

Program Information

Course and Instructor Information

Course Title: Playwriting

Credits: 3.00

Format: In-Person

Prerequisites: N/A

Time and Day of Meetings: Tu/Th 9:30am-10:45am in DRMU 109

Instructor: Tlaloc Rivas

Email: tlaloc.rivas@uconn.edu

Telephone: 860-486-9227

Office: DRMU 246

Office Hours: To be determined

Course Materials

Required Textbooks:

Letters to a Young Playwright: Practical and Impractical Advice on the Art of Playwriting by Adam Szymkowitz | Applause

Wild Mind: Living the Writer's Life by Natalie Goldberg | Bantam

Plays to be Read/Studied:

The Happy Journey to Camden and Trenton by Thornton Wilder

I and You by Lauren Gunderson

Dutchman by Amiri Baraka

How I Learned to Drive by Paula Vogel

The Actor's Nightmare by Christopher Durang

The Big Meal by Dan LeFranc

Required course materials should be obtained before the end of the first week of the semester. You may purchase through the UConn Bookstore or via other booksellers.

Additional Course Materials:

Apart from required textbook(s), other readings such as 10-minute plays, scenes, and excerpts, etc. will be posted HuskyCT. Readings for the seminars are inextricably linked, and you are expected to complete all assigned readings outside of class by their due dates.

Materials:

A writing utensil, a notebook, and a writing pad are required. Laptops are allowed for writing in- class but notifications from all electronic devices including cell phones must be turned off or placed on silent settings.

Note: Any use of your devices for web browsing, e-chatting, or working on any outside material not related to this course will be prohibited for using said devices for a period determined by the instructor and the student's academic advisor. Coffee/tea is allowed in a secure vessel. Please observe that no food or eating is permitted during class.

Course Description

This course introduces students to the art of creating original theatrical works. Emphasizing the playwriting process, students will employ a range of creative strategies and models from contemporary playwrights to discover multiple pathways toward crafting vibrant, compelling plays. While the primary focus is on writing, the course also includes critical engagement with dynamic dramatic texts by acclaimed authors. Through close reading and discussion, students will deepen their understanding of dramatic structure, character, and theme. In addition to textual analysis, students will engage in generative exercises inspired by Maria Irene Fornés, as well as movement-based practices, visual art prompts, improvisational writing, and collaborative dialogue. These methods will serve as springboards for developing original material, culminating in a final scene to be presented in a public reading at the end of the semester.

"There are two of you — one who wants to write and one who doesn't. The one who wants to write better keep tricking the one who doesn't." — Maria Irene Fornes

Course Objectives

Playwriting is a branch of creative writing that helps you develop versatile skills applicable across various academic disciplines and professional fields, including adaptation, translation, screenwriting, fiction, poetry, speechwriting, and more. Whether you're just beginning or revisiting the fundamentals, the emphasis is on expanding your creative toolkit across a variety of contexts. In this course, you will write and revise new work. By the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Combine lived experiences with creative expression by drawing on personal observations, experiential knowledge, and thoughtful inquiry as the foundation for generating original work.
- Compose short plays that demonstrate clear dramatic action, nuanced characters, and purposeful,

expressive dialogue.

- Critically analyze and evaluate dramatic texts by examining their themes and structures.
- Apply analytical insights to inform the development of original creative work and to provide constructive critiques of peer-generated material.
- Within a supportive seminar/workshop setting, formulate critical and actionable feedback to your peers as well as apply peers' feedback in your revision process.
- Practice communicating effectively and listening intentionally.

Course Requirements and Grading

Course Designation:

This course is designated as in-person through the UConn registrar and does not hold a remote or hybrid designation. While accessibility accommodations will be granted, any request for a remote option must be submitted **at least 12 hours in advance**. These requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis and are not guaranteed. All assignments, presentations, and case study must be presented in-person to receive credit throughout the course.

