

TPP 4600: Playwriting Workshop

Fall 2018

Tu/Thu 3-4 (9:35-11:30 am)

Ustler Hall 108

Dr. Sean Bartley

Office Hours: W 5-7 (11:45-2:45) and By Appointment

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Course Description (from Schedule of Courses): “An introductory workshop in playwriting, culminating in the creation of a complete, one-act play by each student.”

Course Explanation:

“The great works of classical theatre, of whatever period, in whatever culture, are full of characters who would never work in a typically ‘well-crafted’ American play. -Mac Wellman, “The Theatre of Good Intentions” (68)

“My plays got much, much worse after I started studying writing seriously at NYU. Along with my fellow students, I became obsessed with Structure (Aristotelian and McKee-vian), which meant that we started writing plays that had clear PROTAGONISTS and QUESTS and TURNING POINTS and INSTIGATING EVENTS and THIRD ACT REVERSALS but not one believable or truthful line of dialogue. The whole time I had a feeling that my writing was getting a lot worse, but I wasn't sure what to do about it. Then I finally found my way into a graduate class called ‘Risking Enchantment’ with a professor—bless his heart—named Martin Epstein, and he had us read Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* and plays by Maria Irene Fornes and he would shout things like: ‘WHERE'S THE WEATHER IN YOUR PLAY?’ and ‘THERE HAS TO BE A RITUAL AND THAT RITUAL HAS TO BE DISRUPTED’ and all of that freed and helped me enormously. Screw turning points. Where's the weather?” -Annie Baker, Interviewed by Adam Greenfield

“We talk to ourselves, and the people who pick up on us are younger. Suzan Lori-Parks and Mac Wellman are understood with perfect ease by 20-year-olds in our classes at Brown. We have to explain Mac and Suzan-Lori to our own peers in their mid-forties because they say, ‘I want a tune that goes bum-bum-bum-de-dum.’ It's like Sondheim dismantling the Broadway musical, speaking to people 20 or 30 years younger than he is. It's not intentional, but as we dismantle the apparatus of our time we are speaking to a younger generation. That then becomes their legacy and they will dismantle it further.” -Paula Vogel, Interviewed by David Savran

In this class, students interested in playwriting will learn by doing. We will explore dramatic structure, influential plays, and conventions of contemporary scripts, but will do so in order to *question* them rather than reify them. By completing four major writing assignments and workshoping their material with their peers, students will try their hands in a variety of formats, styles, and conventions, hopefully developing a “toolkit” of techniques that work for them and fuel their own individual processes. While students will have the option to hear one of their final plays performed aloud, the emphasis here is on process, not on product.

Required Texts:

- Edgar, David. *How Plays Work*. ISBN: 1854593714.
- Supplemental texts posted to Canvas. These may be either .pdf attachments or direct links to UF Library databases.

Course Fees: Information about course fees can be found at <https://one.ufl.edu/soc/2188>.

Course Schedule: Students will collaborate on some aspects of the course schedule with the professor on the first day of class (8/23/18). The finalized course schedule will be posted on Canvas by 5:00pm that evening and distributed in hard copy at the following class meeting (8/28/18).

Canvas and Email: Students will need to access Canvas frequently in this course. Because of state and federal laws, all emails related to course content or delivery *must* come from students' UF accounts rather than personal accounts (like Gmail and Yahoo).

Grade Breakdown:

- Attendance and Participation: 15%
- Quizzes: 15%
- Bakeoff Assignment: 15%
- Adaptation: 15%
- Ten Minute Play: 20%
- Final Play: 20%

Grading Scale (UF does not award an A+ grade):

A = 93-100 A- = 90-92 B+ = 89-89 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

(For more information: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies/>)

Course Expectations:

1.) To attend class. This course will rely on discussion, class exercises, and group work. For this format to succeed, you must be present and on time. You will receive points for participation and attendance in this course. You may miss **TWO** unexcused class sessions without penalty to your grade. After this, 10 percentage points will be deducted from your Attendance and Participation grade for each absence beyond the allotted two. Tardiness is not acceptable. Three late arrivals and/or early exits will equal one absence. **If you know you will be absent from class, it is your responsibility to notify the instructor prior to the absence and turn in any work prior to the start of class time.** Excused absences, which are defined in the University Attendance Policy (<https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/attendance-policies/#absencetext>), must be documented. *Only absences covered in the University Attendance Policy* may be documented and considered as excused. Athletes must submit official, written documentation for *every* absence. Students who miss class due to an excused absence must contact the instructor to make up missed work (including quizzes) **within one week of your return to class.** All students are responsible for providing their own documentation – I cannot track it down for you.

2.) To read the assigned materials. The material we read will provide us with the common ground upon which we will base our conversations. Without that common ground, our conversations will lose much of their richness. We will have quizzes and in-class writing exercises to ensure that you are keeping up with the reading and to help stimulate class discussion. Bringing the textbook to class on each day a reading is due is essential.

3.) To be attentive and participate in class. Participation does not simply mean speaking aloud in class, although that is essential. Students should participate by actively following discussion and by contributing to our semester-long conversation through the insights they present in their papers and assignments. Other examples of participation include coming prepared to class, asking questions that help to clarify the assigned readings, and making thoughtful comments that link the readings to outside material (perhaps even from other courses). Examples of activities that detract from that atmosphere include arriving late or leaving early, cell phone use, distracting behavior during lectures or student presentations, speaking unkindly or disrespectfully to or about anyone in the classroom, or expecting special treatment. These activities will not be tolerated, and offenders may be asked to leave class or face other disciplinary measures.

