

USC School of Dramatic Arts

“And ultimately, now, I’m interested in revealing differences – I appreciate gaps. Now, many years later, I talk to my students about reaching towards another human being and understanding that you might not make it. I call it the “broad jump towards the other.”

- Anna Deavere Smith (Actor, Playwright, National Humanities Medal Awardee)

Course: Intermediate Acting II (THTR 352b)

Units: 4

Time: Spring 2024, Tuesdays / Thursdays 11:00 am -**12:40 pm**

Location: MCC 106, outdoor spaces and Zoom

Instructor: Assistant Professor in Acting [Esther K. Chae](#)
(Yale School of Drama Acting M.F.A., University of Michigan Theater Studies M.A.)

Office Hours: By appointment only via email to the instructor (before/after class or Zoom)

Contact Info: chaeesth@usc.edu (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, (213) 740-1288, MCC

Course Description and Overview

Students will learn techniques and tools to create and explore what it means to be an *empathetic actor* by intensive research, dramaturgy, and sensitivity to the human condition. Students will be challenged to work as an ensemble and also to play identities that are different from themselves based on psychological, social, and emotional life circumstances.

The course is structured in 3 parts: The Physical World, The Verbal World and The Psychological/Emotional world for developing the actor’s instrument. Of course none of these exist silo or separate for the actor when developing a character or scene - they serve as valuable focal points to build upon, as students practice and become proficient in the skills needed to analyze a play and the arc of a character.

An inclusive range of genres (non-verbal theater, docu-theater/verbatim theater, and BIPOC plays) drawn from the global canon of diverse voices, texts, and methodologies will be used. A wide range of intersectional identities will also be explored in the class.

Students will independently create, develop, and sustain a role. The actor will become proficient with the ability to enter the world of the character based on thorough exploration/investigation of the text, dramaturgy, and research. Students will master the basic principles of acting needed to analyze a scene, character, and world of play. Students will become adept at being “athletes of the soul.”

Learning Outcomes:

- Students will be able to perform using different acting methodologies, including full body warm-up, Viewpoints, Portraits of Humanity, ADS technique, and ensemble work.
- Students can independently create, develop, and sustain a character that explores intersectional identities.
- Students will become proficient with the ability to enter the world of the character empathetically through rigorous research + dramaturgy + in-depth rehearsal using acting techniques approached via 3 lenses: The physical/movement, linguistically/text, and emotional/psychological realm of characters.
- Students will master the basic principles of acting needed to analyze a character, scene, and world of play.

Required Reading and Viewing (Plays)

Check hyper links to recordings and reading material provided in Google Doc syllabus, otherwise purchase or library access will be needed.

[The Viewpoints Book: A practical guide to Viewpoints and Composition](#) - Anne Bogart and Tina Landau

[Twilight: Los Angeles](#) by Anna Deavere Smith

[The Laramie Project](#) by Moisés Kaufman and the members of the Tectonic

[Undesirable Elements: Real People, Real Lives, Real Theater](#) (library or [purchase](#))

[Everybody](#) by Branden Jacobs-Jenkins (library or [purchase](#)) - modern adaptation of 15th century play

Required Reference Links

[Twilight: Los Angeles Performance](#) at Mark Taper (March 9 - April 9, 2023)

[Twilight: Los Angeles Dramaturgical Research Packet](#)

[Ping Chong and Company's Undesirable Elements](#)

[BIPOC Swap list - the plays](#)

[List of BIPOC Plays and Creatives](#)

Suggested Reading/Viewing

[Notes from the Field](#) by Anna Deavere Smith (library or [purchase](#))

[Notes From The Field](#) (HBO movie, requires payment)

[An Actor Prepares](#) - Constantin Stanislavsky

[Letters to a Young Artist](#) - Anna Deavere Smith

[The Empty Space](#) - Peter Brook

[Everyman](#) 15th century play

Class Notes

Before each class, students must check live syllabus and (pin/star) emails from the professor for all updates, including safety precautions, class location, reading plays and reviewing preparation materials, such as articles, videos, and websites. Assignments generally follow the 'flipped classroom' style where preliminary research and review are done prior to classroom teaching.

Bring yoga mats (as needed), personal Reflection/Progression Journal (RPJ) (physical pen/paper, no electronics), and **hardcopy print outs of scripts** for rehearsals (do not rehearse from electronic devices!), personal water bottles, hand sanitizers.

Phones/Electronic Devices must **be off your body**, in the bag, and out of sight during class (unless cleared by the instructor for possible classwork) Stating the obvious - no texts, calls, emails for the duration of the class.

Attendance and participation in class are mandatory. No unexcused absences are allowed, in accordance with School of Dramatic Arts guidelines. Each unexcused absence will result in a -2 point reduction in your overall grade. An excused absence is due to serious illness, grave emergency, or the appropriate SDA leave of absence. Frequently arising illnesses during the semester (Covid, flu/cold, mono, food poisoning etc.) and manageable personal and family matters do not constitute a basis for an excused absence and Zoom attendance is considered default. You are responsible for all work missed.

There is no negotiation unless there is a health or family crisis. In that case, you must document the incident officially. Please read the Student Handbook regarding Health Service notes.

Lateness is disruptive and unprofessional. If you enter after attendance has been taken you are considered tardy, a -1 point deduction will be taken. If the student has three or more unexplained absences or "tardies" during the course, their final overall grade will be docked -5 points.

Lastly, you must be available to rehearse and prepare outside of class and make yourself available to other students.

Classroom norms

Our body, with our mind and soul, is who we are, and opening ourselves to critique (or peer feedback) can be a vulnerable process. To model the expectations of a professional work environment in our field, and promote a respectful, safe, and creative classroom environment, we agree to be respectful to the space/equipment, to fellow students, to the instructor, and to our shared experiences. All students are expected to be open to receiving and giving each other respectful and thoughtful performance feedback and constructive criticism in the positive spirit with which it is given as a means of development.

Trigger warning (referenced from USC Professors Meiling Cheng and Oliver Meyer's syllabus)

Plays often deal with distressing circumstances/conflict and characters may use language or behave in ways that are upsetting. In this course, we will be exploring the authentic human condition in potentially dangerous and controversial character portrayals or settings. We will do so respectfully, responsibly and with great sensitivity but please gauge your receptibility to potentially controversial character exploration work before you join the class. You will be asked at times to be open to entering the unknown and to stretch your comfort zone. We, as an ensemble, are obligated to respect each other's artistic decisions and process and withhold any judgment regarding work presented in class, however uncomfortable it might

make you feel personally. And we stay open and in “soft focus” to any feedback, or analysis that pertains to the process and vulnerable work. Your voluntary participation in the course constitutes agreement to experiencing difficult and/or challenging classwork.

Course evaluation

Student feedback and active participation is essential to making this course the best it can be. Students will have an opportunity to share comments during mid-semester 1:1 check-in and the standard USC course evaluation survey at the end of the semester.

Faculty Statement

As a professor who works professionally as an actor, there will be times this semester when I am likely to be absent from class. In this case, you will have asynchronous class work and/or be taught and guided by a seasoned and professional teaching SDA professor. By reading this acknowledgment, you agree to these particular terms. Please make an appointment with me if you would like to further discuss any concerns.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

The class schedule is a “live” syllabus where content changes under the professor’s discretion regarding students’ needs, space availability, guest speaker scheduling, and safety protocols - especially towards finals. It is your responsibility to manage the time and finals of various classes; and to keep updated on changes by attending class, reviewing class Google Drive and reviewing & responding back to emails from the professor.

Week 1 (1/9)

Warm-up exercises (Bring individual yoga mats)
Introduction to class + Syllabus review
Class check in + creating ensemble/setting community boundaries
1 word/phrase semester goal for self

Assignment:

Read and prepare discussion points or questions for following class

[Viewpoints Chapter 5](#)

[Understanding Viewpoints](#) article and 2 embedded videos of Anne Bogart Interview and Symposium with Tadashi Suzuki

<Part 1 The Physical World of the Actor; Viewpoints>

Week 2 (1/16)

Warm-up exercises (bring individual yoga mats)
Discussion on Viewpoints and Understanding Viewpoints reading material
Mirror exercise / Amplification Scale 1-10

Review in class Viewpoint Composition examples

Assignment: Read and review for following week

[Introducing Composition](#)

[Starting to Speak Chapter 9](#) (Vocal Viewpoints)

Week 3 (1/23)

Warm-up exercises (bring individual yoga mats)

Viewpoint Circle exercise with stop/turns/jumps + Sun Salutation Circle

Review Vocal Viewpoints

Composition Exercise (TBD groups / 5 mins) under “Exquisite Pressure”

Composition scripts/scoring must be notated in RPJ and will be spot checked.

Assignment: Start reading 3 anchor plays - Twilight:LA, Laramie Project, Undesirable Elements (choose one from this book). Also start research & reviewing Reference Links

Week 4 (1/30)

Warm-up exercises

Composition rehearsal in groups

Composition presentations (graded)

Assignment: Research Anna Deavere Smith Method in preparation for Part 2

<https://www.annadeaveresmith.org/>

<Part 2 The Verbal World of the Character; Portraits of Humanity>

Week 5 (2/6)

Vocal warm-up exercises

Discussion on Documentary Theater + Verbatim Theater - theatrical storytelling that moves beyond mimicry, imitation or appropriation. A dynamic theatrical format with a strong focus towards social justice work.

Review Anna Deavere Smith Method and her process

[Twilight : LA clips](#) + <https://www.pbs.org/video/anna-deveare-smith-rcomnq/>

Definition of Empathy for ADS character work acting exercise = “broad jump towards the other,” even if you might not make it.

Discussion on Portraits of Humanity (based on Professor Anita Dashiell-Sparks Interview/Ethnographic research titling) - choose someone different from you to portray as a character.

Assignment:

POH Interview/record/gather research material to rehearse in class. Record and upload your original interviewee character and also your own character recording for "Portraits of Humanity" (1 min max.) to Google Folder (examples [here](#))

Week 6 (2/13)

Docu-drama (Verbatim theater) "Portraits of Humanity" rehearsal
Review "Portraits of Humanity" recordings
Portraits of Humanity presentations (graded)

Assignment:

- a) Finish reading 3 plays Twilight:LA, Laramie Project, Undesirable Elements and choose 1 character from the anchor plays to work on. Bring two **hard copy printouts** (one for you and one for me) of your character choices for the following class.
- b) Watch [Watch TWILIGHT : Los Angeles PBS](#)
(Attention! to TWILIGHT:Los Angeles' [A NOTE ON CASTING](#) and Warning! to violent footage in recording)

Week 7 (2/20)

Review recording of [Michael Leon Thomas](#) (ADS productions movement coach)
5 character gestures for Movement Basket
Rehearse characters using ADS Method (bring headsets/earbuds/airpods)

Week 8 (2/27)

Rehearse characters using ADS Method
Off book, first share TBD
Character presentations (graded)

Week 9 (3/6)

Mid-term buffer
Guest speaker TBD
Midterm Check-in and assessment, either in person or Zoom

Assignments:

Choose another character or scene from either the 3 anchor plays or from the Reference Links section. Bring 2 hard copies to the following class.

~ Spring Recess 3/10-17 ~

<Part 3 The Psychological & Emotional World>

Week 10 (3/19)

Check in and review of syllabus and rest of semester trajectory and expectations of the final section
Warm-up exercise

Table read of various characters and scenes from chosen plays

Week 11(3/27)

How to get out of character - tapping, grounding work, massage, self-care
Character Image Board (Pinterest, Google Docs etc.) - visualizing your character
Rehearsal for Final Presentations of 2 characters combined, with theatrical transition

Assignments:

Off-book and dress rehearsal preparation (wardrobe/costume, make-up, shoes, accessories, props etc.)

Week 12 (4/3)

Rehearsal continued - putting together final presentation as an ensemble
Viewpoint exercise for Final Presentation as an ensemble

Week 13 (4/9)

Rehearsal continued - putting together final presentation as an ensemble
Viewpoint exercise for Final Presentation as an ensemble

Week 14 (4/16) - Prof. Chae at conference (guest professor and speaker TBD)

Dress rehearsal

Week 15 (4/23)

Final Scene Presentations (graded and recorded) - *presentations must fully incorporate all methodologies covered in class*

Semester review and wrap up

<*Study Days 4/27-4/30 Sat-Tues*>

Finals Week (Wed May 8, 2-4pm) <https://classes.usc.edu/term-20241/finals/>

Written exam (remote submission) TBD

Check for any conflicts!

Grading breakdown

Attendance and Participation Grades are based on performance and active participation, both in class and out of class on-line communication, including responding back to emails/required exercise deadlines via Google Doc.	% (points) of Grade
1) the quality of class participation (including daily attendance, class discussion, peer feedback, and respectful and positive attitude) (10)	30
2) satisfactory completion of assignments and meeting deadlines (including reviewing material outside of class and uploading assignments) (10)	

3) the quality of in-class acting performances (attention, commitment, willingness to collaborate/experiment and being an attentive audience) and out of class recordings/uploads and rehearsals. Non-availability for your partner will be penalized. (10)	
Performance Assignments: Warm ups @ top of class (if tardy, -1 deduction) (10) First Viewpoints + Composition (5) Portraits of Humanity Character Study (5) ADS Method Character Development Exercises (10) Final presentation (20) - must include all 3 Worlds of the Character (physical, verbal, emotional/psychological) covered throughout the semester	50
Written Assignments: Reflection and Progression Journaling (RPJ) and uploading related to all assignments (5) Final Written Exam (15)	20
Grade Reductions: Missing an assignment -3 points Unsatisfactory or inactive participation/collaboration outlined in the above breakdown - 3 points Absence - 2 points for each, post mid-term absences also affect <Attendance and Participation category> ex. 1 absence after mid-term will be -3 point reduction Tardiness - 1 point for each	
Total	100

Grading Scale

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

SDA PRODUCTIONS, ISPS, AND EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

SDA productions, ISPs and Extracurricular Activities* will not excuse you from any classwork. There will be no exceptions made for absences in a 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 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 GFS 120 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) 814-4618 (Video 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.

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.

Students with disabilities must provide accommodation letter and form to professor at the beginning of the semester.

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.