
You are responsible for all information contained in this syllabus. Claiming ignorance of any of the following information is NOT an excuse for being unprepared.

This syllabus is subject to change at my discretion.

AMHERST COLLEGE College of Theater and Dance
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**Writing the Full-Length Play
(ENGL235/THDA 272)
Spring 2024**

E-mail: ftavoukdjian@amherst.edu

**TR 2.30-3.50
Prof. SEVAN**

Office Hours: TR 4-8PM / Frost B18

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Amherst College acknowledges and appreciates the fact that our college is built within the ancestral homelands of the Nonotuck peoples. We also recognize our present-day neighboring indigenous nations: the Nipmuc and the Wampanoag to the East, the Mohegan, Pequot, and Narragansett to the South, the Mohican and Mohawk to the West, and the Abenaki to the North. Finally, we acknowledge and celebrate that Indigenous people continue to live here in the Kwinitekw Valley among us.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course is workshop-based in which you will explore writing a full-length play for the theatre. Students are expected to be familiar and comfortable with the basic principles of playwriting including action, dialogue, conflict, dramatic question, and character. We will deepen our understanding of these principles by completing and workshopping writing assignments, providing and receiving feedback, and reading the work of established playwrights.

The course will be run more or less as a workshop. You will present draft pages of your play (cast and read aloud in class) for constructive critique from me and your classmates. You are expected to revise in earnest. Writing is rewriting. For the purposes of an organized method of feedbacking we will be using the Liz Lerman Critical Response Process.

Writing will be fast and furious over the course of our 14 weeks together. Be prepared to write a lot and to write quickly as well as reading one another's plays before and during class time.

NON-THEATRICAL APPLICATIONS

This course will help you develop skills applicable to a wide range of academic disciplines and professional fields. You will practise analysis, synthesis, and evaluation – 3 higher order cognitive skills that will benefit you in any classroom or workplace. You will analyse the work of playwrights, to understand how the whole and parts operate, as well as your and

your classmates' writing to understand where and how the parts hold together or break down. You will synthesise your personal observations, experiences, and questions to create original writing, and you will evaluate your writing and others writing to explore possibilities for revision.

In whatever field you pursue, you will inevitably receive feedback on your performance and have to offer others feedback on theirs. Feedback can be scary, but a workshop class like this will give you plenty of practise in receiving and giving feedback. You will learn how to listen actively to critical feedback, respond gracefully to that feedback, and process that feedback in a productive manner. You will also learn how to provide honest, tactful, and productive feedback to others.

Finally, you will read plays by a selection of writers who are diverse in background and style. You will consider different perspectives and experiences, which will help you better understand to communicate with the diversity of classmates and colleagues you encounter now and in the future. You will also delve into characters in your own writing that may think and behave differently than you, encouraging you to deepen your capacity for empathy, which is invaluable both professionally and personally.

NOTE ABOUT SENSITIVE MATERIAL

Some of the plays we will read in this course – and perhaps some of the plays you or your classmates will write – may examine issues related to race, class, gender, violence, and so forth. If you find yourself in discomfort with a particular reading and can't attend a particular class discussion, please let me know. Also, know that you may excuse yourself from a discussion due to personal discomfort with the subject matter if the occasion arises. Our classroom should be a safe space for you to explore and discuss the material; if at some point it does not feel safe to you, you must do what you need to, to take care of yourself and your classmates. I ask you to consider the difference between discomfort and trauma in our examination of these texts.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Understand and implement the more advanced tenets of playwriting within the parameters of a dramatic work.
- Identify a variety of playwrights and styles.
- Complete a fully realized dramatic work through 3 drafts crafted during the semester.
- Contribute productively to a workshop environment with constructive criticism and positive feedback.
- Apply feedback to your own writing through revision.
- Articulate your choices in the revision process.
- Analyse and discuss the craft of plays.
- Analyse and discuss critical theory readings about drama and playwriting.

CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE

- Be respectful. To me. To each other. We are all different. Make space.
- I have an open-door communication policy. Anytime you have a question or concern please reach out ASAP. Don't sit and stew. However, please make sure all concerns are class-related.
- Be engaged. You'll get the most out of the course if you're present and participating.
- Sharing creative work can be terrifying. I aim to create a safe space where we can take risks, be honest, and feel free to share work at any stage.
- Mobile Devices. Turn them off. Seriously. I encourage you to bring in laptops and tablets to write/take notes on, but please be present and a part of our community.
- Because of the space we are in please do not bring food or drink into the room outside of water.

REQUIRED WORK:

First Draft	15%
Second Draft	20%
Final Draft	25%
Reflection Journal	20%
Class Participation	10%
In-Class Writing Exercises	10%

READINGS

You are expected to diligently and carefully read the assigned plays and critical excerpts. Be prepared to fully discuss them and answer questions during class meetings and for your journal. Readings must be done before they are up for discussion. All course readings will be provided for you on our course Moodle.

