

# USC School of Dramatic Arts

## GESM 35302D Eco-Theatre

**Units: 4**

**Fall 2019 Mondays and Wednesdays, 2-3:50pm:**

**Location: VKC 209**

**Instructor: Oliver Mayer**

**Office: MCC #101C**

**Office Hours: Tuesdays 2-5pm, or by appointment.**

### **Course Description**

This course explores the many ways plays and live performance are dealing with such major environmental crises as climate change, loss of natural resources, and extinction. These problems, which affect us all, are of particular concern to playwrights west of the Rockies who wish to tell stories that reflect the unique history and geography of the American West; through the lens of eco-theatre, traditional issues of the West—water, drought, oil and gas extraction, desertification, and agriculture/migration—are viewed, and through the lives of specific fictional characters, the more universal, global implications are explored. Along with ecological issues, the class will investigate concerns such as science denial, science fraud, political obstacles, and historical treatment of the issues, including the different approaches to conservation taken by settlers and native people. The theatrical responses to these topics, and the various genres the work has embraced—such as street theatre, dystopian futurism, children’s theatre, and reality-based work—will be scrutinized. Students will also view how such topics have been handled by playwrights of the past, and they will be invited to create their own responses.

### **Learning Objectives**

Who are you in relation to the ecosystem? Over the course of the semester, we will search for connections between the world as we know it -- its history, its present state, its uncertain future – and the stage as a place where stories are played out in an attempt to find the drama, risks and rewards of our present moment. The main learning objectives will be to identify aspects of our life that we often take for granted, to evaluate how they have been treated on stage in specific plays, and eventually to write our own dramatic responses to the world as we see them. This course will address *Eco* as one’s habitat or environment often under fire, and *Theatre* as a necessary tool that both puts out fires and can also be a Firestarter.

**Prerequisite(s):** Open only to Freshmen.

### **Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required**

This is a low-stress classroom in terms of technological proficiency. Bring pen and paper as well as your laptop.

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

These books will be available at the USC Bookstore. They can also be purchased online or elsewhere. Supplementary materials will be made available online via Blackboard.

<b>Bilodeau, Chantal</b>	<b>SILA</b>
<b>Mayer, Oliver</b>	<b>DARK MATTERS, AND OTHER PLAYS</b>
<b>Shakespeare, William</b>	<b>AS YOU LIKE IT</b>
<b>Washburn, Annie</b>	<b>MR. BURNS</b>
<b>Waters, Steve</b>	<b>CONTINGENCY PLAN</b>

### **Description and Assessment of Assignments**

Be prepared to read in a qualitative way, so that you can feel prepared to discuss and evaluate the material presented in class. Based on our discussions, I will assign homework and in-class exercises that are (hopefully) a lot of fun as well as germane to the questions raised. Although we may do some essay writing along the way, we will spend the bulk of the semester doing dramatic writing: That is, we will use the tool of writing for the stage to try to make sense of the what's really going on, not only in terms of the ecology but in our politics. I grade on the quality of your presence and sharing. I also grade assignments.

### **Grading Breakdown**

This class demands active participation, discussion, and feedback on a weekly basis. Be prepared to discuss each other's work and to do so with both compassion and insight.

**A** indicates work of excellent quality; **B** of good quality; **C** of average quality. Although **D** indicates below quality work, and **F** indicates inadequate work, I expect neither of these lowest grades from any of you.

You will also have a chance to raise your grades by rewriting the work in question. Whether essays or dramatic writing, work can always get better if you think about your subject, take the advice that works for you, and allow yourself to see what's really there.

### **Grading Scale (Example)**

Course final grades will be determined using the following scale

A	95-100
A-	90-94
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D+	67-69
D	63-66
D-	60-62
F	59 and below

## **Assignment Rubrics**

Weekly Writing Assignments will be given both in-class and as homework. You will be expected to be writing and presenting scenes every week. Be prepared to read aloud your work, both for peer review and for my feedback. Absent students should email me or contact their fellow students about missed assignments. These should be read to present at the next class you attend.

There will be one **MIDTERM in class on Monday, October 7**, and one **FINAL EXAM in class on Friday, December 13 from 2-4pm**. You must be there to take both tests. If you foresee a problem with either date, you **MUST** come to me about it, beforehand. No exceptions.

