Weber State University

THEA 4860: Advanced Playwriting

Spring 2014

Monday 1 PM- 4PM

**Instructor:**

Dr. Jenny Kokai **Office:** VBC 305

**Office hours:** T/TH 10:30-11:30 AM and by appointment

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**Goals and Questions**: This class assumes you have taken Playwriting and/or have done sufficient individual work to merit inclusion. You must have instructor approval to enroll in this course. During the course of this semester, students will write at least 1 full length play. Students will continue to find the answer to the questions: What is my voice as a writer? What questions do I ask on stage? What makes a successful play?

**Objectives:**

* Students will increase competency in the components of a play: dialogue, plot, story, action, character as demonstrated in the completion of a full length script.
* Students will maintain habits that promote daily writing, discipline, and creativity as demonstrated by their “Morning Pages Journal.”
* Students will give constructive feedback using the Lerman Method as demonstrated through class discussion.
* Students will revise and refine work based upon feedback from peers and instructor as demonstrated in the revisions made to their plays through the workshop process.
* Students will develop individual style and identify the sort of questions they wish to ask on the stage as demonstrated by their full length play.

**Program Outcomes for Theatre:** This class addresses or meets the following Program Outcomes for Theatre majors:

1. Have writing skills and ability to use research tools (library, internet, etc.).

6. Have a practical, working knowledge of how to produce a play on stage, including all related performance, script, design, and technical considerations.

7. Have the ability to critically evaluate what they and others have created.

8. Develop necessary skills to be proficient in at least 1 area of theatre (performance, teaching, technical/design-costume, technical/design-scenery, technical/design-lighting, technical/design-sound, directing, theatre management, or playwriting), with the ability to identify, analyze and resolve specific problems pertaining to that area.

9. Understand the historical context of theatre, drama, and performance including plays, major figures, costumes, scenic innovations, and theoretical approaches, and how these relate to contemporary society and culture.

10. Have experience with individual and collaborative processes needed to produce and understand theatre.

**Attendance:** The Theatre area recognizes the importance of class participation and performance. To this end we enforce the following attendance policy: Tuesday/Thursday classes are allowed 2 absences, Monday/Wednesday/Friday classes are allowed 3 absences, however these absences may not be on a scheduled test day. Once the allowed absence limit has been reached the student's grade will drop incrementally for each additional absence.

Example: Mitzi, an “A” student, has missed 3 classes in a MWF theatre class. Today she is missing class and her grade will drop to an A-. If she misses the next class, her grade will drop to a B+. 1 more absence and she will have dropped a full letter grade to a B.

Tardies are as important an issue as absences. Therefore, 2 tardies equal 1 absence. Students should plan ahead and use absences and tardies wisely.

As this class is a once a week seminar class, students will be expected to be at every single class meeting barring University excused issues involving extreme illness, death of an immediate family member, etc.

**Texts:**

* All readings are available through electronic reserves from the library. Students will need to purchase a notebook or binder.

**Recommended Texts:** These books are NOT assigned, instead they are books that I have found useful or that I have enjoyed greatly. They may help you as a writer as well, or you may find your own guidebooks.

* Cameron, Julia. The Artist’s Way. United States of America, Jeremy P Tarcher/Putnam: (2002).
* Egri, Lajos. The Art of Dramat!c Wr!t!ng. New York, Touchstone Books (1960).
* Lamott, Anne. Bird by Bird. United States, First Anchor Books: (1995).
* Niggli, Josefina. New Pointers on Playwriting. Boston, The Writer, Inc. (1967).
* Plimpton, George. Playwrights at Work. New York, The Modern Library: (2000).
* Turco, Lewis. Dialogue. Cincinnati, Ohio, Writer’s Digest Books, (1989).

**Assignments**: All reading assignments are due for the day they are listed.

* The primary purpose of our class meetings is to bring in completed pages to read and discuss. This means that the majority of work will be done out of class on an individual basis. As this is an upper level class you will be expected to have discipline and organization as a writer to get these pages done.
* If bringing in work to be read, please make 1 copy for each character in the play so that the play can be best read by your classmates. Please also bring a copy for me with your name on each page.
* Students are expected to keep a journal/notebook/binder in which they use Cameron’s “Morning Pages” exercise. Every single day (seven days a week) students need to sit down and write 3 pages. These pages can be dialogue, they can be poetry, they can be stream of consciousness, it doesn’t matter what they are, as long as they are 3 pages long. I will be periodically and randomly collecting these notebooks to check that this is being done (BRING YOUR NOTEBOOK TO EVERY CLASS), but I will not be grading for content. In fact, I won’t even read it. Ever. The important thing is that the exercise is done every day. I will be making my own “Morning Pages” book available for students to see as well.
* The “long” assignments for this class will be the completion of a full length play.

