

THTR 596 63231D
Thesis Development & Attainment
Fall 2024 - Individually Scheduled
Location: Online and in person TBD

Instructor: Paula Cizmar

Office: JEF 201, 950 W. Jefferson, Los Angeles 90089

Office Hours: Available: Wed 3 – 6 pm;

Thurs Noon – 4 pm; please note that office hours are by appointment only; contact me via email or phone, at least 24 hours in advance. For appointments outside these hours, I am available by videoconference.

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<http://itservices.usc.edu>; or School of Dramatic Arts – Mr. Prakash Shirke. Contact Info: shirke@usc.edu; 213.740.1288. MCC

Course Description and Overview

Catalogue description: THTR 596 Designed to guide the MFADW student toward refinement of thesis including vision, development, and execution.

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30. Write in layers. Have as many things happening in a play in any one moment as possible...
32. Keep your chops up with constant questioning of your own work. React against your work. Be hypercritical. Do in the next work what you aimed for but failed to do in the last one...
34. Character is the embodiment of obsession. A character must be stupendously hungry. There is no rest for those characters until they've satisfied their needs...
36. A writer cannot live without an authentic voice -- the place where you are the most honest, most lyrical, most complete, most creative and new. That's what you're striving to find. But the authentic voice doesn't know how to write, any more than gasoline knows how to drive. But driving is impossible without fuel and writing is impossible without the heat and strength of your authentic voice. Learning to write well is the stuff of workshops. Learning good habits and practicing hard. But finding your authentic voice as a writer is your business, your journey -- a private, lonely, inexact, painful, slow and frustrating voyage. Teachers and mentors can only bring you closer to that voice. With luck and time, you'll get there on your own.

—Jose Rivera, from “36 Assumptions About Playwriting”

Learning Objectives

This is your opportunity to engage in serious dramaturgy and the development of your thesis play. Writing a play is both intuitive and technical—a process involving the seemingly opposing forces of mechanics and magic. Getting to know all the territory around the characters, situation, story, the world of the play—by deep investigation, introspection, research, editing, exploring existing scenes, new scenes, and new approaches to scenes—is a way to get the seemingly opposing forces of playwriting to come together. This coming together is what you have been working toward in your

thesis play. In this course, we will further advance the process of getting the script ready for its launch out into the world. THTR 596 offers MFADW students the opportunity to take the time needed to deepen the heart and soul of the thesis play by delving into many different forms of brainstorming, planning, meditation, reinvention, revision; we will look at whatever strategies suit our needs, whether reality-based or intuitive, archival or mythological, direct or indirect. We will explore research methods and take a closer look at issues/challenges surrounding the play and its intended messages. This is the time to create the layers that will further embed mood, tone, texture, authenticity into the work and strengthen your own writer's voice. The ultimate goal, of course, is a thesis play that engages an audience's imagination in a character journey, with all its richness and with great care.

Let's commit to devoting heart and mind, using the time carefully, wisely, diligently.

Emphasis is placed on *empathy* and *metaphor* as each person strives to:

- further develop the “deep map” of the play, refining the background, foreground, and various other dimensions of the story;
- experiment with diverse modes of storytelling in the revision process;
- discover how to achieve balance, i.e., between research and imagination, between language and story, between originality and clarity.
- explore the “lore” of the play to expand the viewpoints of the characters and to strengthen theme;
- devise a process for working and reworking this script and others in the future..

Communication

We're operating in the 21st century, so of course we will honor the following:

- SUSTAINABILITY
- CONNECTION
- TRANSFORMATION

By embracing SUSTAINABILITY, we will save on time, energy, and paper. You will not print your work; you will send drafts, plans, and final scripts as PDFs. All handouts and course materials will be paperless, available online.

CONNECTION means that we will make contact in several ways—with each other, with the creative community, with the world at large. Though we're meeting mostly one on one after our initial dramaturgical sessions, we'll take care to stay in touch with the others and perhaps even plan a VIRTUAL coffee break or a VIRTUAL visit to a play or discussion of interest. We'll connect with each other to maintain the support network that you've established over the past few years; plus we'll connect via text message and online to keep up to the minute on what's going on in the theatre world. We'll stay attuned to what's going on in American theatre, and we'll look at what's going on in the world—and explore how we can use art for growth and healing. Let's consider the many

stories that have gone untold and the people who have gone unrecognized and determine what we can do to change that.

