

THTR 365 – Playwriting I

62964R/Units: 4

Fall 2023 — TUES, THURS — 4:00-5:50pm

Location: KAP 137

Instructor: Boni B. Alvarez

Office Hours: by appt: TUES, THURS 12-1:30pm

Office: MCC 212

Contact Info: bbalvare@usc.edu

(I will reply as soon as I can, but please allow 24 hours for a response.)

Course Description

This course is a twice-weekly workshop focusing on the essential elements of playwriting through weekly assignments, students' initiative, reading of scenes and extensive classroom analysis and dramaturgy.

Learning Objectives

- Through in-class writing exercises and dramaturgy, students develop a command of dramatic elements: character; setting; story; conflict; dialogue; language; metaphor; subtext; tone; theatricality.
- Through exploratory exercises, students unearth and cultivate their individual playwright's voice, while developing a personalized creative process.
- Students will learn how to effectively participate in a writers' workshop, contributing to the building and nurturing of a fertile and creative space.
- This course strengthens the students' abilities of critical analysis through the reading of, written responses, and discussion of contemporary plays.
- Students will complete a first draft of a full one-act or the first act/half of a new full-length dramatic work for the stage.

Required Readings – Texts have been ordered through the USC Bookstore.

- Morisseau, Dominique. *Skeleton Crew*
- Norman, Marsha. *'Night, Mother*
- Nguyen, Qui. *Vietgone* - ***this play will be distributed electronically**
- Shawn, Wallace. *Aunt Dan & Lemon*
- Solis, Octavio. *Lydia*

The required readings deal with intense and disturbing subject matter. This course ascribes to the adage that a playwright's artistic purpose is to hold up a mirror to the world they live in, illuminating the potential of extreme dramatic situations – those that force us to ponder the fundamentals of human existence. Please consider this syllabus itself an overall content warning and your participation in the course an explicit consent to experiencing difficult and/or troubling art.

Description and Assessment of Assignments

The work required for this course is creative, towards the goal of creating art. Works of art are subjective and difficult to qualify. Your grade in this course will largely be determined by the thoroughness of your effort, your engagement in process, and the imagination displayed in the exercises and pages submitted.

Participation – 15%

Students must demonstrate preparedness of the assigned readings. Students must commit to both individual and group in-class writing exercises. Students must practice engaged volunteerism.

Participation is necessary not only for the development of your own work, but for the development of your fellow playwrights' as well. In a playwriting workshop, active listening & engagement are imperative – students should be respectful and generous when offering and receiving feedback.

Empathy is a requirement for this course. It is imperative we nurture a creative space, one in which everyone feels emboldened to bravely take artistic risks. Behavior that endangers the creative space will adversely affect your participation grade.

Building Block Assignments – 20% overall

These exercises help unearth your individual artistic voice and build the play you are trying to write. These assignments draw from autobiography, the imagination, and other dramatic works.

- Character List – 5pts
- Character Monologue – 5pts
- Play Pitch – 5pts
- Metaphor Scenes – 5pts

Play Responses – 20%

There are a total of 4 written Play Responses (5pts each) due over the course of the semester for the plays below. Due dates can be found on the Weekly Schedule.

- *Skeleton Crew*
- *Lydia*
- *Vietgone*
- *Aunt Dan and Lemon*

Workshop Pages – 30%

Each playwright has 3 designated dates for workshopping new pages. Each workshop session has a value of 10 points. To earn full points, students must bring in 5-7 pages.

Pages are to be submitted via e-mail and will be read electronically in class. Pages should be formatted following the industry standard – Courier font, 12pt.

Final Project – 15%

Students will submit a first draft of a full one-act or the first act/half of a new full-length dramatic work for the stage (30-45 pages). Plays will be evaluated on character development, language, story & structure, and theatricality. Projects will also be evaluated on expression of playwright’s voice, overall impact, as well as professional presentation.

