

THTR 566 Dramatic Writing Studio, Section 63213D Units: 4

Fall 2024, Session 001—Mondays—Time: 12-2:50 PM

Location: DMC 153

Instructor: Velina Hasu Houston, MFA, PhD; Pronouns: she/her/hers/kanojo/ella, Race: MR/O

Contact Info: greentea@usc.edu, 24- to 47-hour response time

Office: USC School of Dramatic Arts, Virtual Office

Office Hours: Thursdays 12-2 p.m. By appointment via email; mutual courtesy: 24-hour cancellation

Teaching Assistant: None.

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

Catalogue Description

Investigates gestalt of the student dramatic writer's professional development from the empty page and writing fundamentals to the first-draft script, business affairs, and dramaturgical advancement.

Course Description

THTR 566 Dramatic Writing Studio is a graduate course that focuses on the literary maturation of the dramatic writer (both in terms of writing and professional evolution). The student is expected to:

- Mature one's writing and professional development for meaningful engagement in the profession and society
- Be aware of plays – past and present (*if you want to be different, you need to know what you're striving to be different from*)
- Complete the first draft of a professionally promising full-length play
- Provide candid constructive criticism to class colleagues, and digest and absorb it towards the betterment of your own work

Recommended Preparation:

- Read and/or attend play readings diverse by ethnicity, color, gender, culture, sexuality, religion, ability, class, age, etc.
- Read and/or attend recitals/readings of literary works from other genres such as poetry, prose, opera, etc.
- Live useful, meaningful lives. Arthur Miller: "A writer must live a useful life." Ernest Hemingway: "In order to write about life, first you must live it."

Labor, Land, and Respect Acknowledgments

Let us 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. Let us be thankful of and honor their sacrifices. Let us acknowledge the Gabrielino/Tongva peoples as the traditional land caretakers of Tovaangar (Los Angeles basin, So. Channel Islands); and acknowledge our presence on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the Gabrielino/Tongva peoples. Let us pay our respects to the ancestors, elders, and relations—past, present, and emerging—of all people. Moreover, in the name of mutual respect, let us strive to neither mis-pronoun nor mis-race one another.

Course Notes

- Peer and Mentor Dramaturgy. Please use constructive criticism for dramaturgical feedback. Strive to be candid, but not destructive; being a cheerleader is not helpful, but neither is being ruthless. Successful criticism means being constructive, but also forthright about strengths and weaknesses. It doesn't help to provide commentary that's generic or unspecific; caustic, or rapturously glorifying (nothing is perfect). It helps to be specific, too, i.e., page number, dialogue, exact scene.
- Brightspace. Do not turn off notifications on Brightspace because announcements and some course content will be communicated via that modality. Checking these items plus reviewing the syllabus (original source for course content) is imperative. You will be responsible for any information contained on those sites/documents. Regularly (no less than every Friday) check the Brightspace site for this course. If something for the course is on our Brightspace site, you will be responsible for knowing that information.
- Professional Manuscript Formatting. Professional play manuscript formatting is required for any course work submitted, including pages [i.e. Final Draft stage format or similar]. Dramatists' Guild formatting guidelines are posted on its website: <https://www.dramatistsguild.com/>. For the entire play manuscript, do not exceed eighty (80) pages (excluding title, cast of character, or copyright information pages). *For each page beyond 80, 2 points will be subtracted from the grading assessment. For a manuscript not in professional format when you submit your final draft, 5 points will be subtracted from the grading assessment.*
- Copyrights. Students are encouraged to copyright their plays at the end of the term (Electronic Copyright Office: https://eco.copyright.gov/eService_enu/start.swe?SWECmd=Start&SWEHo=eco.copyright.gov.) Writing also can be protected via the Writers Guild of America-West Registry (<https://www.wgawregistry.org/>), but students must be mindful of the differences between the two types of protection: <https://www.writersstore.com/wgaw-registration-vs-copyright-registration/>.
- Mobile Phones. Please do not have them out during class. You can check messages, text, email, or make phone calls during breaks, or before or after class.

