

## **THEATRE 321: Playwriting**

### **2018 Block 2**

**Location:** Armstrong 24

**Hours:** M 9-11 (& on 10/15 12-2pm), WF 9-12pm, TTH 9-11am/12:30-2:30pm

**Instructor:** Scott Bradley

**Office:** Armstrong 48B

**Office Hours:** Wed 12-2pm or by appointment

**Email:** sbradley@cornellcollege.edu

### **Required Texts and Materials:**

#### Plays:

- *Water by the Spoonful* by Quiara Alegria Hudes
- *Hir* by Taylor Mac
- *Sweat* by Lynn Nottage
- *Guards at the Taj* by Rajiv Joseph
- *Far Away* by Caryl Churchill
- *A Kingdom Jack'd* by Scott Bradley

#### Materials:

You are required to bring to every class:

- writing journal
- stack of index cards
- pens, pencils, colored markers (a couple of each is fine)
- NOT required, but helpful: personal laptop computer

#### Additional reading in PDF form (to be provided by professor):

- Excerpt from *365 Days /365 Plays* by Suzan-Lori Parks
- "Liz Lerman's Critical Response Process" article
- Excerpt from Oscar Brownstein's "Strategies of Drama"
- Stageplay formatting template
- "Elements of Style" essay by Suzan-Lori Parks
- "Visit to a Small Planet" essay by Elinor Fuchs
- Excerpt from Aristotle's *Poetics*
- "On Writing As Transgression" essay by Naomi Wallace
- "36 Assumptions About Writing Plays" essay by Jose Rivera

I have built some flexibility into the syllabus so that I can adapt it to our class needs. As we go, I may add readings relevant to our discussion.

### **Course Description:**

In this class, we will explore different methods of writing plays and performance texts. We will examine various structures and stories, and we will access, develop, and hone our own creative voices to write for the stage. We will practice writing through a variety of approaches and share our work daily. We will read and analyze both published works and one another's performance texts. We will respond to each other's work with honesty, respect, and curiosity.

Some topics we will consider:

- Plot, Structure, Form – how are plays built? how does time move?
- Character – what elements constitute character? how do we activate them?
- Voice and Language – speech, rhythm, dialogue, poetry
- Perception shifts, ethics – how does an audience experience a play?

## Learning Objectives

After this course, a student should be able to:

- Demonstrate knowledge of playwriting fundamentals and mechanics
- Recognize influential writers and works of contemporary American drama
- Generate original performance texts that reflect their distinct, developing authorial voice
- Navigate professional development opportunities as a theatrical writer
- Utilize Liz Lerman's Critical Response Process to give and receive compassionate, critical feedback

## Cornell College Educational Priorities and Outcomes

This course supports the Educational Priorities and Outcomes of Cornell College with emphases on vocation (professional development), knowledge (historical context and analysis of contemporary dramatic literature), inquiry (cultural and theoretical research for dramaturgical presentations), ethical behavior (critical response methodology), communication (oral and written critical peer feedback, group discussion, oral presentations, written performance texts), and intercultural literacy (diverse/inclusive readings and writing exercises).

<https://www.cornellcollege.edu/about-cornell/mission/index.shtml>

## Theatre Departmental Learning Outcomes

This course meets the following outcomes: Intercultural Literacy and Inquiry, Knowledge and Application, Collaboration, Vocation and Well-Being.

<https://www.cornellcollege.edu/theatre/mission-outcomes/index.shtml>

## Course Requirements

### **Active Participation:**

**150 points**

This class is both a writing community and a collaborative art-making space. You are expected to engage fully with course readings, your classmates' work, and your own writing. You are your classmates' colleagues and first audience. Be ready to read in their plays, point out their brilliant lines or spine-tingling moments, learn from them, ask them sharp questions, and push them to grow. As this is a workshop, I expect everyone to participate in every conversation. This includes both active listening and thoughtful contributions.

### **Written assignments: (5x50 points)**

**250 points**

Most written assignments will be collected in standard play format – we'll go over this in class. Include your name, the date, and PAGE NUMBERS. If printed out, please remember to staple them. I encourage double-sided printing. **IMPORTANT:** When it is your turn to share, bring in a copy for me, and at least one for every two readers. We will discuss alternative ways of sharing our work during the first class.

**Online Responses:****50 points**

You will be asked to post an online response to assigned readings and topics. You are expected to post a comment before class meets to discuss the reading and post a response to at least one other comment. Questions to consider: How does the play employ plot, structure, character, voice, conflict, etc. to compel us forward? What surprised you, or where does your perception shift? What would you steal for your own work? These are informal, discussion-style comments, but they should demonstrate a rigorous engagement with the material.