Grading Breakdown

| ASSIGNMENT | % of grade |
|--------------------------------|-------------------|
| Participation | 15 |
| Building Block Assignments (4) | 20 |
| Play Responses (4x5pts) | 20 |
| Workshop Pages | 30 |
| Final Project | 15 |
| TOTAL | 100 |

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.

| | | |
|------------|----------|-----------|
| A+: 100-98 | A: 97-94 | A-: 93-90 |
| B+: 89-87 | B: 86-84 | B-: 83-80 |
| C+: 79-77 | C: 76-74 | C-: 73-70 |
| D+: 69-67 | D: 66-64 | D-: 63-60 |
| F: 59-0 | | |

When a student’s mathematical GPA falls between two grades, the final grade will be weighted towards the higher end of the scale for students whose attendance and participation in class have been excellent or good and toward the lower end for those with average or poor attendance and participation.

Additional Policies

Assignment Submission: **NO LATE ASSIGNMENTS WILL BE ACCEPTED.**

MISSED CLASSES – It is your responsibility to obtain information about missed class discussions and assignments from your colleagues.

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.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

1 CHARACTER

TUES 8/22 Interviews & Introductions

THURS 8/24 [DUE: Norman's 'Night, Mother](#)

2

TUES 8/29 [DUE: CHARACTER LISTS](#); conflict & antagonists

THURS 8/31 Character lists (cont)

3

TUES 9/5 [DUE: CHARACTER MONOLOGUES](#)

[WED 9/6 – 9pm - DUE: Skeleton Crew PLAY RESPONSE](#)

THURS 9/7 *Skeleton Crew*; character monologues (cont)

4 WORLD OF THE PLAY

TUES 9/12 Shaping the world of the play; setting exercise (in-class)

[WED 9/13 – 9pm DUE: Lydia PLAY RESPONSE](#)

THURS 9/14 *Lydia*; Layering your world – beyond the physical

5 PLAY IDEAS

TUES 9/19 [DUE: PLAY PITCH – \(Group A\)](#)

THURS 9/21 [DUE: PLAY PITCH – \(Group B\)](#)

6

TUES 9/26 [DUE: PLAY PITCH – \(Group C\)](#)

METAPHOR & THEATRICALITY

THURS 9/28 [DUE: METAPHOR SCENES](#)

7

[MON 10/2 – 9pm DUE: Vietgone PLAY RESPONSE](#)

TUES 10/3 *Vietgone*; tone/mood/style; metaphor scenes (cont)

WORKSHOP

THURS 10/5 [DUE: 5-7 PAGES – \(Group J\)](#)

8

TUES 10/10 [DUE: 5-7 PAGES – \(Group K\)](#)

THURS 10/12 [FALL RECESS – NO CLASS](#)

9

TUES 10/17 [DUE: 5-7 PAGES – \(Group L\)](#)

THURS 10/19 [DUE: 5-7 PAGES – \(Group M\)](#)

10

TUES 10/24 [DUE: 5-7 PAGES – \(Group J\)](#)

THURS 10/26 [DUE: 5-7 PAGES – \(Group K\)](#)

11

TUES 10/31 [DUE: 5-7 PAGES – \(Group L\)](#)

THURS 11/2 [DUE: 5-7 PAGES – \(Group M\)](#)

12 PLAY'S THESIS

MON 11/6 – 9pm DUE: *Aunt Dan & Lemon* PLAY RESPONSE

TUES 11/7 *Aunt Dan & Lemon*; What am I trying to say with my play?

WORKSHOP (cont)

THURS 11/9 **DUE: 5-7 PAGES – (Group J)**

13

TUES 11/14 **DUE: 5-7 PAGES – (Group K)**

THURS 11/16 **DUE: 5-7 PAGES – (Group L)**

14

TUES 11/21 **DUE: 5-7 PAGES – (Group M)**

THURS 11/23 **THANKSGIVING – NO CLASS**

15

TUES 11/28 **WORKSHOP - OVERFLOW**

THURS 11/30 Evaluation: What needs re-tooling; What's missing; theatricality

FINAL PROJECT DUE THURS 12/7 4:30-6:30pm

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

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.

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.