If you would like to explore other manuals of playwriting I suggest the following texts:

- *Playwriting: Structure, Character, How and What to Write* (Stephen Jeffreys)
- *How Plays Work* (David Edgar)
- *The Secret Life of Plays* (Steve Waters)
- *Playwriting: The Structure of Action* (Sam Smiley)
- *The Art of Dramatic Writing* (Lajos Egri)
- *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers* (Christopher Vogler/ Michele Montez)

COURSE WORK

- **Play Drafts** — over the course of the semester you will produce two rough drafts and a ‘final’ draft of your play which will receive feedback in class sessions and via notes from me. Each draft has to show substantial progressions from one to the next and will include a self-reflection essay to talk about the process, questions, and successes you have with each draft.
- **Class Participation** — means attending sessions, coming prepared, being involved in and contributing to discussions. Theatre is about engaging with a community in the present moment. I recognize that verbal participation is easier for some than others, so please feel free to discuss any participation concerns with me.
- **Class Writing Exercises** — writing exercises to build your writers toolkit and voice. These will be shared in class – time permitting – but submitted online into a Google Drive folder you will create and share with me.
- **Reflections Journal** – for each play/playwriting topic we read in the course you will fill out a reader response reflection entry. These are due weekly on Tuesdays by noon.

GRADING:

Theatre is subjective. Your work won’t be graded based on thematic content or personal taste, but on the execution of the narrative based on the playwriting of narrative/dramatic questions, conflict, resolutions, character development, and dialogue, as well as how feedback has been integrated and how drafts grow from one to the other.

LATE WORK:

In theatre and in life, time is of the essence. The practise of completing work by a given deadline will help you whether you pursue theatre or you never touch a play again. Therefore, if you turn in late work, you will not earn full credit unless there is a special circumstance— for example, a personal emergency—that prevents you from completing your work on time and for which you have documentation. Please contact me regarding any special circumstances. Late work will be penalised at 10-points per day late. *Note: The final draft cannot be turned in late.*

Tech Snafus: We live in a world of technological glitches. Moodle might be down or your access to the Amherst website may have an issue. Have a backup plan. In the case of written work I highly recommend that if you wait until the last minute, as is the birthright of all students, and something does go wrong that you email me immediately with the assignment in question to lock in your submission day and time. I can’t help you troubleshoot any technical issues, but you can cover yourself from any penalties by this email lock in.

ATTENDANCE

Three unexcused absences will result in 10-point deduction from your course grade. Additional unexcused absences will result in a 5-point course grade deduction per absence. Excused absences are illness/hospitalization (with appropriate supporting documents) or a death in the family.

AMHERST POLICY OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Every person's education is the product of his or her own intellectual effort and participation in a process of critical exchange. Amherst cannot educate those who are unwilling to submit their own work and ideas to critical assessment. Nor can it tolerate those who interfere with the participation of others in the critical process. Therefore, the College considers it a violation of the requirements of intellectual responsibility to submit work that is not one's own or otherwise to subvert the conditions under which academic work is performed by oneself or by others.

- We will cultivate our studio atmosphere to be a space of support, respect, patience, and care as well as a time for examining our process with an overall generosity of spirit. It is our responsibility to make an effort to build and maintain this atmosphere.
- Your willingness and concentrated participation in class activities is your responsibility in this course.
- Experiential learning works best in an atmosphere of openness and trust. It is your responsibility to contribute to this atmosphere by attending all class meetings and completing assignments on time, by communicating problems openly, honestly, and promptly, and by listening to your peers without any judgment.

Plagiarizing will result in a 0 for the assignment and possible failure of the course

BELONGING AND INCLUSION

As the instructor of this course, I endeavor to provide an inclusive learning environment. However, if you experience barriers to learning in this course, let's connect to discuss ways to best support your access. If you have disability-related circumstances and are seeking academic accommodations (e.g. extra-time testing, reduced distraction test area, short breaks as needed, note taking assistance, etc.), Accessibility Services is eager to assist us with identifying reasonable accommodations for the course. They can be contacted at accessibility@amherst.edu

COURSE SCHEDULE

The course schedule is subject to change. All changes will be announced in class and posted to Moodle and/or email.

ADA POLICY

Amherst College is committed both philosophically and legally to assuring access to all college programs and services. The college pursues the goal of equal access through proactive institutional planning and barrier removal, as well as through the provision of reasonable and appropriate accommodations to students, staff, and faculty with documented disabilities.

For more information about Amherst College Disability Services please visit:

<https://www.amherst.edu/offices/student-affairs/accessibility-services>