

USC School of Dramatic Arts

THTR 596b Thesis Development & Attainment, 63289D
SYLLABUS DATED January 6, 2020

Units: 2

Spring 2020, Session 001—Mondays—Time: 12-1:20 PM

Location: Office, Massman Drama Center (DRC)

Instructor: Velina Hasu Houston, MFA, PhD

Office: USC School of Dramatic Arts, 1029 Childs Way, Mail Code 0791

Office Hours: 3-5 PM Mondays by appointment only via email to the instructor (other times can be negotiated); as a courtesy, 24-hour cancellation via email to the instructor and/or student required.

Contact Info: greentea@usc.edu, (213) 740-8686; email is preferred contact, response in 48 hours or less.

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 Master of Fine Arts in Dramatic Writing (MFADW) student toward refinement of thesis including vision, development, and execution. Focus will be on the student's thesis play and refinement via dramaturgical feedback and utilization of scene diagnostics.

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, aided by dramaturgy and scene diagnostics in THTR 596b. 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 and that become clear as a result of diagnostics.

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 2020 on the University's thesis submission date (published on the USC Schedule of Classes under the registration calendar). 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, not including your title, copyright, and cast of character 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

How I Learned to Drive by Paula Vogel

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.

Supplementary:

Intimate Apparel by Lynn Nottage

Roosters by Milcha Sanchez-Scott

Miriam's Flowers by Migdalia Cruz

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

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: Dramaturgical Investigations

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| 1) Protagonist's Routine Circumstances | Please bring large index cards to conferences for the Dramaturgical Investigations. |
| 2) Protagonist's Stakes | |
| 3) Protagonist's Particularity of the Moment/
Event of Play | |
| 4) Play's Initiation of Conflict | |
| 5) Cast of Characters and Development | |

50% of Grade

Final Project 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:

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

1/13 – 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. Review of syllabus, dramaturgical investigation expectations, and semester goals. Read Vogel for 1/27.

1/20 – Holiday. No class. Martin Luther King, Jr., Birthday.

1/27 – Conferences. Student 1, 12-1: _____, Student 2, 1-2: _____
_____. Focus is on discussion of Vogel. Be prepared to discuss dramaturgical investigations in conferences.

- 2/3 – Conferences (AA). Dramaturgical investigations with regards to student work.
- 2/10 – Conferences (NG). Dramaturgical investigations with regards to student work.
- 2/17 – Holiday. No class. President’s Day.
- 2/24 – Conferences (AA). Dramaturgical investigations with regards to student work.
- 3/2 – Conferences (NG). Dramaturgical investigations with regards to student work.
- 3/9 – Conferences.
- 3/16 – Holiday. No class. Spring Break.
- 3/23 – Writing and development. Completion of revision of Act I by 3/30.
- 3/30 – Writing and development. Submit Act I by 4:30 pm PDT.
- 4/6 – Conferences (AA). Dramaturgical investigations with regards to student work.
- 4/13 – Conferences (NG). Dramaturgical investigations with regards to student work.
- 4/20 - Conferences (AA). Dramaturgical investigations with regards to student work.
- 4/27 - Conferences (NG). Dramaturgical investigations with regards to student work. End of classes.
- 5/1 - Final Project Plays due on this date.
- 5/8 – 11 am-1 pm. Final Examination. Site TBD.

*ADDITIONAL POLICIES

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.

Statements 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. 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