TRANSFORMATION means that we will be looking at theatre writing as a way to effect transformation in our lives and in the lives of others; even though we're using concrete tools (including charts, lists, research), we'll look at creating theatre from a place of empathy, from a place of heart-driven concern for humanity; we'll look at culture and trends and attempt to define and redefine playwriting for the 21st century.

Prerequisite(s): MFA DW 1st- and 2nd-year course work.

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

Several plays (determined after discussion with writers).

Plus: articles, essays, etc., supplied by instructor when appropriate.

The School of Dramatic Arts' Dramatic Writing Program guidelines call for each student in playwriting courses to read at least seven plays as part of the course and to investigate them critically. You are also encouraged to read plays (and see plays) in addition to those selected for Required Reading. The more you read, the more you will become aware of the diverse styles, voices, and structural forms open to you as a writer.

Special Note

All students enrolled in MFADW are required to attend program events. This includes the New Works Festival events and the like. While some of these dates are not yet solidified, please put the times/dates in your calendar as soon as they are announced. Because we are monitoring professional development in the program and in every course that you take in the program, your participation in these program events will have a direct impact on you.

Heads up for Spring: Please make any and all travel plans for after the New Works Festival III.

Description of Grading Criteria and Assessment of Assignments

Grading criteria: The quality of work for all components (see Grading Breakdown) is determined by the thoroughness of the effort, the continuing process, and the imagination displayed.

Grading Scale for SDA: **A** indicates work of excellent quality; **B** of good quality; **C** of acceptable quality; **D** of below average quality; and **F** indicates inadequate work.

USC GRADING SCALE

Overall grading is determined on the following scale:

96-100%=A	95-91%=A-	
88-90%=B+	85-87%=B	81-84%=B-
78-80%=C+	75-77%=C	71-74%=C-
67-70%=D+	66-64%=D	61-63%=D- F = 60 and below

[Failing Grade for Graduate Credit = C-]

- "Excellent" indicates that the student couples clear understanding of the class material with original and creative insight, as demonstrated by their work; "Good" means that the student demonstrates a clear understanding of the material and has done the work well; "Acceptable" indicates that the student demonstrates a general understanding of the material but with some gaps; "Poor" indicates that there are identifiable gaps in the student's understanding of the class

material; “Failure” is the result of the student not having completed his or her assignments coupled with poor understanding of the material.

- When the average falls between two grades, the final grade will be weighted toward the positive end of the scale for students whose attendance and participation in class have been good, and will be weighted toward the negative end of the scale for those with poor attendance and participation.

Grading Breakdown

Your grade will be based on multiple components: the inquiry into various dramaturgical theories/tools; inspiration/research presentation; preparation for revision; critical analysis; the development of a revision plan, including presentation of the tools/strategies employed and check-ins on your continuing process; ongoing writing and revision; completion of your Final Project.

Please bear in mind that you earn your grade based on the timely completion of your work, plus the quality of your work. Late assignments are marked down due to missed deadline. Assignments are accepted only within one week of due date. After that, they are considered a missed assignment, which counts as zero. (Note: A late assignment is marked down one grade notch, approximately 5 points; i.e., an assignment that would have earned an A receives an A- for missing the deadline; an assignment that would have earned a B+ receives a B for missing the deadline, etc.)

Please strive for excellence—it’s a wonderful goal, even if elusive. So what is excellence? It is based on effort and intent and some ephemerals. I am interested in writing that explores the human spirit, the heart, the place in us we can’t describe. If you are willing to go there, you will do just fine

Components of the overall grade are weighted as follows (see below for details):

Inspiration board/Vision board for this draft, these characters	10 percent
Dramaturge’s table exercise (including you and entire 3 rd -year cohort)	10 percent
Reading/viewing assignments (including in-person discussion)	10 percent
Personal assessment of your own script + personal goals review	10 percent
Revision plan	10 percent
Ongoing research	10 percent
Application of assessment, goals, plan, research to script	20 percent
Final Project – A Revised Thesis Play	20 percent
TOTAL	100 percent

The Inspiration Board/Vision Board is an intuitive brainstorming tool—a way to get in touch with your unconscious motivators. In this case, you have probably already created a vision board for your project and/or have tapped into many sources of inspiration—so the questions are:

Which of these ideas/sources got you here?

