

USC School of Dramatic Arts

THTR-365: Playwriting I
Spring 2023—Tuesdays/Thursdays—1:00PM-2:50PM
Location: MCC102

Instructor: Luis Alfaro, Associate Professor
Office Hours: By appointment Tues/Thurs
Contact Info: luisalfa@usc.edu/SLACK/3233698306

Course Description and Overview

A twice-weekly workshop focusing on the essential elements of playwriting through weekly assignments, students' initiative, readings of scenes & plays, and extensive classroom analysis and dramaturgy.

Learning Objectives

Students will write their own material for the stage and read assigned text, as well as research, create and develop material on a weekly basis. Students will participate in the dramaturgy and assistance of their fellow student's work. The class will work together in the process of honing individual talents, through observation and participation. The focus is on learning how to write a play and engage in dramaturgical response using the landmark essay "Towards A Process of Critical Response" as a base for conversation and suggestion.

Goals

Students will write an original one act play while exploring elements of a play, including conflict, subtext, and character development.

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

The Presence of the Actor

Joseph Chaikin

Publisher: Theatre Communications Group (TCG):

ISBN-10: 1559360305 / ISBN-13: 978-1559360302

Towards a Process of Critical Response

Liz Lerman

[professor will provide]

Description of Grading Criteria and Assessment of Assignments

This class is process oriented and it is assumed that finished works will be the result. Students who have completed the requirements of the class should expect a strong first draft, at the very least, of their work. If the Professor chooses to focus on elements within the play that might benefit the student more than a finished work, the student will not be penalized for an unfinished draft.

The class is split into THREE sections – conceptualization (weeks 1-7), production (weeks 8-12) presentation (weeks 13-15). The First Section will focus on numerous writing assignments and learning the skills of playwriting. The Second Section will focus on writing a one-act play. The Third Section will focus on the art of rewriting and editing.

The semester will be spent creating material, learning technique, and doing research. The course will focus on both finding and exploring the individual artist's voice, using autobiographical and character exercises to build on the authenticity of that voice, as well as focusing on topical or thematic material developed in collaboration with the class.

Assignments are presented in the classroom. Therefore, it is expected that you will bring your completed assignments to class and share them. Regular submission deadline will be MONDAYS & WEDNESDAYS at MIDNIGHT.

It is difficult to qualify an artwork, so the discipline and timing of meeting and turning in assignments is important towards your grade. Turning in assignments late, or not at all, will affect your grade.

FOR SDA Assignments: Students will be required to complete written “homework” assignments on a weekly basis. Students are expected to present their work in class weekly. Students will be expected to focus out of class time for the preparation of their performances.

Students must complete a final exam and to come to the final wrap-up class during the scheduled final exam period, to pass the course. You cannot leave early. If you have a conflicting final exam, you should let me know at the beginning of the semester. Class assignments will be regarded as written exams.

FOR SDA GRADING CRITERIA: *The grading guidelines shall clearly articulate the specific and expected standards which constitute work of excellent, good, and fair quality with regard to the course in question.*

Grading Scale for SDA: **A** indicates work of excellent quality; **B** of good quality; **C** of average quality; **D** of below average quality; and **F** indicates inadequate work.

Grading Breakdown

The SDA GUIDELINES on GRADING as published elsewhere in this handbook are:

- Each course shall contain at least three assignments, projects, exams, papers or exercises which shall be evaluated during the semester, and which shall provide an analytical record of each student's progress in the course.
- Attendance shall be weighted at no more than 15% as per University Guidelines. Studio Courses must delineate how participation will be graded (in class exercises, scene study, etc.)
- There shall be no unexcused absences.
- No late assignments, projects, exams, papers, or exercises shall be accepted unless advance extensions have been arranged between the student and the teacher or unless exceptional circumstances occur.

School of Theatre classes use the University's grading scale:

96-100%=A

95-91%=A-

88-90%=B+

85-87%=B

81-84%=B-

78-80%=C+

75-77%=C

71-74%=C- [Fail Grade for Graduate Credit]

67-70%=D+

66-64%=D

61-63%=D-

Criteria of evaluation will be based on the individual students' potential for learning and creation, and grades will not be competitively based, i.e., who writes the "best" work in the class.

Students are expected to show up on time; present assignments when they are due and actively participate with in-class dramaturgical analysis and discussion of fellow class work. Class time is impossible to make up - one must be there to participate. Reliability and enthusiasm count.

Grade Evaluation

<u>Student Responsibility</u>	<u>Point Value</u>	<u>% of Grade</u>
Weekly Class Dramaturgy	100	25%
Mid Term Exam	100	15%
Final Exam	100	25%
Character/Environment Assignment	100	10%
First Draft Play	100	25%

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

Week #1 – *It's a Bust*

[Setting up the room. Creating a list of collective class agreements on how we want to work as a collaborative class. What are your personal goals for this course? What can you offer to the larger cohort of collaborators you will be working with? What are the ways you want to work in? How can we listen and respond to each other?]

Week #2 - *Let's Talk*

[Critical response process. "Towards a Process of Critical Response" by Liz Lerman.

Step One: *Statements of Meaning* - Responders state what was meaningful, evocative, interesting, exciting, and/or striking in the work they have just witnessed. An affirmation/The Pop/What did you like?

Step Two: *Artist as Questioner* – What were you hearing? Showing my cards.

