

# 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 January 8, 2024**

**Spring 2024, 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:** Weds. 9-11 a.m. by appointment only via email to the instructor (other times can be negotiated); as a mutual courtesy, 24-hour cancellation via email to the instructor and/or student required.

**Contact Info:** [greentea@usc.edu](mailto: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.

## Labor Acknowledgment

I acknowledge that much of what we know of the U.S. today has been made possible by the labor of enslaved Africans who suffered trans-Atlantic trafficking, chattel slavery, violence, and Jim Crow; and continue to suffer anti-Blackness. I am thankful of and honor their sacrifices. I pay my respects to their ancestors, elders, and relations, past, present, and emerging.

## Land Acknowledgment

I acknowledge the Gabrielino/Tongva peoples as the traditional land caretakers of Tovaangar (Los Angeles basin, So. Channel Islands). I acknowledge my presence on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the Gabrielino/Tongva peoples; and pay my respects to their ancestors, elders, and relations, past, present, and emerging.

## Ethnic and Gender Respect

In the name of mutual respect, let us strive to neither mis-pronoun nor mis-race one another. Non-binary refers to non-binary ethnicity, culture, and/or gender.

## 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)
8. Considering business affairs

### Assignment Submission Guideline

Please submit your Final Project electronically directly to the instructor at [greentea@usc.edu](mailto:greentea@usc.edu), not via Blackboard.

### Readings

#### Required

1. Your Play and Your 596b Colleagues' Plays
2. 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) "The Music Lessons" by Wakako Yamauchi
- b) "Walls" by Jeannie Barroga
- c) "Cannibal" by Safiya Sinclair
- d) "Kindred" By Octavia Butler
- e) "When Can We Go Back to America?" By Susan H. Kamei
- f) "Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End" By Atul Gawande
- g) "Japanese Death Poems: Written by Zen Monks and Haiku Poets on the Verge of Death" Ed. By Yoel Hoffman
- h) "The Power of Myth" By Joseph Campbell
- i) "Letters to A Young Poet" By Rainer Maria Rilke
- j) "The Art of Dramatic Writing" By Lajos Egri
- k) "The Book of Tea" By Kakuzo Okakura
- l) "Cutting for Stone" by Abraham Verghese

### 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:

Final Project/Final Examination	100% of final grade
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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 B- to receive a “CR” for the course. [Failing Grade for Graduate Credit = C-]

### Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

1/8. Status check on thesis. Overview of objectives including dramatic writing foundations and business affairs instruments (pitch decks, biographies, synopses, character breakdowns). Instructor will read and dramaturgically evaluate student thesis plays. Dates in borders are not class dates, but dates you or the SDA website noted regarding other events that have an impact on your thesis plays.

1/15. USC HOLIDAY.

1/22. Biographies, synopsis, character studies due.

1/22. Drafts of thesis plays due to SDA for NWF3, per students’ understanding.

1/29. Pitch decks due to instructor.

Luis will sponsor readings of 3<sup>rd</sup>-year MFADW plays “in first two weeks of class,” per students’ understanding.

2/5 – Independent studies and writing.

2/12 – Submit first revision of entire play.

2/19 – USC HOLIDAY.

2/26 – Individual conferences regarding revisions. Set up with instructor. Virtual or in-person available.

3/1 – (NWF3 Productions begin) – Play 1 is Cynthia’s with Denise Blasor directing.

3/4 – DEIB panel. Online.

3/11 – USC SPRING RECESS.

3/18 – Artistic panel. Online.

3/22. NWF3 – Play 2 is Mar’s with Alison De La Cruz directing.

3/25 – Collective meeting about business affairs including marketing objectives.

4/1 – Independent studies and writing, conferences as needed.

4/5. NWF3 – Play 3 is Joseph’s with Dante Brown directing.

4/8 – Reading of post-production revised play of Cynthia Galaz Sotelo.

4/15 – Reading of post-production revised play of Mar Schotland.