**Technology:** If we are writing in class, you are welcome to bring your laptop if you prefer to write on it. You are also welcome to bring headphones and listen to music while you are writing. However, you may not access the internet during class. If you decide to use Facebook, chat, or check email (which I know is very tempting) you’ll be low tech from then on—pencil and paper. Well, I guess you can have a pen. But you’ll need to bring it yourself. Cell phones are strictly verboten, and should be turned silent at the beginning of class.

**Grade Breakdown:**

Participation- 30%

Morning Pages- 20%

Full length play- 50%

**Participation:** In this class we will be following the Liz Lerman Critical Response process given below. It takes some practice, but successful participation will mean embracing the model and offering feedback generously to your classmates. Participation also means you have done the assigned reading before class and come ready to discuss the material.

(from <http://danceexchange.org/projects/critical-response-process/>)

1. Statements of Meaning: Responders state what was meaningful, evocative, interesting, exciting, striking in the work they have just witnessed.
2. Artist as Questioner: The artist asks questions about the work. After each question, the responders answer. Responders may express opinions if they are in direct response to the question asked and do not contain suggestions for changes.
3. Neutral Questions: Responders ask neutral questions about the work. The artist responds. Questions are neutral when they do not have an opinion couched in them. For example, if you are discussing the lighting of a scene, “Why was it so dark?” is not a neutral question. “What ideas guided your choices about lighting?” is.
4. Opinion Time: Responders state opinions, subject to permission from the artist. The usual form is “I have an opinion about \_\_\_\_\_\_, would you like to hear it?” The artist has the option to decline opinions for any reason.

**How assignments will be graded:** I expect to see your full length play progress over the course of the semester and for you to refine it with the feedback given to you by the professor and your peers.

**Plays will be graded on the following criteria:**

1. Evidence of unique artistic choices made by playwright.

2. Depth and development of character, plot, story, as befits genre and style of play.

3. Articulation of a coherent rationale for artistic choices.

4. Revisions made based upon feedback by professor and peers.

Participation means that for each class time you give your peer thoughtful, concise feedback on their work. It does not mean you tell them how you would write the play. Nor does it mean you hog the floor by talking too much. It means being a thoughtful and invested advocate for their work and a respectful listener of other people’s opinions.

**Weekly Assignments:**

**Jan 6: Introductions/Writing Assignments**

**Jan 13:** First 10 pages due

**Jan 20: No Class Meeting-** Second 10 pages due by email

### Jan 27: Third 10 pages due

**Feb 3:** Fourth 10 pages due

**Feb 10:** Fifth 10 pages

### Feb 17: No Class- Sixth 10 pages due by email, individual conferences scheduled through the week

**Feb 24:** Seventh 10 pages

**Mar 3:** Eighth 10 pages

**Mar 10: No class- Spring Break** Ninth 10 pages due by email

**Mar 17: First Reading:**

**A.**

**B.**

**Mar 24: First Reading:**

**C.**

**D.**

**Mar 31: First Reading:**

**E.**

**F.**

**Apr 7: Revisions**

**Apr 14: Revisions**

**Apr 21: Final Script Due**

**Academic Dishonesty:** As specified in PPM 6-22 IV D, cheating and plagiarism violate the Student Code. Plagiarism is “the unacknowledged (uncited) use of any other person’s or group’s ideas or work.” Students found guilty of cheating or plagiarism are subject to failure of a specific assignment, or, in more serious cases, failure of the entire course.

**Core Beliefs:** According to PPM 6-22 IV, students are to “[d]etermine, before the last day to drop courses without penalty, when course requirements conflict with a student's core beliefs. If there is such a conflict, the student should consider dropping the class. A student who finds this solution impracticable may request a resolution from the instructor. This policy does not oblige the instructor to grant the request, except in those cases when a denial would be arbitrary and capricious or illegal. This request must be made to the instructor in writing and the student must deliver a copy of the request to the office of the department head. The student's request must articulate the burden the requirement would place on the student's beliefs.” As a note, I am not willing to censor your fellow students and their writing. Each student has an individual voice and it is very likely topics and language will come up that may be offensive to some.

**DEPARTMENT COURSE CONTENT POLICY**: Some of the writings, lectures, discussions or presentations in this course may include material that some students may find offensive. Please review the syllabus carefully to see if the course is one that you are committed to taking. If you have a concern, please discuss it with me at your earliest convenience.

**Disability Accommodation:** PPM 3-34 notes: “When students seek accommodation in a regularly scheduled course, they have the responsibility to make such requests at the Center for Students with Disabilities before the beginning of the quarter [semester] in which the accommodation is being requested. When a student fails to make such arrangements, interim accommodations can be made by the instructor, pending the determination of the request for a permanent accommodation.”

**Emergency Closure:** If for any reason the university is forced to close for an extended period of time, we will conduct our class via Canvas. Look for announcements through Weber email and on our Canvas page.