- **Final Exam Courtesy Reminder.** Final exam dates and times are set by USC, and students are required to participate. Note date and time in calendars now. Do not make plans that prohibit completion. For THTR 566, the final exam is equivalent to the accomplishment of the final project; therefore, the final exam dates refers to two things: submission of the final project and, as USC requires, meeting at the time of the final exam.

Communication

- If you have questions or concerns, please contact the instructor via USC email during the business week, Monday-Friday, 9 am-5 pm PDT/PST. The instructor will strive to reply to emails within 47 hours during the business week. The instructor may not respond to emails sent outside of these guidelines and may not respond to emails sent from non-USC accounts.
- **In the subject line, indicate course number like this: THTR 566.**
- If you have a question, to promote independence and critical thinking (1) consult the syllabus or BrightSpace, (2) consult a classmate. If you still don't have an answer, email the instructor. Include the steps you took to seek the answer and what you've already learned.

Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required

- Devices such as laptop computers are welcome in class, BUT students must leverage their devices for course purposes only, i.e. sharing of pages, reading articles to which instructor refers them – no checking of email or navigating social media. Students with legal requirements to use devices when not indicated by course needs should let the instructor know of their need privately and accommodations readily will be made.
- Please make sure devices are silenced so as not to disturb classmates.

USC Technology Support Links:

[Zoom information for students](#)

[Software available to USC Campus](#)

Required Readings

- *Home* by Samm-Art Williams
- *The Goat or Who Is Sylvia?* by Edward Albee
- *And the Soul Shall Dance* by Wakako Yamauchi
- *Grandchildren of the Buffalo Soldiers* by William S. Yellow Robe, Jr
- *Intimate Apparel* by Lynn Nottage
- *The World of Extreme Happiness* by Frances Ya-Chu Cowhig
- *Fun Home*, Book and Lyrics by Lisa Kron
- *Mary Jane* by Amy Herzog
- *Roosters* by Milcha Sanchez-Scott

You will write a Dramaturgical Report about one of these plays. The entire report should be 10 pages or less in a standard 12-point font with standard top/bottom/left/right margins. If you have previously evaluated a play for 566, do not select it for this exercise. Pick the play (you are encouraged to read them all). Provide a written exploration of the play that includes:

- A synopsis
- A character breakdown with each character's name and description (traits, desires, fears, relationships)
- Information about the time period of the play including major events, and what impact these may have on the protagonist's journey
- A relating of key events of the play and how they relate to the protagonist's journey
- An evaluation of the particularity of the play's moment (the "why now" of the play)
- An assessment of why the playwright may have written the play
- A consideration of what you learned from reading the play that may be helpful with your own writing.

Recommended Reading Materials

1Q84 by Haruki Murakami

Letters to a Young Poet by Rainer Maria Rilke

Bodies That Matter by Judith Butler

Beloved by Toni Morrison

The Twilight Years by Sawako Ariyoshi

Kindred by Octavia E. Butler

The Makioka Sisters by Jun'ichirō Tanizaki

Discipline and Punish by Michel Foucault

One Hundred Years of Solitude by Gabriel Garcia Marquez

The Warmth of Other Suns by Isabel Wilkerson

The Covenant of Water by Abraham Verghese

Red and Yellow, Black and Brown: Decentering Whiteness in Mixed Race Studies; Ed. by Spickard, Rondilla, Guevarra

The Fire Next Time by James Baldwin

Grading Breakdown, Grading Scale, & Assignment Rubrics/ Description and Assessment of Assignments

Please note all assignments are evaluated on a 100 = A rubric*and becomes the noted percentage of the final grade. Please remember: grades are not given, but earned. Furthermore, be mindful of the fact that students earn grades individually and are not graded on a scale against other students. The rubric used for evaluating your final project is attached. Due dates are underlined. The grading rubric for this class is as follows:

