

USC School of Dramatic Arts

THTR 596b Thesis Development & Attainment, 63289D

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

Units: 2; Syllabus Dated November 27, 2022

Spring 2023, Session 001—Mondays—Time: 12-1:20 PM & Other As Needed

Location: TBD

Instructor: Velina Hasu Houston, MFA, PhD

Pronouns: she/her/hers/kanojo, Race: MR/O, Blood Type: O+

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

Office Hours: 12:30-2:30 PM Tuesdays 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.*

IT Help: USC Information Technology Services, <http://itservices.usc.edu>

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 an independent study course in which the student prepares the thesis play for thesis submission via dramaturgical development and script diagnostics.

Course Notes

Over the first two years in the program, a student's developmental skills increase, reaching full autonomy in the final program year. Putting those skills to considered use in the refinement of the thesis play is the expectation. The course allows the student to dedicate specific hours to development, nurturing, and maintenance of the thesis.

The course is designed to support the student in 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 written in the program prior to the third year in the program.

Learning Objectives

1. Strengthening character development and execution
2. Writing in a mode that is mindful of professional standards: 6 or fewer characters, 50-89 pages, no more or less (not including title, copyright, and cast of characters pages)
3. Strengthening story development and execution
4. Using correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling
5. Utilizing standard manuscript format (standard margins, 12-point font size, and play formatting [<https://www.dramatistsguild.com/script-formats>])
6. Copyrighting your play
7. Overall refinement of the thesis play (see grading rubric for specifics)

Assignment Submission Guideline

Please submit your Final Project electronically as a **doc/docx document** so that commentary also may be provided electronically. If you choose to submit it as a PDF, it is understood you do not desire written feedback, but merely summary comments. Because of the nature of your artistic creation, submit directly to the instructor at greentea@usc.edu, not via Blackboard.

Readings

Required

1. "Mouth Full of Blood" by Toni Morrison
2. Your Play and Your 596b Colleagues' Plays
3. 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.)

Supplementary:

- a) "Fairview" by Jackie Sibblies Drury
- b) "And the Soul Shall Dance" by Wakako Yamauchi
- c) "Leopoldstadt" By Tom Stoppard
- d) "Cannibal" by Safiya Sinclair
- e) "Kindred" By Octavia Butler
- f) "When Can We Go Back to America?" By Susan H. Kamei
- g) "Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End" By Atul Gawande
- h) "Japanese Death Poems: Written by Zen Monks and Haiku Poets on the Verge of Death" Ed. By Yoel Hoffman
- i) "The Power of Myth" By Joseph Campbell
- j) "Letters to A Young Poet" By Rainer Maria Rilke
- k) "The Art of Dramatic Writing" By Lajos Egri
- l) "The Book of Tea" By Kakuzo Okakura

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. A final grade is entirely up to the student with regards to the effort expended to meet course requirements.

USC's definitions of grades are: "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*.

Assignments:

Reading and discussion of "Mouth Full of Blood"	10% of final grade
Final Project/Final Examination	90% of final grade

The reading and discussion of "Mouth Full of Blood" will be evaluated on a 0-100% basis, assessed throughout the course from Week Four-Nine.

The Final Project/Final Exam 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.

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

Week One, 1/9. Gestalt of dramatic writing, professional development issues, assessment of thesis development process and status including oral synopses. Start reading "Mouth Full of Blood" (pages 1-197 due Week Four).

1/16. USC HOLIDAY. NO CLASS.

Week Three, 1/23. Independent studies and writing. Continue reading pages 1-197 of "Mouth Full of Blood" and be prepared to discuss in conference.

Week Four, 1/30. Individual conferences. Consideration of thesis projects, discussion of developmental pathways, discussion of required reading. Discussion of "Mouth Full of Blood."

Week Five, 2/6. Independent studies and writing. Check-in and observations of current state of development.

Week Six, 2/13. Independent studies and writing. Check-in and observations of current state of development. Read pages 198-350 of "Mouth Full of Blood" and be prepared to discuss on 3/6.

2/20. USC HOLIDAY. NO CLASS.

Week Eight, 2/27. Independent studies and writing. Check-in and observations of current state of development.

Week Nine, 3/6. Group meeting. Writing workshop: scene presentations with mentor and external dramaturgical commentary and review. Discussion of "Mouth Full of Blood."

3/13. USC HOLIDAY. NO CLASS. (SPRING RECESS.)

Week Ten, 3/20. Writing workshop: scene presentations with mentor and external dramaturgical commentary and review.

Week Eleven, 3/27. Project presentation using student readers. Student 1. Site TBD.

Week Twelve, 4/3. Project presentation using student readers. Student 2. Site TBD.

Week Thirteen, 4/10. Project presentation using student readers. Student 3. Site TBD.

Week Fourteen, 4/17. Independent studies and writing. Check-in and observations of current state of development.

Week Fifteen, 4/24. Final Week. Pre-production drafts completed and due. Guest Artist Panel: Diversity, equity, and inclusion in the theatre arts discipline. Online.

Final Exam/Final Project Submission, 5/5. Final exam/project date as designated by USC is due **5/5 between 11 am and 1 pm**. Please submit your final draft of your thesis play between those times, **no earlier or later**, to 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.

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.

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 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.

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/>).

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

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

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

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, 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

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

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

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, 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

Non-emergency assistance or information.