**GESM 35310 Eco-Theatre**

**Units: 4**

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

**Location: DRC 105**

**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 write dramatic scenes about the state of the world as we know it – its history, present danger, and highly uncertain future – with an emphasis on the growing threats to our environment, such as climate change. We analyze six plays that find the drama in environmental issues, as well as reading scientific and journalistic essays that focus on ecology. We will analyze the risks and rewards, the economics and the politics, that bring complexity to the issues. 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 our ecology affects real people in real ways, and to use drama to find out the human stakes to these problems.

**Prerequisite(s):** Open only to Freshmen not currently enrolled at School of Dramatic Arts.

**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 TEMPEST**

**Waters, Steve CONTINGENCY PLAN**

**Description and Assessment of Assignments**

Be prepared to read in a qualitatitive 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 germaine 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.

**Trigger Warnings**: It is my considered opinion that the best plays are triggering. They often deal with distressing material and occasionally use language and imagery that might cause upset. They are pieces of their time and moment, as are yours now. We will analyze why the drama takes plays to dangerous places, and we will do so responsibly and with sensitivity.

**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 **in-class** **MIDTERM in class on Wednesday, October 6**, and one **FINAL EXAM in class on Friday, December 10 from 2-4pm.** You must be there to take both tests. If you foresee a problem attending, you MUST let me know, 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, 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 23 **FIRST CLASS, INTRODUCTIONS, EXPECTATIONS, GOALS, LEARNING OBJECTIVES, GRADING RUBRICS, DEFINITIONS OF ECO- AND -THEATRE, EXPLORATIONS, INVENTIONS**

Wednesday, August 25 **EXPECTATIONS, CONTIGENCIES, RECKONINGS, HISTORY/MYSTERY**

Monday, August 30 **TEMPEST, ACTS 1&2 CITY AND FOREST**

Wednesday, September 1 **TEMPEST, ACTS 3-5 URBAN SPRAWL AND ARCTIC FIRES**

Monday September 6 **LABOR DAY, NO CLASS**

Wednesday, September 8 **ISLAND OF THE MIND SCENES**

Monday, September 13 **ISLAND OF THE MIND SCENES**

Wednesday, September 15 **EDI COMMUNITY DAY @ SDA, NO CLASS**

Monday, September 20 **SILA, INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND ANIMALS**

Wednesday, September 22  **SILA, PROSE AND POETRY**

Monday, September 27 **PROSE AND POETRY SCENES**

Wednesday, September 29 **PROSE AND POETRY SCENES**

Monday, October 4 **ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE, WATER, OWNERSHIP AND POLLUTION, WHISTLEBLOWING**

Wednesday, October 6 **MIDTERM IN CLASS, ATTENDANCE MANDATORY**

Monday, October 11 **WHISTLEBLOWING SCENES, MIDTERMS RETURNED**

Wednesday, October 13 **WHISTLEBLOWING SCENES**

Monday, October 18 **CONTINGENCY PLAN, SCIENCE VS POLITICS**

Wednesday, October 20 **CONTINGENCY PLAN, SCIENCE VS POLITICS SCENES**

Monday, October 25 **SCIENCE VS POLITICS SCENES**

Wednesday, October 27 **SCIENCE VS POLITCS SCENES**

Monday, November 1 **THE WHITE PLAGUE**

Wednesday, November 3 **THE WHITE PLAGUE**

Monday, November 8 **PLAGUE SCENES**

Wednesday, November 10 **PLAGUE SCENES**

Monday, November 15  **WALLOWA, THE ELEMENTS AND THE SURVIVAL INDEX**

Wednesday, November 17 **WALLOWA, THE SPIRITS, THE THEORY OF DUENDE**

Monday, November 22 SILA, **DUENDE SCENES**

Wednesday, November 24 **THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY, NO CLASS**

Monday, November 29, **DUENDE SCENES**

Wednesday, December 1 **END OF JOURNEY**

Friday, December 10 **FINAL EXAM, 2-4pm, ATTENDANCE MANDATORY**

**SDA PRODUCTIONS, ISPS, AND EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES**

SDA productions, ISPs and Extracurricular Activities\* will not excuse you from any class work. There will be no exceptions made for absences in class, missed or delayed assignments, homework or lack of class participation resulting from your involvement in any of the above. Your grade will reflect your work in this class, independent from work in any other class or activity.

