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ENG 3064-001: Intermediate Dramatic Writing

Christopher Wixson
Eastern Illinois University

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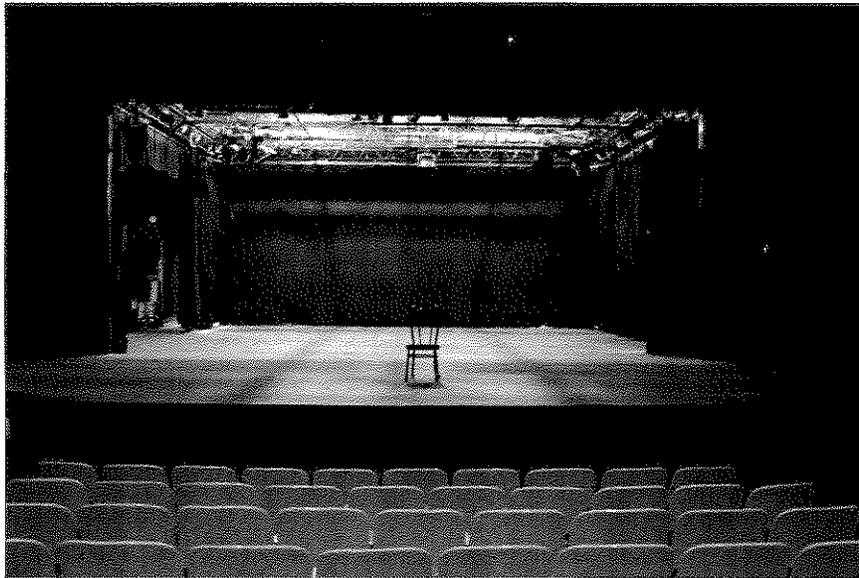
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ENG 3064: Intermediate Dramatic Writing

spring 2019 / Section 001 / 3.00 Credits

Dr. Chris Wixson



"The creation of character is more about the adverbs than the adjectives."

—Peter Mendelsund, *What We See When We Read*

syllabus

course philosophy

ENG 3064 offers the opportunity to develop, diversify, sharpen, and deepen the **craft** of the playwright. Exercises, applied techniques, and reading/discussion of contemporary American scripts will work to unlock the possibilities of stage storytelling. Exercise-based rather than workshop-based, ENG 3064 is (like, I would argue, theatre itself) *process-oriented* much more than *product-oriented*. Growth occurs only through the vigorous workout of craft muscles, which is precisely what this course provides.

Learning Outcomes

Students completing this course will:

1. Understand and deploy the conventions and languages of stage storytelling.
2. Demonstrate a working knowledge with various techniques in dramaturgical craft.
3. Read and analyze several contemporary plays.
4. Determine best practices for their own writing.
5. Cultivate growth in craft, work ethic, and self-assessment.

course texts

The Playwright's Guidebook, Stuart Spencer

The Dramatic Writer's Companion, Will Dunne

Backwards and Forwards, David Ball

Shorts by Susan Glaspell, August Strindberg, and Harold Pinter

Contemporary American Plays by: Clare Barron, Sarah DeLappe, Jackie Sibblies Drury, Noah Haidle, Josh Harmon, Dominique Morisseau, Theresa Rebeck, Ntozake Shange, and Jen Silverman.

contact information

Dr. Chris Wixson

cmwixson@eiu.edu

Coleman Hall 3771/DFAC 1351

Office Hours: TR 8:30-10:30 / W 12-1 / By appointment

****By maintaining your enrollment in this course, you agree to adhere to the following policies:**

attendance

Mandatory.

Class sessions will involve a mixture of in-class writing, discussion, and informal lecture so writers should be prepared to be productive in *both* directed and self-directed modes. This course is understood as a lab -- so expect to use classtime for experimentation and continued development. As such, in-class exercises cannot be made up. If you miss classes, you are missing the course.

I expect you to be arrive on time for class **awake and prepared** every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon. In other words, arrive on time with your reading/writing assignment completed, prepared to labor in our ongoing collaborative task. Because so much in this course relies upon in-class work, absences and habitual lateness will adversely affect your course performance. Attendance will be taken at each class session – you are allowed **two** unexcused absences before your grade is negatively affected. After that, each unexcused absence will lower your participation grade by half a letter. **Six unexcused absences will result in a “O” for participation. More than seven unexcused absences will result in a grade of no credit for the course. Habitual lateness (beyond once) will also affect your grade negatively since it is disruptive and disrespectful.** Please notify me by email if there is unexpected illness or an emergency that causes you to miss class. Do **not** get in touch asking “for the assignment” or a “rundown of what you missed.” My responsibilities as an instructor lie with the students who do come to class. Excused absences are accompanied by appropriate legal or medical documentation. *Any* unexcused absence will seriously undermine your success in this course.

class participation

ENG 3064 is a reading-, writing-, and thinking-intensive course with a schedule that requires time and attention devoted solely to our work together; meaningful **PRESENCE** is essential to the success of our collaborative endeavor and your individual growth. This is an “own and hone” course (OWNING and HONING your craft as writers) and only works if *you* work it.

