

USC School of Dramatic Arts

GESM 35310 Eco-Theatre

Units: 4

Fall 2022 Mondays and Wednesdays, 2-3:50pm:

Location: MCC 102

Instructor: Oliver Mayer

Office: MCC #101C

Office Hours: Wednesdays 11am-1:30pm, or by appointment.

Course Description:

This course explores the many ways plays and live performance are dealing with such major environmental crises as climate change, loss of natural resources, and extinction. These problems, which affect us all, are of particular concern to playwrights west of the Rockies who wish to tell stories that reflect the unique history and geography of the American West; through the lens of eco-theatre, traditional issues of the West—water, drought, oil and gas extraction, desertification, and agriculture/migration—are viewed, and through the lives of specific fictional characters, the more universal, global implications are explored. Along with ecological issues, the class will investigate concerns such as science denial, science fraud, political obstacles, and historical treatment of the issues, including the different approaches to conservation taken by settlers and native people. The theatrical responses to these topics, and the various genres the work has embraced—such as street theatre, dystopian futurism, children’s theatre, and reality-based work—will be scrutinized. Students will also view how such topics have been handled by playwrights of the past, and they will be invited to create their own responses.

Learning Objectives:

Students will write dramatic scenes about the state of the world as we know it – its history, present danger, and highly uncertain future – with an emphasis on the growing threats to our environment, such as climate change. We analyze six plays that find the drama in environmental issues, as well as reading scientific and journalistic essays that focus on ecology. We will analyze the risks and rewards, the economics and the politics, that bring complexity to the issues. This course will address *Eco* as one’s habitat under fire, and *Theatre* as a necessary tool that can both put out fires and be a Firestarter, when needed. The ultimate goal is to unearth the stories about how our ecology affects real people in real ways, and to use drama to find out the human stakes to these problems.

Prerequisite(s):

Open only to Freshmen not currently enrolled at School of Dramatic Arts.

Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required:

This is a low-stress classroom in terms of technological proficiency. Bring pen and paper as well as your laptop for in-class writing. Be ready to read both required and supplementary material. We prioritize in-person classwork, with only occasional online classes depending on health and/or guest speakers. Although Zoom is better than nothing, attending class in-person is a far superior experience for student and teacher.

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials:

These books will be available at the USC Bookstore. They can also be purchased online or elsewhere. Supplementary materials will be made available online via Blackboard.

Bilodeau, Chantal	SILA
Capek, Karel	THE WHITE PLAGUE, from FOUR PLAYS
Ibsen, Henrik	ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE
Mayer, Oliver	WALLOWA, from DARK MATTERS, AND OTHER PLAYS
Shakespeare, William	TEMPEST
Waters, Steve	CONTINGENCY PLAN

Description and Assessment of Assignments :

Be prepared to read in a qualitative way, so that you can feel prepared to freely discuss and evaluate material presented in class. Based on our discussions, I will assign homework and in-class exercises that are fun as well as germane to the questions raised. Although we may do some essay writing along the way, we will spend the bulk of the semester doing dramatic writing: That is, we will use the tool of writing for the stage to try to make sense of the what's really going on, not only in terms of the ecology but in our politics. I grade on the quality of your presence and sharing. I also grade assignments. Weekly Writing Assignments will be given both in-class and as homework. You will be expected to be writing and presenting scenes every week. Be prepared to read aloud your work, both for peer review and for my feedback. Absent students should email me or contact their fellow students about missed assignments. These should be read to present at the next class you attend.

Trigger Warnings:

Plays often deal with distressing material and occasionally use language and imagery that might cause upset. They are pieces of their time and moment, as are yours now. We will analyze why the drama takes plays to dangerous places, and we will do so responsibly and with sensitivity.

Grading Breakdown and Assignment Rubrics:

This class demands active participation, discussion, and feedback on a weekly basis. Be prepared to discuss each other's work and to do so with both compassion and insight. **A/A-** indicates work of excellent quality; **B+/B** of good quality; **B-/C** of average quality. I expect at the very least average quality from your work, if not more. You will also have a chance to raise your grades by rewriting the work in question. Whether essays or dramatic writing, work can always get better if you think about your subject, take the advice that works for you, and allow yourself to see what's really there.

