

USC School of Dramatic Arts

GESM 35297 Eco-Theatre

Units: 4

Fall 2020 Mondays and Wednesdays, 2-3:50pm:

Location: online

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

Students will learn to write dramatic scenes about the world as we know it – its history, present danger, and highly uncertain future – in order to find the drama, as well as the risks and rewards of our present moment, and to show it on stage. We will define terms around the subjects of both ecology and theatre; translate fact, evidence and lived experience into stories for the stage; and build a body of dramatic responses to the multiple and ever-growing threats to our environment, such as climate change. We will read both scientific and journalistic essays and plays that have dealt with our relation to the ecology. This course will address *Eco* as one’s habitat under fire, and *Theatre* as a necessary tool that can both put out fires and be a Firestarter, when needed. The ultimate goal is to understand how these immense topics affect real people in real ways.

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 for in-class writing. Be ready to read both required and supplementary material.

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.

Bilodeau, Chantal	SILA
Capek, Karel	THE WHITE PLAGUE, from FOUR PLAYS
Ibsen, Henrik	ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE
Mayer, Oliver	WALLOWA, from DARK MATTERS, AND OTHER PLAYS
Shakespeare, William	AS YOU LIKE IT
Waters, Steve	CONTINGENCY PLAN

Description and Assessment of Assignments

Be prepared to read in a qualitative way, so that you can feel prepared to freely discuss and evaluate material presented in class. Based on our discussions, I will assign homework and in-class exercises that are 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. 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.

Grading Breakdown and Assignment Rubrics

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/A-** indicates work of excellent quality; **B+/B** of good quality; **B-/C** of average quality. Although **D** indicates below quality work, and **F** indicates inadequate work, I expect at the very least average quality from your work, if not more. 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.

Weekly Active Participation and Discussion: 15%

Midterm: 20%

Final: 25%

Weekly Scene Work: 40%

Midterm and Final Exam

There will be one **MIDTERM in class on Monday, October 5**, and one **FINAL EXAM in class on Friday, November 20 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. Please feel free to contact me by email at any time.

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, via an agreed-upon sharing format. Also, even and especially in these unprecedented times, students will be expected to attend plays and play readings online when possible, both on campus and off. Try to attend SDA productions, particularly the **New Theatre For Right Now** plays. When you see a play, be prepared to discuss it in class.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

Monday, August 17 **FIRST CLASS, INTRODUCTIONS, EXPECTATIONS, GOALS, LEARNING OBJECTIVES, GRADING RUBRICS, DEFINITIONS OF ECO- AND -THEATRE, EXPLORATIONS, INVENTIONS**
Wednesday, August 19 **EXPECTATIONS, CONTINGENCIES, RECKONINGS, HISTORY/MYSTERY**
Monday, August 24 **AS YOU LIKE IT, ACTS 1&2 CITY AND FOREST**
Wednesday, August 26 **AS YOU LIKE IT, ACTS 3-5 URBAN SPRAWL AND ARCTIC FIRES**
Monday, August 31 **PASTORAL SCENES**
Wednesday, September 2 **PASTORAL SCENES**
Monday, September 7 **LABOR DAY, NO CLASS**
Wednesday, September 9 **WALLOWA: THE ELEMENTS AND THE SURVIVAL INDEX**
Monday, September 14 **WALLOWA: THE SPIRITS, THE THEORY OF DUENDE**
Wednesday, September 16 **DUENDE SCENES**
Monday, September 21 **DUENDE SCENES**
Wednesday, September 23 **ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE, ACTS 1&2, WATER, OWNERSHIP AND POLLUTION**
Monday, September 28 **ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE, ACTS 3-5, WHISTLEBLOWING**
Wednesday, September 30 **WHISTLEBLOWING SCENES**
Monday, October 5 **WHISTLEBLOWING SCENES, MIDTERM IN CLASS, ATTENDANCE MANDATORY**
Wednesday, October 7 **CONTINGENCY PLAN, SCIENCE VS POLITCS**
Monday, October 12 **CONTINGENCY PLAN,**
Wednesday, October 14 **SCIENCE VS POLITICS SCENES**
Monday, October 19 **SCIENCE VS POLITICS SCENES**
Wednesday, October 21 **THE WHITE PLAGUE**
Monday, October 26 **THE WHITE PLAGUE**
Wednesday, October 28 **PLAGUE SCENES**
Monday, November 2 **PLAGUE SCENES; SILA, INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND ANIMALS**
Wednesday, November 4 **SILA, PROSE AND POETRY**
Monday, November 9 **SILA, PROSE AND POETRY SCENES**
Wednesday, November 11 **PROSE AND POETRY SCENES**
Friday, November 20 **FINAL EXAM, 2-4pm, ATTENDANCE MANDATORY**

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. 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