You should come to class *prepared to work* on individual/group pieces in progress. Participation in a college-level course means careful, full preparation of the reading, frequent contributions to discussions, risk-taking in writing and thinking. **In addition, please be prepared to WRITE during class, either on an appropriate device or with pencil and paper.**

Coming to class and saying you are “frustrated” or “behind” or “whatever” and thus have nothing to contribute or work on is intellectually lazy and irresponsible. This labor is demanding but rewarding and important; while there will be frustration with complexity at times, this course understands that complexity as part of the challenge to which we aspire to rise as a community of writers during the semester. Don’t come to class and sleep, check your phone, or otherwise distract others and disrupt the process.

Besides excellent preparation, class participation also means responding constructively, respectfully, and energetically to what others in class share, that you work actively to stretch yourself intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. In short, you are expected to work actively to contribute to the course’s overall movement and to strive to make the course a success for yourselves and every class member. **I TAKE THIS GRADE VERY SERIOUSLY.**

late papers

These are no fun for me to keep track of and only put you further behind. For each day beyond the scheduled due date, assignments will be penalized a third of a letter grade. **After a week, I will no longer accept the assignment, and**

it becomes a “O.” Again, if you become ill or the victim of emergency circumstances, please email me as soon as possible and stay in touch.

cell phone and computer use

You may bring your computer to class with you, assuming that you use it in a scholarly and responsible fashion. This means that you will only have applications and windows related to the current discussion open. **You may not check** social media, surf the web, play games, or otherwise distract yourself and those around you from the class conversation with technological devices.

You are likewise expected to use cell phones in a responsible, respectful, and professional manner: **turn them off when you come in to class.** If you have an emergency for which you must be available, you must discuss it with me beforehand and keep your phone on vibrate. **Under no conditions are you allowed to** text message, take pictures or video (illegal in class), play games, or use the cell phone in any other manner during class. The nature of our academic endeavor necessitates mutual respect and dedicated attention during the too short time we have together. Violating any of these policies will result in your participation grade being lowered by a full letter grade for each violation.

academic integrity

Any paper with your name on it signifies that you are the author—that the wording and major ideas are yours, with exceptions indicated by either quotation marks and/or citations. Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use (appropriation and/or imitation) of others' materials (words and ideas). **Yes, self-plagiarism IS a thing; one has committed it when one turns in to a current course an assignment previously written for/submitted in another course.** Evidence of plagiarism will result in one or more of the following: a failing grade for the assignment, an F in the course, and a report filed with the Student Standards Office.

student success center

Students who are having difficulty achieving their academic goals are encouraged to contact the Student Success Center (www.eiu.edu/~success) for assistance with time management, test taking, note taking, avoiding procrastination, setting goals, and other skills to support academic achievement. The Student Success Center provides individualized consultations. To make an appointment, call 217-581-6696, or go to 9th Street Hall, Room 1302.

special needs and situations

If you have a *documented* disability and are in need of academic accommodations, please contact the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible in order to receive approval.

tech support

If you need assistance with D2L, call D2L Support toll free at 1-877-325-7778. Support is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Email and Chat options are also available on the "My Home" page after logging in to D2L. Other D2L resources including a D2L Orientation course for students are available on the same page. For technical questions regarding other software, hardware, network issues, EIU NetID/password, or Panthermail, contact the ITS Helpdesk at 217-581-4357 during regular business hours or submit a help ticket at <https://techsupport.eiu.edu/>. If you have a question regarding course content, contact your instructor.

written assignments

- *Three Short Play Analyses
- *Weekly Sketches
- *Two Self-Reflective Inventory Assessments
- *Active, Engaged Class Participation — defined as WRITING and CONTRIBUTING productively.
- *A Culmination Piece

a word about evaluation

The course operates on the basis of skill-based grading. Each assignment will have concrete craft objectives; evaluation will focus on the technical achievement of objectives and the efficaciousness of the writer's choices.

a word about the schedule

During the week, we will discuss plays (usually on Tuesdays) and *complete* writing exercises (usually due on Fridays). Weekends are for reading assigned plays, pre-writing for the following week's exercise, and working on your Culmination Piece.

course grade breakdown

Your final grade in the course will be determined by your performance on the following assignments:

Three Play Analyses (2-3 pages)	15%
Sketches (varying lengths, from 2-3 pages to 4-5 pages)	40%
Culmination Piece (10 pages)	30%
Initial Self-Inventory (3-4 pages) / Final Self-Reflective Assessment (4-5 pages)	10%
In-class Writing / Class Community Citizenship	5%

**You must complete all written assignments to complete the course. Failure to complete any one of the components represents incomplete work for the semester and anyone with incomplete work will not receive a passing grade for the course.