**Dramaturgical presentation:****50 points**

Each student will select one of the published plays on the reading list and give a twenty-minute dramaturgical presentation on the playwright, as well as historical and cultural context of the play studied.

**Development presentation:****25 points**

Each student will present a synopsis and development goals statement for their one-act, followed by a brief (10 minute) introduction to a development opportunity they might pursue.

**One-on-one meeting:****50 points**

I will meet with each of you individually at mid-block to discuss your progress and the first draft of your one-acts. You are expected to be on-time and bring your story-map for the one-act project. Sign-ups will be made in advance.

**One-act assignment – Story Map:****50 points**

You will create a story map to chart the action of a one-act play, approximately 30-50 pages long.

**One-act assignment – First Draft Workshop:****150 points**

You will present the first draft of a one-act play, approximately 30-50 pages long, in class and participate in critical response to the play. You will cast the reading of the play before your scheduled workshop and you will be prepared with questions to lead the discussion that follows.

**One-act assignment – Second Draft:****100 points**

A completed second draft of your one-act will be turned in at the end of the course. Accompanying this draft will be a statement of revision goals attempted and assessment of your execution in reaching these goals. Guidelines for revision goals will be provided.

**Portfolio:****100 points**

On the last day of class, you will turn in a complete portfolio containing all of your written assignments, your short play, both drafts of your one-act play, goals assessment, and your self-evaluation for the course.

**Production:****25 points**

Class will attend the University of Iowa student production of Taylor Mac's *Hir*, followed by class discussion. Scheduled attendance date: October 12 – 8:00pm

Possible alternate dates for attendance: October 11-13 – 8:00pm; October 14 – 2:00pm

For more information: <https://theatre.uiowa.edu/production/season>

**Total: 1000 Points**

## **COURSE POLICIES:**

### **Statement of understanding:**

If the student is present on or after the morning session of the second day of the course, it will be considered a statement that the student understands, and will adhere to, all course policies including those regarding attendance, civility in the classroom and tardiness.

### **Grading**

All grades based on this 100 point scale:

	100 - 94	A			
	93 - 90	A-			
	89 - 87	B+	86 - 84	B	83 - 80
B-	79 - 77	C+	76 - 74	C	73 - 70
C-	69 - 60	D			
	59 - 0	F			

### **Attendance:**

Your participation in this course is essential; as a result, so is attendance. In the event of illness or other mitigating circumstances, you are allowed to miss **1 class session** without penalty. Please note that afternoon sessions count as another class session and therefore will count as another absence. Each subsequent absence after 1 will result in a **one-full letter grade** reduction of your final grade. For instance, a final grade of A would be reduced to B with two absences; C with three absences; D with four absences; and F with five or more absences. An excused absence will be granted only for direct participation in a Cornell College sanctioned event. (Example: You're on the track team and traveling to an event). Extraordinary circumstances will be dealt with on a one-to-one basis as needed and at the instructor's discretion. If you believe you have an extraordinary circumstance you must communicate with the instructor no later than one day after the date of absence.

### **Tardiness:**

Students arriving **10 min.** after the start of class session will automatically be counted as absent on the second tardy. Extraordinary circumstances will be dealt with on a one-to-one basis as needed and at the instructor's discretion.

### **15-Day Drop Policy:**

In order to be eligible for the 15 day drop, students must have been present at every class session, have completed all assignments and have proven significant efforts to be successful in daily readings/assignments. Eligibility for the Drop Policy must be discussed in advance with the professor and is left to the professor's discretion.

### **Computers in the Classroom:**

Computers and electronic devices are allowed in the classroom under the following restrictions:

1. Electronic devices must be used only for the understanding of the course content, reading of course texts, and furthering of course topics. Facebook, twitter and other social media use is not allowed.
2. Students using electronic devices must do so in full view of the faculty.
3. All sound effects must be muted unless specifically looking for video, etc.
4. When on field trips and/or with guests, no use of any electronic devices will be allowed at any time.

**Cell Phones and other Electronic Devices:**

Cell phones and other electronic devices are not allowed unless used as a prop in a production or for other presentations. Cell phones must be turned off (not just on vibrate). **Students found texting will be removed from the classroom upon the first offense. DO NOT TEXT AT ANY TIME IN CLASS. Please don't hold the phone under the table and check your texts.**

**Missed Assignments/Class Work/Presentations:**

Presentations will only be rescheduled in extraordinary circumstances and at the instructor's discretion. Written assignments which are handed in any time after the beginning of class on the "due date" will be penalized at the rate of one letter grade per day. **This includes assignments that are e-mailed after the start of class.** If you are unable to turn in your materials on time, the professor asks that you NOT interrupt class to "negotiate" a later turn-in date. Speak with the professor after class or on break.