Weekly Active Participation and Discussion: 15%

Midterm: 20%

Final: 25%

Weekly Scene Work: 40%

Midterm and Final Exam:

There will be one **in-class MIDTERM in class on Wednesday, October 9**, and one **FINAL EXAM in class on Friday, December 13 from 2-4pm**. You must be there to take both tests. If you foresee a problem attending, you **MUST** let me know, beforehand. No exceptions.

Grading Timeline:

We can discuss your grades during the semester, preferably during office hours.

Additional Policies:

Unlike some other classes at SDA, we do not use a great deal of technology in this course. That said, feel free to either share your new scenes weekly online with me and the other students, via an agreed-upon sharing format.

The Marginalian:

We will be using Maria Popova's newsletter The Marginalian (TheMarginalian.org) for in-class discussion. Get used to reading it each week.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

Monday, August 26 **FIRST CLASS, INTRODUCTIONS, EXPECTATIONS, GOALS, LEARNING OBJECTIVES, GRADING RUBRICS, DEFINITIONS OF ECO- AND -THEATRE, EXPLORATIONS, INVENTIONS**
Wednesday, August 28 **EXPECTATIONS, CONTINGENCIES, RECKONINGS, HISTORY/MYSTERY**
Monday, September 2 **HOLIDAY, LABOR DAY, NO CLASS**
Wednesday, September 4 **CHARACTER AND ENVIRONMENT, THE ASTROV MONOLOGUES**
Monday, September 9 **READ ASTROV MONOLOGUES**
Wednesday, September 11 **TEMPEST, ACTS 1-2 CITY, FOREST, URBAN SPRAWL AND ARCTIC FIRES**
Monday, September 16 **ACTS 3-5, ISLAND OF THE MIND SCENES**
Wednesday, September 18 **ACTS 3-5, ISLAND OF THE MIND SCENES**
Monday, September 23 **SILA, INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND ANIMALS**
Wednesday, September 25 **SILA, PROSE AND POETRY**
Monday, September 30 **PROSE AND POETRY SCENES**
Wednesday, October 2 **PROSE AND POETRY SCENES**
Monday, October 7 **ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE, WATER, OWNERSHIP AND POLLUTION, WHISTLEBLOWING**
Wednesday, October 9 **MIDTERM IN CLASS, ATTENDANCE MANDATORY**
Monday, October 14 **INDIGENOUS PEOPLES DAY, MIDTERMS RETURNED**
Wednesday, October 16 **WHISTLEBLOWING SCENES**
Monday, October 21 **WHISTLEBLOWING SCENES**
Wednesday, October 23 **CONTINGENCY PLAN, SCIENCE VS POLITICS**
Monday, October 28 **CONTINGENCY PLAN, SCIENCE VS POLITICS SCENES**
Wednesday, October 30 **SCIENCE VS POLITICS SCENES**
Monday, November 4 **SCIENCE VS POLITICS SCENES**
Wednesday, November 6 **THE WHITE PLAGUE**
Monday, November 11 **HOLIDAY, VETERANS DAY, NO CLASS**
Wednesday, November 13 **THE WHITE PLAGUE**
Monday, November 18 **PLAGUE SCENES**
Wednesday, November 20 **PLAGUE SCENES**
Monday, November 25 **WALLOWA, THE ELEMENTS AND THE SURVIVAL INDEX**
Wednesday, November 27 **HOLIDAY, THANKSGIVING DAY, NO CLASS**
Monday, December 2 **WALLOWA, THE SPIRITS, THE THEORY OF DUENDE**
Wednesday, December 4 **END OF ECO JOURNEY**
Friday, December 13 **FINAL EXAM, 2-4pm, ATTENDANCE MANDATORY**

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.symlicity.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.