

# USC School of Dramatic Arts

## **THTR 596b Thesis Development & Attainment, 63289D**

*Please note syllabus is subject to updates after the third week of classes.*

**Units: 2; Syllabus Dated January 12, 2024**

**Spring 2025, Session 001—Mondays—Time: 12-1:20 PM**

**Location: TBD**

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

**Unit Address:** USC School of Dramatic Arts, 817 W. 34<sup>th</sup> St., Los Angeles, CA 90089-6230

**Office Hours:** TH 12-2 by appointment; as a mutual courtesy, 24-hour cancellation via email is expected

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

**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 and Land 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. In addition, 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 mindful of professional standards: 6 or fewer characters, 50-89 pages (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 sincere refinement of the thesis play (see grading rubric for specifics)
8. Consideration of 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 BrightSpace.

## Readings

### Required

1. Your Play and Your 596b Colleagues' Plays
2. BrightSpace

### Supplementary Suggestions:

- a) "The Music Lessons" by Wakako Yamauchi
- b) "Arcadia" by Tom Stoppard
- 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) "One Hundred Years of Solitude" By Gabriel Garcia Marquez
- k) "The Book of Tea" By Kakuzo Okakura
- l) "Cutting for Stone" by Abraham Verghese
- m) "The Cherry Orchard" by Anton Chekhov
- n) "The Goat, or Who Is Sylvia?" by Edward Albee

## 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*.

For a credit/no credit course, those are the two options for grade evaluation.

### Assignments:

Final Project/Final Examination 100% of final grade

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

- 1/13 – Status check on thesis. Overview of objectives including dramatic writing foundations and business affairs instruments (pitch decks, biographies, synopses, character breakdowns). Reading and dramaturgical evaluation of thesis plays.
- 1/20 – USC HOLIDAY.
- 1/27 – Class review of biographies, synopsis, character studies.
- 2/03 – Independent studies and writing.
- 2/10 – Independent studies and writing, target of completing 1<sup>st</sup> draft by 2/18; submit plays to instructor at [greentea@usc.edu](mailto:greentea@usc.edu).
- 2/17 – USC HOLIDAY.
- 2/24 – Individual conferences regarding revisions; set up with instructor.
- 3/03 – Industry panel; online due to geographical diversity of guest artists.
- 3/10 – Independent studies and writing.
- 3/17 – USC SPRING RECESS.
- 3/24 – Class exploration of business affairs. In-class submit list of five potential sites for production and reasoning for selections.
- 3/31 – Independent studies and writing, conferences as needed.
- 4/07 – Literary Artists’ panel; online due to geographical diversity of guest artists.
- 4/14 – Reading of post-production revised play of Claire Bernstein.
- 4/21 – Reading of post-production revised play of Eliza Kuperschmid.
- 4/28 – Reading of post-production revised play of Alessandra Viegas.

**ADDENDUM TO COURSE SYLLABUS – ADDENDUM A**  
The following information is recommended or required by USC.

### 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).

## ADDITIONAL POLICIES

### 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](https://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.