**Food/Drink in the Classroom:**

Food and drink ARE allowed in the classroom as long as the classroom remains clean. At the start of session, please let us know if certain foods in the room will trigger food allergies. Should students step into a theater for any reason, please know that no food or drink is allowed in the studio, Kimmel or the Up Town Theatre Space.

**Dress:**

Students may be asked to stand and move a bit while reading texts in order to fully explore the playwright's intentions. Please consider this and dress accordingly.

**Civility in the Classroom:**

Students are expected to assist in maintaining a classroom environment that is conducive to learning. In order to assure such an environment, unless otherwise approved by the instructor, students are prohibited from using phones or the like, making offensive and/or defamatory remarks, reading newspapers/magazines, sleeping, bringing a weapon of any kind, or engaging in any other form of distraction or disruption of the educational process in the classroom. Students are also asked to consider their professionalism in communication with peers and faculty, and refrain from unnecessary "side-bar" conversation while the group is discussing. The professor encourages a robust, energetic and civil conversation that could include disagreement, and asks that all involved practice the tenants of civil discourse when discussing. This basic protocol, politeness and professionalism will be asked of everyone in the course, and is a skill that will serve you well in the future.

**Breaks:**

The calendar allows for many unscheduled class sessions throughout this block to allow students to deeply engage the material and prepare for the upcoming course. In doing so, time in class is precious and so will be filled. Breaks will be given at the professor's discretion. Should you need to step out of class for a biological break, please feel free to do so when you need. The professor asks that you consider the focus of your colleagues when leaving or returning. Participation points will be reduced if there is a pattern of frequent and long breaks from the sessions.

**Communication with the Faculty**

Professors have varied duties to a college, and teaching in the classroom is but one part of the job. Production work, committee assignments, departmental meetings and responsibilities to all Cornell students fill the day quickly. Many times I am not in my office due to meetings, production assignments, rehearsals or the like. The student is gently reminded that they are one of many who require the professor's time. Therefore, it's strongly urged that the student take it upon themselves to communicate early, in a variety of fashions (verbally, e-mail, phone, text) clearly and with

professionalism when in need of the professor's assistance. The professor will work to reply within 48 hours of initial contact and request that the student make a "good faith" effort to communicate as well. We are all working toward the same goal of student success, so let's assist each other in getting there.

Other tips for professional communication:

- Check your e-mail multiple times a day. Reply to e-mails even with an acknowledgement of "Thanks!"
- Use your Cornell e-mail address for Cornell business.
- Consider professionalism and personal responsibility in word choice, e-mail signature, font choice, content, etc. College is a time to practice professionalism in communication.
- Do not send verbal messages with a colleague. It's unfair to "make them the messenger" if you are going to be absent, for example.
- As I do not "Friend" current students, please do not request that I "Friend you" on Facebook until after graduation. We both deserve some personal and professional privacy.
- When you text, tell me who you are.

### **Policy on Human Rights**

This class looks to bring together, in common pursuit of its educational goals, persons of many nations, races, and creeds. In no aspect of this course shall there be differences in the treatment of persons because of race, creed, color, national origin, age, sex, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, or any other classification that deprives the person of consideration as an individual, and that equal opportunity and access to facilities shall be available to all. Though we all want to offer the benefit of the doubt to each learner in an educational setting, should the student suspect the presence of an aggression or a micro aggression, the student is urged to immediately speak to the instructor or the chair of the department. Please keep in mind that civil discourse can be passionate without being intentionally hurtful.

### **Accommodations for Disabilities**

Cornell College makes reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities. Students should notify the Coordinator of Academic Support and Advising and their course instructor of any disability related accommodations within the first three days of the term for which the accommodations are required, due to the fast pace of the block format. For more information on the documentation required to establish the need for accommodations and the process of requesting the accommodations, see <http://www.cornellcollege.edu/academic-support-and-advising/disabilities/index.shtml>.

### **Academic Honesty**

Cornell College expects all members of the Cornell community to act with academic integrity. An important aspect of academic integrity is respecting the work of others. A student is expected to explicitly acknowledge ideas, claims, observations, or data of others, unless generally known. When a piece of work is submitted for credit, a student is asserting that the submission is her or his work unless there is a citation of a specific source. If there is no appropriate acknowledgement of sources, whether intended or not, this may constitute a violation of the College's requirement for honesty in academic work and may be treated as a case of academic dishonesty. The procedures regarding how the College deals with cases of academic dishonesty appear in The Catalogue, under the heading "Academic Honesty."

### **Emergency Procedures for Armstrong Hall**

1. In the event of fire or a building evacuation, please exit through the north side of the building (the "front") and gather as a group in the grass outside of Merner Hall.
2. In the event of a tornado or severe weather emergency, go to the greenroom hallway.
3. In the event of a medical emergency, call 911 (9-911 from a campus phone) and then call public safety at x4299. Send someone to wait at the front and rear entrances to the building to guide

first responders to the classroom.

4. In the event of a violent weapons incident, lock and barricade doors, turn off lights, close window blinds, get low and stay behind cover (desks, walls, etc.). Silence cell phones and stay quiet. Stay put until notified by safety officials that it is safe to leave.

## Playwriting Course Schedule

All assignments are DUE on the date listed unless they are noted IN-CLASS.

<b>Week 1</b>	<b>Gathering Supplies</b>	<b>Readings DUE</b>	<b>Exercises/Presentations DUE</b>
9/24 Mon 9-11	Story	IN-CLASS: Formatting; Fuchs essay	IN-CLASS: <i>Barren Souls</i> analysis
9/25 Tue 9-11	Character	“36 Assumptions”; Aristotle’s Poetics Part IV	Twenty Images; IN-CLASS: Character profile
9/25 Tue 12:30-2:30	Character		IN-CLASS: Monologue/Scene
9/26 Wed 9-12	Structure	<i>365 Plays</i> excerpt; “Elements” SLP essay; News item	<i>365</i> Presentation; IN-CLASS: News exercise
9/27 Thu 9-11	Critical Response	Liz Lerman essay	2 short plays
9/27 Thu 12:30-2:30	Perception Shift	Brownstein excerpt	
9/28 Fri 9-12	Maps	<i>Water by the Spoonful</i>	<i>Water</i> Presentation; IN-CLASS: Mapping IN-CLASS: Transform exercise
<b>Week 2</b>	<b>Drawing the Map</b>	<b>Readings DUE</b>	<b>Exercises/Presentations DUE</b>
10/1 Mon 9-11	Transformation		Transformation map & play
10/2 Tue 9-11	Objectives/Tactics	<i>Guards at the Taj</i>	<i>Guards</i> Presentation
10/2 Tue 12:30-2:30	Theatrical cartography		One-act story maps
10/3 Wed 9-12	<b>ONE-ON-ONE MEETINGS</b>		1-on-1 Questionnaire, Story map revised
10/4 Thu 9-11	Big Idea	<i>Sweat</i> ; News item	<i>Sweat</i> Presentation; IN-CLASS: News play
10/4 Thu 12:30-2:30	Big Idea		IN-CLASS: Heroics/B&W
10/5 Fri 9-12	Visual Storytelling	<i>Far Away</i>	<i>Far Away</i> Presentation IN-CLASS: Team Bake-off

<b>Week 3</b>	<b>Building the Road</b>	<b>Readings DUE</b>	<b>Exercises/Presentations DUE</b>
10/8 Mon 9-11	Revolution	Naomi Wallace essay	Heroic/B&W short; Workshop 1 play
10/9 Tue 9-11	Violence	<i>Hir</i>	<i>Hir</i> Presentation; Workshop 2 & 3 plays
10/9 Tue 12:30-2:30	Workshop	Workshop 1 play	Playwright/responder questions
10/10 Wed 9-12	Workshop	Workshop 2 & 3 plays	Playwright/responder questions; Workshop 4 play
10/11 Thu 9-11	Workshop	Workshop 4 play	Playwright/responder questions; Workshop 5 play
10/11 Thu 12:30-2:30	Workshop	Workshop 5 play	Playwright/responder questions; Workshop 6 play
10/12 Fri 9-12 10/12 Fri 7-10pm	Workshop <i>Hir</i> Performance	Workshop 6 play	Playwright/responder questions
<b>Week 4</b>	<b>Road Trip!</b>	<b>Reading DUE</b>	<b>Exercises/Presentations DUE</b>
10/15 Mon 9-11	Dramaturgy	<i>A Kingdom Jack'd</i>	AKJ Questions
10/15 Mon 12-2	Cold Readings with Basic Acting		7-10 pg excerpt from 2 <sup>nd</sup> draft
10/16 Tue 9-11	Director/Playwright	AKJ	
10/16 Tue 12:30-2:30	Professional Opportunities	Development Searches	One-act synopsis and goals; Development presentations
10/17 Wed 9-12	Revision		Final portfolio