blackboard for the prompt for Protagonist Report, Week 6, which his due next week; and timing of individual conferences.

2/11 – Protagonist Report, Week 6 is due. Individual meetings during class time.

2/18 – Holiday. No class. President's Day. Please check Blackboard for the prompt for Protagonist Report, Week 8, which his due next week; and timing of individual conferences.

2/25 – Protagonist Report, Week 8 is due. Individual meetings during class time.

3/4 – Writing and development.

3/11 – Holiday. No class. Spring Break.

3/18 – Writing and development.

3/25 – Writing and development.

[3/29 – UNIVERSITY DEADLINE: Thesis/Dissertation Manuscript submission deadline.]

4/1 – Continued development and cultivation of thesis.

4/8 – Continued development and cultivation of thesis.

4/15 - Writing and development.

4/22 - Writing and development.

4/29 – Writing workshop, collective meeting. Final Project Plays due on this date.

[5/3 – 11 am-1 pm. Final Examination. Oral Defense of Thesis Plays.]

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.