\*Activities that have been officially sanctioned by the larger university (such as marching band, song girls, or varsity sports) are exempt. You must submit official documentation to your professor regarding your participation in an event prior to your absence.

**EDI @SDA: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT/MANDATORY EDI TRAINING**

Wednesday, September 15, 2021

As part of our EDI initiatives and call to action, some workshops will be offered to faculty and staff and to students. Competencies that will be included: Anti-Racism (Faculty/Staff) and Equity Mindedness (Faculty/Staff), and then Theater Intimacy & Building Cultures of Consent (Students, Faculty/Staff). More details will follow. NOTE: All SDA classes will be cancelled to support involvement in this effort.

**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](https://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 Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from OSAS. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. OSAS is located in GFS 120 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Website for OSAS and contact information: (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 814-4618 (Vidoe Phone), (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.

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**Health and Participation in Class**

You are expected to complete your Trojan Check screener daily and, as your instructor, I may ask you to show your daily screening in class. Your health and safety, and the health and safety of your peers, are my top priorities. If you are experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19, or if you discover that you have been in close contact with others who have symptoms or who have tested positive, you must follow the instructions on Trojan Check. My hope is that if you are feeling ill or if you have been exposed to someone with the virus, you will stay home to protect others. I will ensure that you can continue to participate in class remotely so that your education is not disrupted.

To reduce the spread of COVID-19, USC requires that face coverings (masks) be worn indoors including in classrooms. Face coverings must cover your nose and mouth and be worn throughout the class session. A mask with a valve is not considered an adequate face covering and should not be used, as it can expel exhaled air, increasing the risk to others. Eating or drinking during class is prohibited because of the risk posed by removing your mask for these activities. Failure to comply with these requirements will result in your being asked to leave the classroom immediately. Requests for accommodations related to the face covering and eating/drinking policies should be directed to the Office for Student Accessibility Services (<https://osas.usc.edu/>).

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**SDA Student Support & Reporting Form:**

To facilitate a supportive environment of accountability, SDA has created an internal system of reporting for students to address issues/concerns and to offer feedback or suggestions for improvement. This mechanism provides a pathway for reporting and offering feedback without fear of retaliation or judgment. Any submission filed through this form will be reviewed and processed accordingly through SDA Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion.

To file a report, please visit: <https://bit.ly/SDAstudentreporting>

**Support Systems:**

*Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call*

[studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling](https://studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling/)

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

*National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call*

[suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org/)

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

*Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press “0” after hours – 24/7 on call*

[studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault](https://studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault/)

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

*Office of Equity and Diversity (OED) - (213) 740-5086 | Title IX – (213) 821-8298*

[equity.usc.edu](https://equity.usc.edu/), [titleix.usc.edu](http://titleix.usc.edu)

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

*Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298*

[usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care\_report](https://usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care_report/)

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office of Equity and Diversity |Title IX for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

*The Office of Student Accessibility Services - (213) 740-0776*

<https://osas.usc.edu>

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

*USC Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 821-4710*

[campussupport.usc.edu](https://campussupport.usc.edu/)

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

*Diversity at USC - (213) 740-2101*

[diversity.usc.edu](https://diversity.usc.edu/)

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost’s Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

*USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call*

[dps.usc.edu](http://dps.usc.edu/), [emergency.usc.edu](http://emergency.usc.edu/)

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

*USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call*

[dps.usc.edu](http://dps.usc.edu/)

Non-emergency assistance or information.