## **Grading Timeline**

We can discuss your grades during the semester, preferably during office hours.

## **Additional Policies**

Unlike some other classes at SDA, we do not use a great deal of technology in this course. That said, feel free to either share your new scenes weekly online with me and the other students, or print them and distribute hard copies in class. Also, students will be expected to attend plays, both on campus and off. When possible, tickets will be provided. Try to attend SDA productions. When you see a play, be prepared to discuss it in class. Scheduled plays to attend include 3 PADEREWSKIS on Saturday, October 12 at USC (RSVP required).

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

Monday, August 26 **FIRST CLASS, INTRODUCTIONS, EXPECTATIONS, GOALS, LEARNING OBJECTIVES**  
Wednesday, August 28 **DEFINITION OF TERMS: ECO-, THEATRE-, RESOURCES, EXTINCTION, THE ELEMENTS**  
Monday, September 2 **NO CLASS, LABOR DAY**  
Wednesday, September 4 **AS YOU LIKE IT, ACTS 1&2, WHICH ELEMENTS ARE AT PLAY?**  
Monday September 9 **AS YOU LIKE IT, ACTS 3-5, DIRECT AND INDIRECT CONNECTIONS TO NOW**  
Wednesday, September 11 **AS YOU LIKE IT, PATRIOT DAY, WHAT IS PATRIOTISM IN RELATION TO ECO?**  
Monday, September 16 **FIRST ORIGINAL SCENES IN RESPONSE TO AS YOU LIKE IT**  
Wednesday, September 18 **WALLOWA, SPIRIT OR EARTH?**  
Monday, September 23 **WALLOWA, AUTUMNAL EQUINOX AND SEASONAL EFFECTS ON AND OFF STAGE**  
Wednesday, September 25 **WALLOWA, AND DUENDE.**  
Monday, September 30 **SECOND ORIGINAL SCENES IN RESPONSE TO WALLOWA**  
Wednesday, October 2 **CONTINGENCY PLAN, YOM KIPPUR, ATONEMENT, GUILT, THE BOOK OF LIFE**  
Monday, October 7 **CONTINGENCY PLAN, MIDTERM**  
Wednesday, October 9 **CONTINGENCY PLAN, WATER OR AIR?**  
Monday, October 14 **THIRD ORIGINAL SCENES IN RESPONSE TO CONTINGENCY PLAN, COLUMBUS DAY**  
Wednesday, October 16 **MR BURNS, Guest Instructor, FALL BREAK**  
Monday, October 21 **MR BURNS, DISCUSSION OF POLAND FOLLOWING TRIP TO POZNAN**  
Wednesday, October 23 **MR BURNS, FIRE OR SPIRIT?**  
Monday, October 28 **FOURTH ORIGINAL SCENES IN RESPONSE TO MR BURNS**  
Wednesday, October 30 **HALLOWEEN AND ECO THEATRE**  
Monday, November 4 **SILA, WATER, EARTH OR SPIRIT?**  
Wednesday, November 6 **SILA, AND DUENDE.**  
Monday, November 11 **SILA, VETERANS DAY, WAR AND THE ENVIRONMENT**  
Wednesday, November 13 **FIFTH SCENES IN RELATION TO SILA**

Monday, November 18 **DARK MATTERS, ECOLOGY BEYOND OUR PLANET, AIR AND SPIRIT**  
Wednesday, November 20 **DARK MATTERS, Guest Instructor**  
Monday, November 25 **SIXTH SCENES IN RELATION TO DARK MATTERS**  
Wednesday, November 27 **NO CLASS, THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY**  
Monday, December 2 **FINAL PRESENTATIONS**  
Wednesday, December 4 **LAST CLASS FINAL PRESENTATIONS**  
Friday, December 13 **2-4PM FINAL EXAM (no exceptions)**

## **EXTRA-CURRICULAR COMMITMENTS AND ISPS**

Should you choose to participate in any extra-curricular project, such as an Independent Student Production, the SDA administration and faculty will not make allowances or exceptions for absences in class, missed or delayed assignments, home work that is required as preparation for class, or lack of participation in class resulting from your extra-curricular involvement.

## **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” [policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b](http://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](mailto: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.

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### **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](http://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](http://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](http://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](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. [equity.usc.edu](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://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](http://dps.usc.edu)