96-100%=A	88-90%=B+	81-84%=B-	75-77%= C	67-70%=D+	61-63%=D-
95-91%=A-	85-87%=B	78-80%=C+	71-74%= C-	66-64%=D	

[Failing Grade for Graduate Credit = C-]

<u>ASSIGNMENT</u>	<u>POINTS*</u>	<u>% OF FINAL GRADE</u>
First ten pages of play	100\100	5%
Second ten pages of play	100\100	5%
First act of play	100/100	10%
Third ten pages of play	100\100	5%
Fourth ten pages of play	100\100	5%
Dramaturgical Report	100\100	20%
Final EXAM/Project: Full-length play	100\100	50%
TOTAL.....		100%

Grading Timeline

Instructor strives to grade work 1-2 weeks upon submission, if submission is turned in on time as noted in this syllabus. Please note that most weekly work receives oral feedback in class – so TAKE NOTES. Submitted assignments that will receive written feedback are your first act and end-of-term completed full drafts (except for third and fourth sets of 10 pages that are not presented in-person in workshop).

Assignment Submission & Attendance/Participation Matters

Assignments are to be submitted on due dates noted in Course Schedule. No late assignments accepted. Students are not graded on attendance, however, if a class is missed, students cannot engage in weekly course work. Excused absences are permissible for illness, family/personal crisis, or religious purposes for a practiced religion. Students with an excused absence may complete assignments within forty-eight (48) hours and submit according to syllabi protocol. All assignments are expected to be completed individually.

Course evaluation

Anonymous course evaluation occurs university-wide at the end of the semester. It is an important review of students’ experience in the class. USC will send an email to students’ USC email addresses asking them to fill out course evaluations. Results are sent to instructors. Please participate.

Schedule of Classes

8/26. Cohort introductions. Introduction to semester’s journey. Current production realities. Team explorations of characters (all the characters) – include what’s important to them and why, everyday world, and desires, biggest fear, biggest dream. Considerations of cohort’s full-length plays for the semester: synopsis and pitches, commitment for the term.

9/2. University holiday. (Labor Day) No class.

9/9. First 10 pages due. Everybody must submit today; no revisions if you are reading next week. Please send a PDF to instructor as proof of completion. Readings and peer/mentor feedback are offered live in class with discussion. Please take notes. 50% of class will present today, the other 50% presenting on 9/16.

9/16. Remaining 50% present on first 10 pages today. Readings and peer/mentor feedback are offered live in class with discussion. Please take notes.

9/23. Second 10 pages due. Everybody must submit today; no revisions if you are reading next week. Please send a PDF to instructor as proof of completion. Readings and peer/mentor feedback are offered live in class with discussion. Please take notes. The remaining 50% of class will present on 10/7.

10/7. Remaining 50% present on first 10 pages today. Readings and peer/mentor feedback are offered live in class with discussion. Please take notes.

10/14. Writing week. Work towards the completion of the first act of your play.

10/21. Independent tutorials with instructor. Please consult with instructor individually to secure a meeting time.

10/28. Act I due to instructor via email, no later than 10 pm. DEIB panel discussion with professional guest artists.

11/4. Third 10 pages due. Everybody must submit today. Please send a PDF to instructor as proof of completion. As many pages as possible will be read in class today. Readings and peer/mentor feedback are offered live in class with discussion. Please take notes. If you do not present in workshop today, the instructor will review your pages and provide written feedback.

11/11. University holiday. (Veterans' Day) No class.

11/18. Fourth 10 pages due. Everybody must submit today. Please send a PDF to instructor as proof of completion. As many pages as possible will be read in class today. Readings and peer/mentor feedback are offered live in class with discussion. Please take notes. If you do not present in workshop today, the instructor will review your pages and provide written feedback. Workshop readings will be prioritized for those who did not read their third set of 10 pages in class.

11/25. Industry panel with professional guest artists.

12/2. Business affairs discussion: copyrights and registration, character breakdowns, synopsis, cover letters, agents vs. managers. Dramatical observations due via email to instructor by 10 pm.

12/13. Final exam/project due to instructor via email by 12:55 pm.