4.) To complete the required assignments in a timely fashion. The assignments provide you with both informal and formal opportunities to articulate your responses to the issues we'll be discussing. You will get the most out of the course if you turn in your work on time. **If you know you will be absent due to school related functions, family events, etc. it is your responsibility to make prior arrangements with the instructor. Late assignments are subject to a 10% deduction per day.** Some assignments, such as the Facilitation, cannot be made up except in the case of unanticipated, excused absences. While I appreciate that computer problems happen, they are not an acceptable reason for submitting work late and will result in the same 10% per day late penalty. All deductions are calculated based upon the possible points for each assignment.

Course Hashtag (#tpp4660): Outside of class, students are welcomed and encouraged to use the #the4110 hashtag to discuss the material and concepts with each other and the professor. One particularly productive way to use the hashtag is to tweet questions, responses, and ideas that come from a reading assignment immediately after reading it. The professor (@seanmbartley) will often read these tweets and, when appropriate, incorporate them into class discussions and lesson plans. The course hashtag is a great way for students who feel less comfortable speaking in front of the class to contribute to the conversation.

Quizzes: There will be at least 10 quizzes during the course of the semester which are graded on a pass/fail system and designed both to ensure that students keep up with the assigned reading and to reward students for being attentive during class. Quizzes will typically cover the reading due in class that day. On days when reading is due the quiz will take place prior to our class discussion. Thus, students should come to class with the reading completed and be prepared to be quizzed on the material. Students with unexcused absences are not afforded the opportunity to make up a quiz at a later date, though each student will be awarded one quiz drop at the end of the semester. **Students who miss a quiz due to an excused absence must arrange to complete their make up quiz within one week of the date it was originally administered in class; those who do not make this deadline forfeit the opportunity to make up missed work.**

Bakeoff Assignment: The first Bakeoff was imagined by Paula Vogel, Mac Wellman, and Constance Condon in the early 1990s to generate material quickly, getting out of analytical modes of

thinking and committing to their instincts. The “ingredients” these authors had to include in the first Bakeoff were a screen door, a back porch, and a secret. They had just 48 hours to turn the ingredients into a play. The Bakeoff became the first assignment for the incoming MFA Playwriting students at both Brown University and Yale School of Drama when Paula Vogel ran those programs. Rather than starting with Aristotle or Freytag or Esslin, they started by writing a play.

We will begin our class with a version of the Bakeoff as Vogel ultimately revised it at Brown and Yale. Students will choose the “ingredients” collectively, but will also explore two other sources with a “daisy chain” structure: Arthur Schnitzler’s controversial and innovative 1897 play *Reigen* (also known as *La Ronde*) and the free-associative suggested video links on the YouTube website. Students will have 72 hours to write at least three scenes of their own “daisy chain.”

Adaptation: First, we’ll investigate how a wide range of playwrights, directors, and performance artists have adapted Chekhov’s plays and short stories. In consultation with the professor, students will select their own short stories or other fictional works to adapt, workshopping their adaptations with their peers.

Ten Minute Play: After completing their adaptations, students will explore playscripts that offer non-traditional formats to directors, designers, and performers, including Caryl Churchill’s *Love and Information*, Les Freres Corbusier’s *Dance Dance Revolution*, and The Rude Mechs’ *The Method Gun*. Students will write their own ten-minute plays inspired by (or departing from) these examples, complicating the relationship between page and stage.

Final Play: For the final play, students may choose to either return to their Bakeoff pieces, completing the “daisy chain,” or to create a completely original one-act play. Students must pitch this play by Thursday, 11/15 and are encouraged to consult with the professors and their peers throughout the writing process.

University and School of Theatre and Dance Policies:

University Honestly Policy: UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Honor Code (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honorcode/>) specifies several behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the professor.

Accommodations: Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

Attendance at Performances: By decision of the faculty in the School of Theatre and Dance, the following statement is included on all departmental syllabi: “*Since production is the laboratory for all theatre*

courses, attendance at all mainstage School of Theatre and Dance productions is required of students enrolled in classes with the following prefix designations: THE, TPA, TPP, ORI. Critiques of and/or responses to these productions may be required. Attendance at all related events is encouraged.”

Course Evaluation: Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results/>

Student Resources:

Health and Wellness

1. U Matter, We Care: If you or a friend is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu or 352-392-1575 so that a team member can reach out to the student.
2. Counseling and Wellness Center: <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/Default.aspx>, 392-1575; and the University Police Department: 392-1111 or 9-1-1 for emergencies.
3. Student Health Care Center, 392-1161.
4. University Police Department, 392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies).
<http://www.police.ufl.edu/>

Academic Resources

1. E-learning technical support, 352-392-4357 (select option 2), e-mail to learningsupport@ufl.edu, or <https://lss.at.ufl.edu/help.shtml>.
2. Career Resource Center, Reitz Union, 392-1601. Career assistance and counseling.
<http://www.crc.ufl.edu/>
3. Library Support, <http://cms.uflib.ufl.edu/ask>. Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.
4. Teaching Center, Broward Hall, 392-2010 or 392-6420. General study skills and tutoring.
<http://teachingcenter.ufl.edu/>
5. Writing Studio, 302 Tigert Hall, 846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers. <http://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/>