How did you arrive at this crucial place in the writing?

And what do you need to provide fuel for continuing to create the world of the play, deepening the characters, refining the story and structure, revising the dialogue?

The Vision Board is a way for you to get in touch with what excites you about this particular work and to take a deep map approach to a play: visual art, musical inspirations, charts, graphics, articles/news stories/essays, photographs, podcasts, archival documents—any kind of source

material. If desired, you can create a formal presentation in a specific format, such as Powerpoint, Prezi, Keynote, etc. That's definitely what we would do in a classroom setting. But since we are having some of the one on one meetings ONLINE, you may opt to simply discuss these things out loud as you share screen and/or annotate your chosen materials. It helps to present them in some way—and to bounce them off someone else. So be prepared to discuss your resources and inspirations for your characters/story both in a creative/metaphoric language, as well as pragmatically. Note that the vision board technique is useful at any point in a creative work. This a tool with which you can tap into your imagination at a starting point; you can use it as an active, multimedia form of brainstorming; or as a way to start to explore alternative story points, alternative endings; or as a way to begin to frame your thoughts; as a way to visualize transformations in characters; as a way to promote discussion with other artists to enhance your vision. The “board” part of this vision board presentation is virtual—no need to print it out or work on hard copy. The computer screen is just fine.

Reading plays, seeing plays, and critical analysis is vital to every writer because it provides a process for assessing artistic work; in the analysis of already published plays, you gain experience in taking a deeper look at character, language, and structure—which can then be applied to evaluating your own work, to assist you in drafting and revision. In this class, we'll attempt to identify specific plays and specific writing that may help you gain ideas and inspiration for problem solving in your play.

The Dramaturge's Table exercise is an analysis and assessment session that will have each member of our creative cluster (the 3rd-year Dramatic Writing MFAs and me, the instructor) respond in a structured way to all of the 3rd-year scripts as an early part of the rewrite process.

What is the personal assessment of script/personal goals review?

By now, you've had some time to consider what your play is intended to be, how you want it to affect an audience, and what your future goals are for the play and for yourself. You've also probably got a fairly good idea about specific areas you want to work on and places that you know are truly representative of your own voice. You should also have a fairly good idea of what story your play is telling, and what it means/how it matters. (And after The Dramaturge's Table, you will have a greater sense of what remains to be addressed.) In addition to your Dramaturge's Table response, please write a short summary of your assessment or your own script and a review of your goals. It can be a blog post, a paper, an annotated list—just something that you can give to me so that I can understand what it is that you are after as well as I can, so that I can guide you toward writing the best possible play you can write. And with any luck, it will be one that goes beyond your expectations.

What is the research plan?

Upon completion of your inspiration board/vision board, you will devise some sort of strategy or process-oriented plan for further meditating on and exploring the story, theme, and characters of your play. The detailed plan will be discussed with me. Your plan will be individualized to your needs/desires as a writer and also individualized to the requirements of the play you're working on.

What does participation entail?

Participation involves showing up for the meetings and having done the assessment work, the revision plans, the meditation on meaning and the deep thinking required to revise your play.

Your Final Project is a revised draft of your thesis play. Period. It should be a thoughtful and well-imagined draft that emerges from a process in which you were deeply involved, at the intersection of mind, heart, soul.

Hint: Keep a creative journal of some kind. It can be a hard copy old-school paper journal, or it can be electronic. Just find a place to store your thoughts, ideas, visions, brainstorm on the play(s) you're working on—as well as a place to download your feelings and meditations as your work progresses. This will be helpful later when your play goes into production—and you can refer back to what you were thinking and feeling during the process of creating it. This is an archive of your explorations for writing; it may include jottings off the top of your head, stuff from your Inspiration Board, research, ideas, resources for current and future writing, for current and future revision, and exercises and raw material from just about any source. It will make your writing—and rewriting--so much easier!