On Pre-existing Work:

It is important that everyone in the class begins at the same level and follows this course's plan of exercises and calendar. Therefore, only original work created during the course will be allowed. Previously written plays or adaptations will not be counted towards credit.

Challenging Content:

Some plays we read or write in this course may touch on sensitive topics such as race, class, gender, or violence. This may include difficult subject matter, controversial themes, and content with emotional weight. If you feel uncomfortable with a particular discussion or reading, please let me know in advance. You may also excuse yourself from discussions if needed for your well-being. Our classroom is meant to be a safe space for exploration, so take care of yourself and your classmates.

Writing Exercises:

Throughout the course, you will receive both in-class and out-of-class writing exercises. I will collect the out-of-class writing exercises to provide feedback. You must complete all out-of-class writing exercises to receive full credit for this portion of your grade. Completing an out-of-class writing exercise means that you:

- Follow the writing prompt (*For example, if the prompt asks you to write a naturalistic scene between two characters, go with a scene between two gas station attendants instead of a scene between five bumble bees and a snowman.*)
- Type the exercise in standard script format (*You will receive a handout that explains standard script format.*)
- Submit the exercise on time (See the above policy for late work.)

Required Theater Attendance:

Theater is a live, collaborative art, and the script is just one step in the process. To fully understand how to write a play, you must understand how directors, actors, and designers work to realize a play on stage. As such, you are required to see the following play at Connecticut Repertory Theatre: ***Pocatello* by Samuel Hunter (March 27-April 6), Harriet S. Jorgensen Theatre**

Assessment and Criteria

Grading will consist of participation in class; notebook assessment; a monologue/2-character scene; an initial 10-minute play (10 pages); and a final consisting of two 10-minute plays or one one-act play (20 pages). Criteria for assignments and assessments include but not limited to structure and coherence; authenticity of voice; character development; thematic clarity; and investment in storytelling.

Summary of Course Grading:

Course Components	Weight
Participation/Discussions	10%
Notebook	20%
Monologue/2-Character	15%
10-minute play	20%
New play or two 10-minute plays	35%

- A. Participation/Discussions (10%)
- B. Notebook (20%). You will keep a hand-written notebook which will be used for writing prompts, exercises, and outside journaling. To be compiled and maintained throughout the course then submitted at the end of the semester. Due Weeks 4, 8, 12, 15
- C. A monologue / two-person scene (15%). You will draft a monologue based on the writing exercises, followed by a two-character scene building off that monologue. Due Week 4.
- D. 10-minute play (20%). You will compose, revise and turn in an original 10-minute play (minimum 10 pages in length) before mid-term evaluations are submitted.
Due Week 7.
- E. Draft of a new play(s) (35%). You will compose, revise and turn-in an original work (minimum of 25 pages) – or two 10-minute plays (minimum 10 pages in length each).

Note: either of these can build off your 1st 10-minute play – whether it is an expansion or a complete revision. Due Week 14.

Due Dates and Late Policy:

Assignments are due on the date stated on the calendar (TBD). If a student needs an extension, the student must contact the instructor by email. Requests for extensions will automatically be approved, but an email is required to facilitate setting a new mutually agreed-upon due date for the assignment. Once that new due date is set, it will not be extended a second time.

If a student requests an extension on more than one assignment during the course, the second and following extended assignments will be penalized by no more than 5% points if they are turned in by the new agreed-upon extension date(s).

Any assignment not turned in by the original due date without a previously negotiated extension, or by the agreed-upon extension due date, will not be accepted. Any confusion about due dates will be resolved by referring to the syllabus for original due dates and to email correspondence for extension due dates. In-person discussions or other forms of communication do not supersede email correspondence.