4/22 – Reading of post-production revised play of Joseph Valdez.

### ADDENDUM TO COURSE SYLLABUS – ADDENDUM A

The following information is recommended or required by USC.

Please review them for your benefit and be aware of the resource information provided. This syllabus and your enrollment in GESM 111g, fall semester 2023, means you are aware of the information below and understand its impact on you. Thank you.

### Required Information, Advisory Information, and Additional Policies and USC Standards

#### REQUIRED INFORMATION

##### Academic Integrity

The University of Southern California is foremost a learning community committed to fostering successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas. Academic misconduct is in contrast to the university’s mission to educate students through a broad array of first-rank academic, professional, and extracurricular programs and includes any act of dishonesty in the submission of academic work (either in draft or final form).

This course will follow the expectations for academic integrity as stated in the [USC Student Handbook](#). All students are expected to submit assignments that are original work and prepared specifically for the course/section in this academic term. You may not submit work written by others or “recycle” work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s). Students suspected of engaging in academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

Other violations of academic misconduct include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage.

The impact of academic dishonesty is far-reaching and is considered a serious offense against the university and could result in outcomes such as failure on the assignment, failure in the course, suspension, or even expulsion from the university.

For more information about academic integrity see the [student handbook](#) or the [Office of Academic Integrity’s website](#), and university policies on [Research and Scholarship Misconduct](#).

### **AI Generators Guidelines**

While I am not against the use of artificial intelligence (AI)-powered programs with regards to working on assignments, I believe there are ethical questions if applied to the completion of assignments. Be aware that AI text generation tools may present incorrect information, biased responses, and incomplete analyses; thus, they are not yet prepared to produce text that may meet the standards of the grades you wish to earn. If you decide to use AI-powered programs to complete the work for this course, be aware that, with regard to University values, using an AI tool to generate content without proper attribution will be treated as plagiarism and reported to the Office of Academic Integrity. If you do use AI tools in the development of any aspect of your work, you must cite them ([USC Libraries AI Generators Citation Guidance](#)) and also be aware that the value of original thinking over AI-thinking has an impact on instructor assessment of the originality of your viewpoints. Please see Addendum B below to read authors’ views on AI tools.

### **Course Content Distribution and Synchronous Session Recordings Policies**

USC has policies that prohibit recording and distribution of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment. Recording a university class without the express permission of the instructor and announcement to the class, or unless conducted pursuant to an Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) accommodation is prohibited. Recording can inhibit free discussion in the future, and thus infringe on the academic freedom of other students as well as the instructor. ([Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook](#), page 13).

<b>ADDITIONAL POLICIES</b>
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#### **Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems**

**Academic Integrity (see above).**

#### **Students and Disability Accommodations:**

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University’s educational programs. [The Office of Student Accessibility Services](#) (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at [osas.usc.edu](#). You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at [osasfrontdesk@usc.edu](mailto:osasfrontdesk@usc.edu).

#### **Support Systems:**

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

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

[988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#) - 988 for both calls and text messages – 24/7 on call

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline is comprised of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The new, shorter phone number makes it easier for people to remember and access mental health crisis services (though the previous 1 (800) 273-8255 number will continue to function indefinitely) and represents a continued commitment to those in crisis.

[Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services \(RSVP\)](#) - (213) 740-9355(WELL) – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender- and power-based harm (including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking).

[Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX \(EEO-TIX\)](#) - (213) 740-5086

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

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

[The Office of Student Accessibility Services \(OSAS\)](#) - (213) 740-0776

OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

[USC Campus Support and Intervention](#) - (213) 740-0411

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

[Diversity, Equity and Inclusion](#) - (213) 740-2101

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

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) 442-1200 – 24/7 on call

Non-emergency assistance or information.

[Office of the Ombuds](#) - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)

A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

[Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice](#) - (323) 442-2850 or [otfp@med.usc.edu](mailto:otfp@med.usc.edu)

Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.