

# USC School of Dramatic Arts

## **THTR 596b Thesis Development & Attainment, 63289D**

*Please note that this syllabus is subject to updates after the third week of classes.*

**Units:** 2

**Spring 2021, Session 060—Mondays—Time:** 12-1:20 PM

**Location:** Online

**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](mailto: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](mailto: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, a play is selected to foreground in 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 gained over the course of the graduate curriculum to bring the 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 the thesis; fully making use of the dramatic writing knowledge received in THTR 566, 500, 506, 501, 574, 527, 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 2021 on the University's thesis submission date (**March 26, 2021, 12:00 pm PST**).

Your final project play must be typed in standard manuscript format with standard top/bottom/side one-inch margins in Courier or Times 12-point type. Please see the professional formatting standards of the Dramatists' Guild: <https://www.dramatistsguild.com/script-formats>. As noted herein, please be mindful that your Final Project grade will be diminished if you do not submit it in professional format.

*You must submit your Final Project electronically as a Word doc/docx document so that commentary also may be provided electronically. If you submit it as a PDF, it is understood that you do not desire written feedback, but merely summary comments.*

Because you are presenting your work to the profession, you are expected to refine your thesis into a play manuscript that is between **50-89 pages**, not including the title page, copyright page, and cast of characters page. 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](https://eco.copyright.gov/eService_enu/start.swe?SWECmd=Start&SWEHo=eco.copyright.gov)).

### **Required Readings**

"The Hero with a Thousand Faces" by Joseph Campbell. ISBN-10 : 0691017840, ISBN-13 : 978-0691017846; Publisher : Princeton University Press; Reprint edition (January 1, 1973).

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:**

*Shakin' the Mess Outta Misery*

*From the Mississippi Delta* by Endesha Ida Mae Holland

*Roosters* by Milcha Sanchez-Scott

*Yellowman* by Dael Orlandersmith

*Miriam's Flowers* by Migdalia Cruz

*The Writers Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers* By Christopher Vogler

*Letters to A Young Poet*, Rainer Maria Rilke (Available On-line), [http://www.carrothers.com/rilke\\_main.htm](http://www.carrothers.com/rilke_main.htm)

*The Book of Tea* by Kakuzo Okakura

*African Philosophy: An Anthology* Edited by Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze

*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*.

Your Final Project, your thesis play, is 100% of your grade. This is your final examination as well.

The Final Project play shall be graded according to the following rubric and on a percentage basis (such as 95/100) according to the grading scale below:

- 25% Quality of character development.
- 25% Quality of story development.
- 25% Quality of dialogue crafting.
- 25% Originality, overall creative achievement, and professionalism of project, which includes formatting, spelling, and grammar.

See Attachment A for the assessment breakdown.

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

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 instructor 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**

1/18 – USC Holiday. Martin Luther King, Jr., Birthday. No class.

1/25 – **Collective meeting.** Thesis assessments based on work achieved in fall semester 2020. Review of syllabus and writing goals for the project. Read *Hero’s Journey* for 2/3.

2/1 – Wellness Day.

2/8 – Collective meeting. Discussion of *Hero’s Journey* and thesis plays with peer and mentor dramaturgy.

2/15 – USC Holiday. President’s Day. No Class.

2/22 – Carlyn Flint conference. Writing workshop with dramaturgical counsel.

3/1 – Amanda Black conference. Writing workshop with dramaturgical counsel.

3/8 – Wellness Day.

3/15 – Carlyn Flint conference. Writing workshop with dramaturgical counsel.

3/22 – Wellness Day.

[NOTE: 3/26 is university submission date for thesis. Submit drafts to Sergio Ramirez and MFADW Program Director Velina Hasu Houston.]

3/29 – Amanda Black conference. Writing workshop with dramaturgical counsel.

4/5 – Wellness Day.

4/12 – Collective meeting. Thesis play discussion plus professional transition matters.

4/19 – Wellness Day.

4/26 – Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Outreach Event. Narratives of Black Culture in the US. Participants to be announced.

FINAL PROJECTS DUE 4/30 by 5 pm PST @ greentea@usc.edu.

## \*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](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.

**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)

## ATTACHMENT A

### Rubric for Assessment of Final Project/Final Exam

#### USC MFADW FINAL PROJECT EVALUATION

Course Number/Name: THTR 596b Thesis Development & Attainment, Spring 2021

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Grading Guidelines from Syllabus:

USC definitions of grades: "A" for work of excellent quality, "B" for work of good quality. USC Department of Grading details the grading issue: <http://www.usc.edu/dept/ARR/grades/gradinghandbook/gradingpolicies.html>.

Grading is determined on the following scale:

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

[Failing Grade for Graduate Credit = C-]

The class presentation grade is evaluated on this scale with the grade breaking down as follows: 25% Quality of structure/through-line/ plotting (story execution), 25% Quality of character development and execution, 25% Quality of dialogue crafting and execution, 25% Quality of overall creative achievement/ professional promise of project/ theatricality/ originality of vision/ presentation.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Quality of storytelling (through-line/execution)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Quality of character development
- \_\_\_\_\_ Quality of dialogue development
- \_\_\_\_\_ Quality of overall creative achievement (professionalism: professional formatting/ theatricality/ originality of vision)

These guidelines mean that I will ask myself the following questions about your play; these are examples, but please extrapolate from the four categories noted above:

- Am I able to discern the story?
- How does the story on the page compare to the story verbalized by the playwright in class?
- Is the story well-executed with a clear and progressive through-line?
- Do all of the characters have a dramatic purpose in the play? Are the characters necessary to the story that is executed?
- Are the characters' fully dimensional?
- Is the dialogue well-crafted?
- Does each character have his or her or their own way of speaking and is it clear why?
- Is the play formatted professionally?
- Is the play 89 pages or less?
- Has the playwright copy-edited the play for spelling and grammar precision?
- What elements of theatricality exist in the play and are they integrated into the world of the play?
- Is the artistic vision of the play original?

Etc.