Note: The SDA GUIDELINES on GRADING state that:

- *There shall be no unexcused absences.*
- *No late assignments, projects, exams, papers, or exercises shall be accepted unless advance extensions have been arranged between the student and the teacher or unless exceptional circumstances occur.*

Additional Policies

Participation is essential and figures into your grade. Though this course is composed of a combination of group meetings and ONE-ON-ONE MEETINGS, do be sure to show up for them, and come prepared. Be ready to operate like a professional artist who is open to collaboration. From time to time, after the initial weeks, we may meet with the other third-year MFAs, therefore remember:

1. You are entering into a collaborative relationship and, thus, it is your responsibility to be available for feedback, analysis, and support.
2. All workshop members must be treated with respect.
3. You are required to attend the meetings and to be on time. Tardiness is defined as being 15 minutes late or more. Excessive tardiness will affect your ongoing writing and participation grade.
4. Absences must be for reasons of illness or emergency, and you must notify me in writing (preferably in advance).
5. All assignments, written and/or otherwise, must be prepared on time and turned in (or presented) on the deadline date. Late assignments will be marked down due to the missed deadline. Assignments not turned in within a week of deadline count as missed assignments (zero credit).
6. Course materials can be found on the Blackboard site for this course. For your syllabus, handouts, extra bits of info, etc., go to Blackboard.
7. Please check your e-mail regularly to see if there are any changes in class meetings, etc. On rare occasions, it becomes necessary to schedule a new class meeting. I will send you the information via e-mail and/or text message.

8. Please turn in all assignments electronically and LABEL them with date, draft information, etc.
9. If you desire an appointment with me, it is necessary to contact me via e-mail or text message at least 24 hours in advance, otherwise there is no guarantee I will receive your message with sufficient time to make arrangements to meet with you. Please note that I have included multiple ways to contact me on the front page of this syllabus.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

Note: We will meet as a group at the beginning of the semester, which includes the meeting for the Dramaturge's Table exercise, but for the most part, this course is a series of one-on-one meetings in which you will consult with me about your work. We'll begin by discussing the process and each individual script.

	Topics/Daily Activities	Readings and Homework	Deliverable/ Due Dates
Weeks 1 - 4	<p>Preparation & Gathering</p> <p>Introduction: Who are We? What do we care about? What inspires us? What do we need as artists? What does the world need from us?</p> <p>Consider: Surprising yourself and taking on writing the best play you <i>can't</i> write; writing beyond your comfort zone.</p>	<p>Discussion:</p> <p>The Deep Map.</p> <p>The Dramaturge's Table Exercise.</p> <p>Consider: Where does each character start? Where do they end up?</p>	<p>Turn in the play you have selected as your thesis play by Friday, August 30, if possible. (If you need Labor Day weekend to continue work, then please send the script as soon as possible.) Send it as a PDF via email to me and to the other members of the 3rd-year MFA cohort.</p> <p>Respond to the Dramaturge's Table exercise re: your own play.</p> <p>Read the plays of the other two members of your cohort.</p> <p>Group meetings: Please check your email for a poll re: which dates we meet as a group for Dramaturge's Table.</p> <p>Group meeting: Dramaturge's Table. Guidelines sent via email.</p> <p>Week 3/4: Submit Revision Plans and Assessment Reviews. Remember to use Inspiration Boards/Vision Boards and notes from your creative journal.</p> <p><i>NOTE: For all upcoming meetings after these activities, we will set up individual sessions.</i></p>

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 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.

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 (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.

Health and Participation in Class

You are expected to stay up to date with University policies on coronavirus, including screenings and testing, etc. The University sends out guidelines on a regular basis, and we must all expect things to change as the number and type of infections change. Your health and safety, and the health and safety of your peers, are my top priorities. If you are experiencing any symptoms of covid, 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 University health and safety instructions. If you test positive, if you are feeling ill, or if you have been exposed to someone with the virus, please stay home to protect others. SDA will work to assist you and help you continue to participate in class in some alternative way so that your education is not disrupted.

To reduce the spread of COVID-19, USC recommends that face coverings (masks) be worn indoors including in classrooms. I will be wearing a mask. As the semester proceeds, the recommendation may become a requirement. If it does, face coverings should cover your nose and mouth. Eating or drinking during class is prohibited because of the risk posed by airborne particles. 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.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.