Step Three: *Neutral Questions* - Responders ask neutral questions about the work, and the artist responds. Questions are neutral when they do not have an opinion couched in them. Criticism in the form of a question.

Taking the trust walk with a partner in the class. Interviewing them. Writing your partners story in a monologue.]

Week #3 – *Tension & Metaphor*

[Presentation of partner monologue. Tension – partner up and write a scene in which each one of you has a need/want objective/intention. Build the scene together using only one-line responses back and forth on the same page. Assignment: "Children's Story", using metaphor to understand the poetry in your play. Write a children's story for a five-year old about a relationship you recently destroyed, something complicated that allows metaphor to do allow complication and simplicity at the same time.]

Week #4 – *Environment & Dramaturges*

[Presentation of children's stories. Assigning our dramaturgy partners. Pair up with one other person in the class who will lead your dramaturgy sessions and be your creative partner for the rest of the semester. Assignment: "Blueprint", draw a blueprint of the neighborhood you call home. Label two areas with the following – heart of the neighborhood, scariest place in the neighborhood. Write a memory about either, at least a page long, thinking in details, both physical and emotional.]

Week #5 – *Character in Action*

[Presentation of the Blueprint exercise. Assignment: "The Pitch", tell your partner your idea for a one-act play. What do you want to say, how do you want to say it? Assignment: Write a monologue in which your character rants on something of utmost importance to you. Think of sustaining an emotion and how to be consistent in the piece.]

Week #6 – Character & Pitching

[Introducing your first piece for the class, critical response session led by your partner.
Assignment: “Unpack”, add at least one full page to your piece. Where do you need to further a thought or explain a concept or idea? What is missing? Take the age exercise, cut in half and write a story about yourself.]

Week #7 – Learning from Others

[Continue group dramaturgy session, led by partners. Breaking into smaller groups to focus on details of your scenes and how we can improve them.]

Week #8 – Getting to the Core

[Writing the one-act, challenges and successes. Talking about obstacles in class setting. Getting exercises to help. What is missing in your work?]

Week #9 – Getting a draft done

[What does it take to drive the piece, be surprising, authentic and theatrical? Working on your character’s voice.]

Week #10 – Finishing up the first draft

[Sending your first draft to your partner. Letting your partner offer a written response. Thinking about the elements that are both exciting and challenging. What is still missing in the piece?]

Week #11 – turning in that first draft

[Continue group dramaturgy session, led by partners. Can we use this week just to focus on character? Motivations/Actions.]

Week #12 – Rewriting exercises

Continue group dramaturgy session, led by partners. Can we use this week just to focus on start? What are elements of your story that need to be unpacked?]

Week #13 – Rewriting exercises

[Continue group dramaturgy session, led by partners. Time to think about form/structure/layout.]

Week #14 – Rewriting exercises

[Continue group dramaturgy session, led by partners. Talking about you the whole of our piece to the class.]

Week #15 – Getting it in.

[Yay, you did it or Boo, you didn’t... Let’s examine the work collectively. How did we do as a group? Where did we find inspiration in each other or as a collective?]

Final Examination Date:

Wednesday, May 10, 2023, from 2:00PM-4:00PM

***NOTE:** All undergraduate classes must meet for the Final Examination as established by the University. You may not hold your final examination on the last day of classes.*

Academic Calendar/Holidays

First Day of Class, Tuesday, January 9, 2023

Martin Luther King Holiday, Monday, January 16, 2023

President's Day, Monday, February 20, 2023

Spring Recess, Sunday – Sunday, March 12-19, 2023

Last Day of Class, Thursday, April 27, 2023

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

Equity, Diversity & Inclusion + Intimacy in Theater Consent Culture Statement:

Through our pluralistic approach of diverse pedagogies, methodologies, ideologies, and modalities of artistic expression, we invite(engage) and challenge students to expand their breadth and depth of knowledge, complexity, and range of the human experience. Even though we nurture, guide, and challenge our students to embrace the unknown or unfamiliar and step outside of

their comfort zones through storytelling/art, we aim to practice effective strategies and offer tools to students mindful of their physical, psychological, social, and emotional wellbeing. In alignment with professional and industry standards, we will integrate core principles and techniques of Intimacy in Theater and Building Cultures of Affirmative Consent. This will provide agency, offer resources and support to the teachers, students, directors, and staff to establish healthy boundaries of consent when working on material that is physically, intimately, or emotionally charged content in both the classroom and production.

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

Luis Alfaro is a Chicano playwright born and raised in the Pico/Union district of downtown Los Angeles. He was most recently Associate Artistic Director of Center Theatre Group at the Music Center of Los Angeles County. He is also an Associate Professor at the University of Southern California. He has received fellowships from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, popularly known as a “genius grant”, awarded to people who have demonstrated expertise and exceptional creativity in their respective fields; United States Artists; Ford Foundation Art of Change; Joyce Foundation; Mellon Foundation and is the recipient of the PEN America/Laura Pels International Foundation Theater Award for a Master Dramatist. He was the inaugural Playwright-in-Residence for six seasons at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival (2013-2019); Playwright’s Ensemble at Chicago’s Victory Gardens Theatre (2013-2020); Inaugural Latinx Playwrights at the Los Angeles Theatre Center (2021); and Ojai Playwrights Conference member since 2002. His plays include *Electricidad*, *Oedipus El Rey*, *Mojada* and have been seen at regional theatres throughout the United States and Europe. Luis spent two decades in the Los Angeles Poetry and Performance Art communities.