Weekly Time Commitment:

Seminar/Lab: 75 minutes (each class); assigned readings (1-2 hours); notebook writing (1 hour); drafting and revising 10-minute play (4 hours or more over a period of several weeks); drafting and revising new play or two 10-minute plays (8 hours or more over a period of several weeks)

Plan accordingly to complete readings, rehearsals, and assignments by their due date. **Please check your email regularly!** If there are important updates or changes, you won't want to miss them. Set a regular time/day in your calendar (2x a day) to read emails. Allow your instructor for up to 8 hours (weekdays) and 12 hours (weekends) to respond to your emails.

Classroom Community:

Learning is, most often, a communal activity. We learn by hearing what others think, responding, and building ideas together. Discussion is an important part of this class. In our discussions, we may debate issues that may be politically or personally charged, and we will not always agree. It is our challenge and responsibility, as participants in this course, to be open and receptive to the opinions of others and to engage one another in respectful dialogue. It is our mutual responsibility to create a safe atmosphere in which every participant is included, where we accept that our thoughts and ideas are part of a mutual learning process, and where constructive feedback is given with compassion, generosity, and the desire to learn and improve.

Course Outline

Week	Dates	Topics
1	Tues 1/21	Playwriting: The Basics Introduction / Syllabus / Notebook Reading: <i>The Happy Journey to Camden and Trenton</i> by Thornton Wilder
	Thur 1/23	Writing Exercises: An Introduction Reading: <i>Blue</i> by Emily Hageman

2	Tues 1/28	Details, Details: The Building Blocks
	Thur 1/30	Writing Exercises Reading: Stuffed by TJ
3	Tues 2/4	Writing Exercises
	Thur 2/6	Reading: Greetings from Fallujah by Christine Evans Why you need to Show and Tell
4	Tues 2/11	Writing Exercises Turn-in Notebook Reading: TBD
	Thur 2/13	Turn-in Monologue/2-Person
5	Tues 2/18	Plot and Character
	Thur 2/20	Workshop Day Reading: Remember by Liz Appel
6	Tues 2/25	How P.O.V. Affects Our Understanding
	Thur 2/27	Writing Exercises Reading: Seven Jewish Children: A play for Gaza by Caryl Churchill
7	Tues 3/4	Crafting Effective Dialogue
	Thurs 3/6	Writing Exercises Reading: <i>I and You</i> by Lauren Gunderson
8	Tues 3/11	Revision: Learning to Fail Better
	Thur 3/13	Workshop Day Reading: How I Learned to Drive by Paula Vogel
9	Tues 3/18	NO CLASSES (Spring Break)
	Thur 3/20	NO CLASSES (Spring Break)
10	Tues 3/25	Transferring the Sensory onto the Page
	Thur 3/27	Writing Exercises Attend: Pocatello by Sam Hunter (Jorgensen)
11	Tues 4/1	Perfection is our Enemy
	Thur 4/3	Writing Exercises Reading: Our Dear Dead Drug Lord by Alexis Scheer

12	Tues 4/8	Ethical Considerations
	Thur 4/10	Writing Exercises No Reading
13	Tues 4/15	Subjectivity, Objectivity, and Integrity
	Thur 4/17	Writing Exercises Reading: The Big Meal by Dan LeFranc
14	Tues 4/22	Workshop Day
	Thur 4/24	Workshop Day No Reading
15	Tues 4/29	Writing Exercises + Workshop Day (if necessary)
	Thur 5/1	Recollections, Final Thoughts, and Just One. More. Writing. Exercise.
5/5 – 5/10 TBD Finals Week		Public Reading(s) of Selected Work(s) Note: All Playwright Notebooks will be returned to their owner(s).

How to Succeed in this Course

Your participation and presence at every class meeting is tantamount to your success. A pattern of absences and lateness will negatively impact your final class participation grade. Should there be an unexpected weather event, instructor illness, or campus emergency, make-up classes will be scheduled towards the end of the semester.

We will frequently post important information and course materials online. You will need to check your email and HuskyCT regularly to keep up. Please allow the course instructor to spend up to 8 hours (weekdays) and 12 hours (weekends) to respond to messages.

