**USC**School of Dramatic Arts

**Playwriting 1, THTR-365 63077 (4 units)**

**SpringTerm – Tuesdays and Thursdays 1-2:50pm**

**Location: DRC 120**

**Instructor: Oliver Mayer**

**Office: PIRC #1007: MCC #101C**

**Office Hours : appointment or walk-in (call first).**

**Contact Info:** [**omayer@usc.edu**](mailto:omayer@usc.edu)**, 310 867 9192**

**Course Description and Overview:**

Essential elements of playwriting through weekly assignments, students’ initiative, occasional productions of scenes, and extensive classroom analysis.

**Learning Objectives:**

This course will explore what a play can do. Although this is a writing course, we will be reading and discussing eight separate dynamic play texts. The goal is to analyze dramatic writing, and to use our findings as points of departure for new work. Through weekly writing exercises presented in class we will build dramatic writing muscles, which we will eventually use in a Final Scene for each student, performed by professional actors.

**Required Readings and Supplementary Materials:**

Williams, Tennessee, **A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE**, Penguin.

Wilson, August, **JOE TURNER’S COME AND GONE**, NAL Trade.

Guare, John, **SIX DEGREES OF SEPARATION**, Random House.

Valdez, Luis, **ZOOT SUIT**, Arte Publico.

Mayer, Oliver, **THE HURT BUSINESS**, Hyperbole.

Fornes, Maria Irene, **PLAYS**, PAJ.

Fugard, Athol, **MASTER HAROLD…AND THE BOYS**, Penguin.

Bilodeau, Chantal, **SILA**, Talonbooks.

Supplementary materials will appear online on Blackboard as well as via hard copy.

**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](mailto:omayer@usc.edu); the midterm and final exams are mandatory and cannot be missed or made up on a later date.

**Assignment Rubrics*:* A** indicates work of excellent quality; **A-/B+** of good quality; **B** of average quality; **I expect no lower grade from you**.

**Grading Timeline**: We can discuss grades during my office hours. Please come see me.

**Grading Breakdown:** Your final grade consists of**:**

**Overall Weekly Grade: 30% Final Scene Presentation: 30%**

**Midterm Exam: 20% Final Exam 20%**

This class will use the following grading scale**:**

**96-100%=A 95-91%=A- 88-90%=B+ 85-87%=B**

**81-84%=B- 78-80%=C+ 77-75=C 71-74%= C-**

**66-64%=D 67-70%=D+ 61-63%=D-**

**Weekly Writing 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. These should be turned in on time at the next class.

**Final Scene Presentation:** The Final Scene will allow you the chance to utilize the sum of knowledge acquired over the course. It will almost always be a revised and expanded scene from one of the writing assignments. Once chosen, you will turn in a rough draft of the scene and receive my comments. The week after that you will turn in your completed and revised scene. All scenes will be performed by professional actors at the final class. I will secure the actors and provide them your final scenes one week before the presentations. Each student will have the chance to discuss intentions, explain confusions, and answer questions from the actors immediately before the performance begins. I will grade scenes based upon the boldness of your use of dramatic methods and strategies worked on over the course of the semester, as well as by your ability to be brave and take chances. **It is imperative that you attend the presentations at the last class, as it connects directly to your final exam**.

**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 occurs in class on **Tuesday, February 27** **at 3pm**. Be on time and be prepared to define specific terms used in class IN YOUR OWN WORDS.

**Final Exam:** Students will judge each other’s Final Scenes based on essential dramatic questions provided by me. The exam will consist of oral presentation of written responses, and discussion of each student piece, and will occur on **Tuesday, May 12 from 2-4pm**. Attendance **MANDATORY** – no exceptions.

**Technology**: Laptops will be helpful, particularly when we read student scenes in the second half of each class. I teach primarily via white board and provide hand-out copies.

**Discussion Etiquette:** I expect honesty and compassion, particularly when you respond to the work of your student colleagues. Both are essential. Try not to rewrite the work of others; rather, identify moments in the work where you have questions or thoughts. When listening to others critique your work, keep an open heart and mind. Take notes and remember to breathe.

**Additional Policies:** We do not use a great deal of technology in this course. That said, we will share weekly new scenes online. We also will accept printed hard copies of scenes. Sometimes the work flows best in handwritten mode, as sometimes pen and paper is the best technology for the work at hand.

**Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown:**

**January 14 Introductions. What is a Play? Writing assignment: CREDO.**

**January 16 INTRODUCING CHARACTERS. Williams’** *A Streetcar Named Desire***, the Attack, Scene One, introductions of Stanley and Blanche. Reversing off expectations. Writing assignment: introducing characters. Read CREDOS, in class writing.**

**January 21 CHOICE. Who chooses in a scene? Force choices on stage, in real time. Read INTRODUCTION SCENES.**

**January 23 FEARS. Fornes’** *Sarita***. Mystery, love, danger, and violence. Read CHOICE scenes. First Writing Assignment in-class: a scene that makes you blush.**

**January 28 DESIRES. Passion versus emotion, and how it governs character. Read FEAR scenes.**

**January 30 SECRETS. Fugard’s** *Master Harold and the Boys***, memory and regret. Outing oneself, changing the names to protect the guilty. Read DESIRE scenes.**

**February 4 FEARS, DESIRES, SECRETS. Putting it all together. THE BIRD quote by Williams and the thundercloud of a common crisis. Read DESIRE scenes.**

**February 6 VALENTINES. Myth, Taboo, and a sense of Play. Mayer’s** *Young Valiant***. Dedications in a scene. Read THE BIRD scenes.**

**February 11 DUENDE. Lorca’s concept in relation to revelation of character in a story.**

**Read VALENTINES scenes.**

**February 13 Arias and Jubas. Wilson’s** *Joe Turner’s Come and Gone***, elevated writing, superpowers, visions, shared rituals, prophecy. Read DUENDE scenes. Writing assignment: write your own personal Juba.**

**February 18 SACRIFICE. Blood offerings, wages and stakes with God. Read JUBA scenes.**

**February 20 HISTORY. Alienation Effects. Valdez’s** *Zoot Suit***, Brechtian methods, History of Chicano Movement, Dramatizing events and epochs. Vernaculars and Private Languages. Read SACRIFICE scenes. Writing assignment: activate a PRIVATE or second language or vernacular.**

**February 25 REVISING HISTORY. Found materials, political theatre, revising history. Read PRIVATE LANGUAGE scenes.**

**February 27 Putting it all together. MIDTERM EXAM given in class. Retelling, revamping and recycling of the past IN THE IMMEDIATE MOMENT.**

**March3 MIDTERMS RETURNED. Guare’s** *Six Degrees of Separation***, anecdote versus experience. Presentation vs Representation.**

**March 5 THINGS CHANGE. The Flan-Ouisa relationship and how characters discover. Read ANECDOTE/EXPERIENCE scenes.**

**March10 LOSS. Bilodeau’s** *Sila***, global versus local issues, culture versus commerce. What is lost and what is gained. Read CHANGE scenes.**

**March 12 Read LOSS scenes. HUMANS and other ANIMALS, dramatizing the Polar Bears and the land itself. Read LOSS scenes.**

**March 17 SPRING BREAK, no class. Sleep and write!**

**March 19 SPRING BREAK, no class. Sleep and write some more!**

**March 19 BLOOD OFFERINGS. Mayer’s** *Blade to the Heat,* **Physical and musical exploits onstage, Spectacle versus Intimacy, the counter intuitive power of truth telling onstage. Writing assignment: Read HUMAN ANIMAL scenes.**

**March 24 CONTEST. Utilizing sports as metaphor. Read BLOOD OFFERING scenes.**

**March 26 ONE ON ONE discussions about individual scenes, trajectories, goals.**

**April 2 DISCUSSION OF STUDENT SCENES. Which take the most chances? Which reveal the most? Which involve the most risk? Which have the most joy? Which have the largest questions? Read CONTEST scenes.**

**April 4 CREATING UNITS OF DRAMATIC ENERGY, growing scenes into longer stories and plays. Read scenes to test risk factor.**

**April 7 FIELD TRIPS: Searching for stories. Natural History Museum** *Becoming Los Angeles* **exhibit.**

**April 9 Read FIELD TRIP scenes.**

**April 14 FIRST DRAFT OF STUDENT FINAL SCENES DUE. Guest speaker TBA.**

**April 16 SCENES RETURNED WITH EDITS AND QUESTIONS. One on one meetings to discuss edits and rewrites.**

**April 21 NOW WHAT? Using plays to help understand your world as you live it.**

**April 23 FINAL SCENES DUE, discussion of Final Class Presentations. Promises Fulfilled and Otherwise.**

**April 28 PLAYS FLY. Exercises to keep writing, and keep writing new.**

**April 30 LAST CLASS, FINAL SCENES, Six actors -- Three Male, Three Female – will read your plays in succession. Attendance is mandatory. Refreshments will be provided. Be prompt, attentive and receptive. I will be watching.**

**May 12 Tuesday, 2-4pm FINAL EXAM, PIRC #1016. Be there. No exceptions.**

**­­­­­­­­­­­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/**](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/**](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/**](http://equity.usc.edu/) or to the Department of Public Safety [**http://capsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us**](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/**](http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/) provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage [**sarc@usc.edu**](mailto:sarc@usc.edu) describes reporting options and other resources.

**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

**USC Libraries:** Need to do research but don't know where to start? Searching for a book, article, or data to support your argument? Not sure how to cite a source in your bibliography?

Ask a librarian! Research help is available:

•In person and by phone, chat and email at Ask a Librarian

•Through research guides and FAQs

•By contacting your subject librarian