

USC School of Dramatic Arts

THTR-506: Advanced Creating Characters

2.0 Units

Spring 2025—Thursdays—4:00PM-6:20PM

Location: MCC102

Luis Alfaro, Associate Professor

JEF 202

Office Hour by appointment

luisalfa@usc.edu

cell: 323-369-8306

Key Calendar Dates

Classes Begin: Thursday, January 16, 2025

Spring Recess: Sunday-Sunday, March 16-23, 2025

Classes End: Thursday, May 1, 2025

Final Examination Date:

Thursday, May 8, 2025, 4:30PM-6:30PM, MCC102

Course Description

An advanced weekly writing workshop, that also includes guest lectures, art and play viewing, that focuses on the continuing development of the crafting of character, centering on depth, breadth, dimensionality, and authenticity. This course is designed to help the graduate writer deepen his craft of understanding in how to center a play with character by working on prompts, exercises and rewriting that focuses on the full humanity, subtext and events in a character as we bring them to life on stage.

Learning Objectives

Identifying dramaturgical obstacles and solutions for the rewriting of a play, by leaning into character development, history, backstory, and motivation, through a series of exercises. Students should be able to have a clearer understanding of the rewriting process, dramaturgical note application, and the building of characters in plays.

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

The Presence of the Actor

Joseph Chaikin

Publisher: Theatre Communications Group (TCG):

ISBN-10: 1559360305 / ISBN-13: 978-1559360302

[professor will provide]

Towards a Process of Generous Criticism

Liz Lerman

[professor will provide]

Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required

You must be able to access class assignments and readings using electronics. If needed, there is access to free versions of productions available at [USC Computing Center Laptop Loaner Program](#). If you need software support and/or availability, it can be found here, [Zoom information for students](#), [Brightspace help for students](#), [Software available to USC Campus](#).

Description and Assessment of Assignments

Students will write and present three individual papers on the subjects, themes, ideas gleaned in each third of the semester: week 5, 10 & 15.

This class is process oriented and it is assumed that students will participate in each exercise and present it in class; engage with each guest through conversation and questions; and attend performances the professor will offer as part of the course.

Assignments are presented in the classroom online. Therefore, it is expected that you will bring your completed assignments and share them. Assignments should be in standard, single space, 12 pt.

It is difficult to qualify an artwork, so the discipline and timing of meeting and turning in assignments is important towards your grade. Turning in assignments late, or not at all, will affect your grade.

FOR SDA Assignments: Students are required to complete written "homework" assignments on a weekly basis, which are the exercises, prompts and rewriting the professor assigns. Students are expected to present their work in class weekly. Students will be expected to focus out of class time for the preparation of their writing. Class assignments will be regarded as written exams.

Participation

Students are expected to show up on time; present assignments when they are due and actively participate with in-class dramaturgical analysis and discussion of the work of fellow collaborators. Class time is impossible to make up - one must be there to participate. Reliability and enthusiasm count.

Grading Breakdown

Table 1 Grading Breakdown

Student Responsibility	Point Value	% of Grade
Weekly Class Exercises	100	30%
Mid Term Exam: Performance Response	100	20%
Final Exam	100	20%
Three Class Papers	100	30%

Grading Scale

Table 2 Course Grading Scale

Letter grade	Corresponding numerical point range
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

Assignment Submission Policy

Assignments are presented in the classroom. Therefore, it is expected that you will bring your completed assignments and share them. Assignments should be in standard, single space, 12 pt. Regular submission deadline will be Wednesday at Midnight.

It is difficult to qualify an artwork, so the discipline and timing of meeting and turning in assignments is important towards your grade. Turning in assignments late, or not at all, will affect your grade.

Grading Timeline

Your standing will be reflected at Mid-Term and Final.

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 contrasts with 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.

This course aims to develop creative, analytical, and critical thinking skills. Therefore, all assignments should be prepared by the student working individually or in groups. Students may not have another person or entity complete any substantive portion of the assignment. Developing strong competencies in these areas will prepare you for a competitive workplace. Therefore, using AI-generated text, code, or other content is prohibited in this course, will be identified as plagiarism, and will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

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. 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).

Distribution or use of notes, recordings, exams, or other intellectual property, based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study. This includes but is not limited to providing materials for distribution by services publishing course materials. This restriction on unauthorized use also applies to all information, which had been distributed to students or in any way had been displayed for use in relation to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the internet, or via any other media. Distributing course material without the instructor's permission will be presumed to be an intentional act to facilitate or enable academic dishonesty and is strictly prohibited. ([Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook](#), page 13).