Academic Integrity

Any work that you submit at any stage for assignments — outlines, bibliography, drafts, final submission, presentations, blog posts, etc.—**must be your own**; as artists, we must seek to protect the rights and intellectual property of our peers, faculty, writers, scholars, and ourselves (!) by insisting that we act with integrity and hold one another and ourselves accountable. Please ask me if you have any questions regarding permissible or encouraged forms of collaboration if they are unclear.

UConn's policy on academic integrity for undergraduates can be found in Responsibilities of Community Life: Student Code, in [Appendix A: Academic Integrity in Undergraduate Education and Research](#):

Academic misconduct is dishonest or unethical academic behavior that includes, but is not limited to,

misrepresenting mastery in an academic area (e.g., cheating), failing to properly credit information, research or ideas to their rightful originators or representing such information, research, or ideas as your own (e.g., plagiarism).

A.I. / LLM Policy:

The rapid advance of artificial intelligence (AI) in the last year means that we are in a fluid and fast-changing time for teaching and learning. At present, the University's policy is *"Inserting AI-generated text into an assignment without proper attribution is a violation of academic integrity, and using AI tools in a manner that was not authorized by your instructor may also be considered a breach of academic integrity"* although instructors have a lot of latitude in how they use AI. In general, however, this means using AI to generate arguments and writing without proper attribution is considered plagiarism.

Therefore, here is our class policy on academic honesty with regards to AI:

- In this class, any written work that you submit at any stage of the writing process—thesis, outline, draft, bibliography, final submission, blog posts, and more—must be your own ideas and writing and not copied or AI generated.
- However, you may use AI as research and editing tool. Any use of AI such as Chat GPT to support work on an assignment must be acknowledged in a citation that includes:
- the prompt you submitted to the bot, 2) the date of access, and 3) the URL of the program.

For more details, please consult the Poorvu Center's guidelines on using sources.

Here are academically honest ways to use AI including CHAT GPT:

- To **conduct preliminary research** and collect information alongside other search engines and library research tools
- To get **editing help** to refine your ideas, alongside support from a writing tutor
- To act as a **tutor** providing extra help on material - providing flash cards and study materials for the midterm
- To **provide summaries** to check your understanding of course material (but not as a substitute for reading course materials)

A good rule of thumb: If while you're completing an assignment you ask yourself, *"Will I get in trouble if I copy and paste from ChatGPT or from a source verbatim without attribution?"* – you've already answered the question. Authenticity in your research and analysis in your own voice matters more than showing your instructor how clever you are.

Buyer beware!

- AI chatbots can sound incredibly polished and authoritative, but they reflect biases and inaccuracies in academic fields and on the internet. Please don't take the information provided at face value.
- AI programs also tend to invent academic sources. Please don't get in trouble for having invented sources in your writing. My assistants will do a source audit on student sources throughout the semester.

- Privacy questions: If you upload unpublished writing (your own or someone else's) to an AI site, it then enters the AI system database. Submitting anyone else's work, research, or notes directly into any of these tools (which could theoretically help you understand a bot's capabilities more fully), may violate their intellectual property.
- A.I. / LLM's software platforms train the product to collect your information and often install cookies to track your other activity. While you may choose to make this bargain to try out A.I. tools yourself, it is more problematic (and potentially undermine your rights under [FERPA](#)) to require you to sign up for tools that will track and use your private data.
- Finally, posting any class materials (i.e. any syllabi, assignments, tests, etc.) on course sharing websites (Course Hero, etc.) may be considered a violation of your instructor's copyright and intellectual property and a lead to a potential investigation of academic integrity and/or university policy. If you have any questions (and we all are learning with this new technology), please consult with me or your advisor.