Rubric for Evaluating Final Project/Final Exam

USC MFADW FINAL PROJECT EVALUATION

Course Number/Name: THTR 566 DRAMATIC WRITING STUDIO

Student Name: _____

Grading Guidelines from Syllabus:

USC definitions of grades: “A” for work of excellent quality, “B” for work of good quality.

Grading is determined on the following scale:

96-100%=A	88-90%=B+	81-84%=B-	75-77%= C	67-70%=D+	61-63%=D-
95-91%=A-	85-87%=B	78-80%=C+	71-74%= C-	66-64%=D	

[Failing Grade for Graduate Credit = C-]

The class presentation grade is evaluated on this scale with the grade breaking down as follows: 25% Quality of structure/through-line/ plotting (story execution), 25% Quality of character development and execution, 25% Quality of dialogue crafting and execution, 25% Quality of overall creative achievement/ professional promise of project/ theatricality/ originality of vision/ presentation.

- _____ Quality of storytelling (through-line/execution/stylistic elements)
- _____ Quality of character development
- _____ Quality of dialogue development
- _____ Quality of overall creative achievement/ originality of vision/ presentation.

Dramaturgical notes are provided throughout the semester. Please retain and refer to them in the plays’ continued refinement.

In addition, the following assessments are used to evaluate student work:
central concepts of dramatic writing, including:

- Expertise in character development, including desire, the multidimensional elements of character, and the “geography” of mapping character; and the ability to tackle the “unanswerable” – the problems and questions that cannot be merely quantified or completely described or finished – on stage through the actions and consequences of the characters.
- Expertise in story development including an understanding of progressive action and the nature of conflict.
- Ability to cultivate a distinctive and authentic voice and vision.
- Ability to research dimensions of character and story in order to authenticate dramatic representations.
- Ability to write dramatic dialogue and discern the distinctions between dialogue and conversation including the ability to use all the dimensions of language to enhance the expression of the sensory and emotional life of the play.
- Ability to comprehend and utilize metaphor and imagery to expand the subtext and the deeper implications of the dramatic work. Awareness of dramatic writing’s capacity for connecting to all disciplines in the investigation of the critical questions of humanity.
- Ability to understand and utilize stage time as something other than real time, as something to be foreshortened or elongated as well as elevated, depending on event and point of view.
- Ability to reflect the world through the prism of the play, so that the writing is suitably and deliberately questioning and open-ended, allowing for colloquy between artist and audience that can change and adapt over time.
- Ability to think in terms of total theatre – utilizing music, dance, media, sports, and other elements – to create a world on stage all its own; and own the courage to explore form with intelligence and creativity.
- Ability to understand the process of presentation and production, and the responsibilities of the writer as a collaborator in that process, including the ability to absorb and apply constructive criticism and revise and refine the work towards greater professional excellence as well as the ability to adapt, learn, initiate, and be proactive creatively and intellectually.

ADDENDUM TO COURSE SYLLABUS

The following information is recommended or required by USC.

This syllabus and your enrollment in THTR 566, fall semester 2024, means you are aware of the information below and understand its impact on you and your colleagues.

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.

Academic dishonesty has a far-reaching impact and is considered a serious offense against the university. Violations will result in a grade penalty, such as a failing grade on the assignment or in the course, and disciplinary action from the university itself, such as suspension or even expulsion.

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.

Please ask your instructor if you are unsure what constitutes unauthorized assistance on an exam or assignment or what information requires citation and/or attribution.

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.

Equity, Diversity & Inclusion + Intimacy in Theatre 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 Theatre 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>

STATEMENT ON UNIVERSITY ACADEMIC AND SUPPORT SYSTEMS

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.

Student Financial Aid and Satisfactory Academic Progress:

To be eligible for certain kinds of financial aid, students are required to maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) toward their degree objectives. Visit the Financial Aid Office webpage for undergraduate- and graduate-level SAP eligibility requirements and the appeals process.

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 consists 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) 740-2500

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

Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits