English 2005: Beginning Playwriting

Instructor: Dr. Radavich
Office: 319 Coleman Hall
Telephone: 581-6971 (Office) or 345-9280 (Home)
Office Hours: 13:00-14:00 MWF

Required Texts:

Catron, Writing, Producing, and Selling Your Play
Cerf, Thirty One-Act Plays
McNamara, Plays from the Contemporary American Theatre
Thomas, Best American Screenplays

PURPOSE. This course will introduce you to the basic building blocks of drama (e.g., plot, character, setting, climax). We will attempt to develop a sense of performance and audience awareness, increasing your understanding of the relationship between the written word and the demands of live performance. To this end, you will be expected to complete one performance-worthy script of one act or equivalent during the semester. Along the way, we will examine various genres and major playwriting philosophies, to aid you in developing your own individual approach. You may focus on writing for the stage, TV, screen, or radio.

COURSE ORGANIZATION. The course will be divided roughly in half. During the first half, we will be reading and analyzing plays and writing scenes to help you develop your skills before launching into the main script. The second half will focus on revising and perfecting your script through class readings, improvisations, and, performances.

ASSIGNMENTS. The major assignments in this class will require writing scenes to develop your skills in constructing plot, action, and dialogue within a convincing and engaging dramatic setting. The final script will represent the culmination of your learning experience. A midterm exam will cover readings and discussion. During the second half of the course, you will be expected to assume performance roles in scripts by others in the class. There will be no final exam; instead, you will turn in your revised script for final evaluation. Two short reviews of dramatic performances (ea. 2-3 pages double-spaced) during the semester will be required.

GRADING. Evaluation of your work in this course will be demanding and fair and will include an assessment of your class preparedness and participation. Grading will be divided into thirds. ONE THIRD of your grade will be determined by your participation in class discussion and performance, as well as by your progress and improvement; reviews will also be counted in this portion. The SECOND THIRD of your grade will be made up of your writing assignments during term. The midterm exam will be worth two playwriting assignments, and the rough draft of your script will be worth three. The FINAL THIRD of your grade will consist of the revised version of your script at semester's end.
LATE WORK. Assignments turned in late will be penalized one-third grade PER CALENDAR DAY late. Missed in-class assignments cannot be made up; that is the reward for coming to class regularly.

ATTENDANCE POLICY. You are assumed to be professionals-in-training and are expected to attend class regularly as you would show up for work on the job. The attendance policy for the course will operate as follows: you may miss up to one week of class without penalty; this allows you flexibility in case of illness or unexpected emergency. Thereafter, the course grade will be lowered proportionately for each week missed. If you are absent more than four weeks of class, you will automatically receive an F in the course.

PLAGIARISM. According to University policy,

Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism - "The appropriation or imitation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one's original work" (Random House Dictionary of the English Language) - has the right and the responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignment of a grade of F for the course.

CONFERENCES. Please feel free to consult me regarding ideas, planning, problems, revision, etc. I would be happy to meet with you at any mutually convenient time.

INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES. If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the Coordinator of the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible.
English 2005 Assignments

Jan. 11 - Introduction
13 - Catron, chs. 6-7
15 - France, The Man Who Married a Dumb Wife

Jan. 18 - King's Birthday; No Class
20 - Saroyan, Hello Out There
22 - Character Sketch Due

Jan. 25 - Catron, ch. 15
27 - Guare, Marco Polo Sings a Solo
29 - Scene #1 Due

Feb. 1 - Discussion
3 - Catron, pp. 163-177
5 - Scene #2 Due

Feb. 8 - Elements of screenwriting
10 - Screenplay (to be selected; in Thomas)
12 - Lincoln's Birthday; No Class

Feb. 15 - Comparison of media
17 - Catron, ch. 8; strategic planning
19 - SCENARIO DUE

Feb. 22 - Odets, Waiting for Lefty
24 - Catron, ch. 19
26 - Excerpt #1 Due

Mar. 1 - Discussion
3 - Shaw, Bury the Dead
5 - MIDTERM EXAM

Mar. 8 - Developing complications
10 - Catron, ch. 20
12 - Excerpt #2 Due

Mar. 15-19 - Spring Break

Mar. 22 - Building to the climax
24 - Trouble-shooting
26 - Discussion
Mar. 29 - Sound and spectacle
   31 - Trouble-shooting
   2 - SCRIPT DUE

April 5 - Performances
   7 - "
   9 - "

April 12 - Performances
   14 - "
   16 - "

April 19 - Performances
   21 - "
   23 - "

April 26 - Performances
   28 - Fine-Tuning
   30 - Review; FINAL SCRIPT DUE

NO FINAL EXAM