Recording Lectures:

In order to protect student privacy and intellectual property rights, students are prohibited from recording any session, or any portion of a session, by other means. **The sharing of any recorded content without receiving written permission is prohibited.** Also: if you would like to ensure your likeness is not captured during an online class, please turn your camera off. For recordings conducted in person, please alert me to any concerns so that I may take steps to help ensure you are not recorded.

The web-based video delivery of any class in this course is for sole use of the students enrolled in this course. Any other use of these class videos or any pictures or derivatives of the class videos without the written consent of the course's professor is prohibited.

Any videos created by students as part of this course are for sole use of the students enrolled in this course. Any other use of these videos or any pictures or derivatives of the videos without the written consent of the video creator is prohibited. **Please remember that the unauthorized recording or sharing of course content may be considered a violation the law, University policy, and/or The Student Code.**

Resources for Students Experiencing Distress

I am committed to supporting your success not only in this course but throughout the semester. **Your health is a critical part of your success, and I encourage you to reach out to me if you encounter challenges or difficulties that impact your performance or your well-being.** We can work together to identify solutions to course-related concerns, and I can help you navigate the many resources available to you at UConn for your academic, personal, and professional development. **Please don't wait until things get "bad enough" to ask for support. You matter, and the more you take care of yourself and your needs, the more you contribute toward your own success.**

UConn Student Health and Wellness (SHaW) offers mental health services in the form of brief, goal-oriented individual therapy to support students in managing their mental health concerns. The [BeWell](#) website also provides free and confidential mental health support 24/7/365 or you can call [\(833\) 308-3040](#) to schedule an appointment. Or if you have an immediate need,

use the following:

7 STUDENT HEALTH SERVICES (CONFIDENTIAL) [860-486-4700](tel:860-486-4700) (24 HOURS)

7 COUNSELING & MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES (CONFIDENTIAL) [860-486-4705](tel:860-486-4705) (24 HOURS)

Some students may prefer to seek therapeutic services elsewhere. The Storrs-Mansfield area is also home to several private practice clinicians. SHaW offers an online database and referral platform for community-based mental health providers at [Thriving Campus](#). UConn students can search providers in their area based on their mental health and insurance needs as well as preferences related to providers' identities.

Policy Against Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, and Interpersonal Violence

UConn is dedicated to creating a safe and fair environment for everyone within the University community—students, staff, and visitors. A culture of mutual respect is essential for fostering academic and professional excellence. Every member of the community is responsible for upholding an atmosphere where learning and work can occur without the fear of discrimination or harassment. Inappropriate romantic relationships, especially when those in authority misuse their position, can undermine the University's goals.

An exception to this reporting exists if students disclose information as a part of coursework submitted to an instructor in connection with a course assignment. Even in the absence of such obligation, all Employees are encouraged to contact OIE if they become aware of information that suggests a safety risk to the University community or any member thereof.

UConn takes all reports with the utmost seriousness. Please be aware that while the information you provide will remain private, it will not be confidential and will be shared with university officials who can help. More information, including confidential and exempt employee resources available for support and assistance, can be found at [Equity](#) and [TitleIX](#)

Students with Disabilities

UConn is committed to protecting the rights of individuals with disabilities and assuring that the learning environment is accessible. If you anticipate or experience physical or academic barriers based on disability or pregnancy, please let me know immediately so that we can discuss options. Students who require accommodations should contact the Center for Students with Disabilities, Wilbur Cross Building Room 204, (860) 486-2020 or [UConn CSD](#)

Weather/Emergency Closures

In case of inclement weather, a natural disaster, or campus emergency, the University communicates

through email & text message. Students are encouraged to sign up for alerts through <http://alert.uconn.edu>. You should also be aware of emergency procedures, and further information is available through the Office of Emergency Management at <http://publicsafety.uconn.edu/emergency/>.

Note: Be sure to check with your individual professors/classes whether or not your classes are either:

- a. moved to online instruction,**
- b. rescheduled, or**
- c. cancelled.**