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.

Table 3 Course schedule

	Topics/Daily Activities
Week 1	Getting to Know You/Agreements
Week 2	Writing Workshop
Week 3	Writing Workshop
Week 4	Writing/Guest Lecture/Performance
Week 5	Writing/Guest Lecture/Performance
Week 6	Writing/Guest Lecture/Performance
Week 7	Writing/Guest Lecture/Performance
Week 8	Writing/Guest Lecture/Performance
Week 9	Writing/Guest Lecture/Performance
Week 10	Writing/Guest Lecture/Performance
Week 11	Writing/Guest Lecture/Performance
Week 12	Writing/Guest Lecture/Performance
Week 13	Writing/Guest Lecture/Performance
Week 14	Writing/Guest Lecture/Performance
Week 15	Writing/Guest Lecture/Performance
Week 16	Writing/Guest Lecture/Performance

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 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>

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 and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.

INSTRUCTOR BIO

Luis Alfaro is a Chicano playwright born and raised in downtown Los Angeles.

He is the 2024 World Theatre Artist for Theatre Communications Group (TCG), and the recipient of the 2024 award in literature from the American Academy of Arts & Letters.

He has received fellowships from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, popularly known as a “genius grant”, awarded to people who have demonstrated expertise and exceptional creativity in their respective fields.

He is also the recipient of the PEN America/Laura Pels International Foundation Theater Award for a Master Dramatist; The United States Artists; Ford Foundation Art of Change; Joyce Foundation; Mellon Foundation; among others.

He was the Associate Artistic Director of Center Theatre Group at the Music Center of Los Angeles County (2021-2022, 1995-2005), home of the Mark Taper Forum, Ahmanson & Kirk Douglas Theaters, where he produced over one-hundred and fifty new play commissions, productions, workshops, and readings.

He is the only playwright in the history of the Kennedy Center to have received two ‘Fund for New American Play’ awards in the same year.

An Associate Professor with tenure at the University of Southern California, he is the director of the MFA in Dramatic Writing program. He was previously on faculty at California Institute of the Arts (Cal-Arts), Writers Program at UCLA Extension and a University of California Regents Fellow at U.C. Riverside.

He was the inaugural Playwright-in-Residence for six seasons at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival (2013-2019); Playwright’s Ensemble at Chicago’s Victory Gardens Theatre (2013-2020); Inaugural *Imagistas* Latinx Playwrights at the Los Angeles Theatre Center (2021-); and served on the artistic staff for the Ojai Playwrights Conference (2002-2022).

His plays include *Aztlan*, *Earlimart*, *Electricidad*, *Oedipus El Rey*, *Mojada*, *Delano*, *Body of Faith*, *Alleluia the Road*, *Black Butterfly*, *Bruja*, and *Straight as a Line*, which have been seen at regional theaters throughout the United States, Latin America, Canada, and Europe.

His most recent play, *The Travelers*, was produced at the Magic Theater in San Francisco and is the winner of the prestigious Bay Area 2024 Glickman Prize. The production traveled to the Los Angeles Theatre Center, where it was named one of the nine best productions of the year by the Los Angeles Times and is the winner of the L.A. Stage Raw award in playwriting.

Luis spent two decades in the Los Angeles Poetry and Performance Art communities, where he regularly presented at Highways Performance Space, Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions and Beyond Baroque Poetry Center.

His book, *The Greek Trilogy of Luis Alfaro*, is the winner of the prestigious Greek & British Hellenic Prize and the plays are licensed by Dramatists Play Service.

He is a local Emmy winner, and Emmy nominated for his short film, *Chicanismo*, which was produced by PBS, named Best Experimental Film at the San Antonio CineFestival, and Best Short at CineAccion in San Francisco.

His recording, *down-town*, released on SST/New Alliance Records, was awarded Best Spoken-Word Release from the National Association of Independent Record Distributors.

He was a student of the playwright Maria Irene Fornes, performance artist Scott Kelman, and a product of the Inner-City Cultural Center in downtown Los Angeles.

Upcoming work includes, *Earlimart* (Latino Theatre Company, Los Angeles), *Herakles* (Getty Villa, Malibu), *Aztlán*. (Magic Theater, San Francisco)