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course calendar

** Because this schedule can and probably will change, it is imperative that you bring it to/have access to it at each class meeting so as to make the appropriate revisions.

** **Always** be prepared to **WRITE** in class with either pencil/paper or appropriate device.

PG: *The Playwright's Guidebook* / DWC: *Dramatic Writer's Companion*

- January
- 8 Course Introduction
Read: PG pp. 3-18; 204-206
- 10 The Mechanics and Physics of Dramatic Narrative
Read: Susan Glaspell's "Trifles" (D2L) / *Backwards and Forwards* Part One
Writer Self-Inventory Due to D2L Dropbox by Friday 1/11 at 11:59 PM
- 15 Stage Dialogue, Stage Movement, and the Stage Character
Read: Pinter's "Last to Go" and Strindberg's "The Stronger" (D2L)
MANDATORY CONFERENCES THIS WEEK
- 17 Sketch Play
"Open Dialogue" Sketch Due to D2L Dropbox by Friday 1/18 at 11:59 PM
- 22 Read: DeLappe's *The Wolves* (D2L)
- 24 Sketch Play
Stage Directions Sketch Due to D2L Dropbox by Friday 1/25 at 11:59 PM
- 29 Read: Silverman's *The Moors* (D2L)
- 31 Sketch Play
Place Sketch Due to D2L Dropbox by Friday 2/1 at 11:59 PM
- February
- 5 Read: Harmon's *Bad Jews* (D2L)
- 7 Sketch Play
Tension Sketch Due to D2L Dropbox by Friday 1/8 at 11:59 PM
- 12 Read: Rebeck's *Seminar* (D2L)
- 14 Sketch Play
Hidden Agenda Sketch Due to D2L Dropbox by Friday 2/15 at 11:59 PM
- 19 Read: Drury's *Really* (D2L)
- 21 Sketch Play
Externally Imposed Variations Sketch Due to D2L Dropbox Friday 2/22 at 11:59 PM

February 26 Read: *Mr. Marmalade* (D2L)

****Mr. Marmalade plays this weekend**

28 Sketch Play

Image Sketch Due to D2L Dropbox by Friday 3/1 at 11:59 PM

March 5 MANDATORY CONFERENCES

7 MANDATORY CONFERENCES

Found Situation Sketch and Elevator Pitch for Culmination Piece Due to D2L Dropbox by Friday 3/8 at 11:59 PM

HAPPY SPRING BREAK!!

Stanislavski Questionnaire Worksheet for Culmination Piece's Main Character Due to D2L Dropbox Sunday 3/17 by 11:59 PM

19 Read: Morisseau's *Blood at the Root* (D2L)

21 Sketch Play

Before/After Sketches Due to D2L Dropbox by Friday 3/22 at 11:59 PM

26 Read: Barron's *You Got Older* (D2L)

28 Sketch Play

Sensory Sketch Due to D2L Dropbox by Friday 3/29 at 11:59 PM

April 2 NO CLASS ----- ENGLISH STUDIES CONFERENCE

4 Review of Dramatic Structure

Backwards Chain and Beat Sequence Due to D2L Dropbox Friday 4/5 by 11:59 PM

9 Review of Stage Character

****For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf plays this weekend**

11 Review of Stage Dialogue

Culmination Piece First Draft Due to D2L Dropbox by Friday 4/12 at 11:59 PM

16 MANDATORY CONFERENCES

18 MANDATORY CONFERENCES

Revised First Draft Due to D2L Dropbox AND via email by Sunday 4/21 at 11:59 PM

23 WORKSHOP

25 WORKSHOP

Final Version of Culmination Piece and Self-reflective Assessment due on D2L by Friday, May 3rd 11:59 PM

PROMPTS FOR ANALYTICAL ASSIGNMENTS

Writer Self-Inventory:

It is important to map out our starting point, both to orient yourself to your individual goals but also to introduce me to you as a writer. In an informal discussion of 3-4 pages, please answer the below questions; the more detailed and precise you can be in your answers, the greater investment you make in your development as a writer this semester.

****How do you understand yourself as *writer*? What are your operative interests as a *writer*?**

****What is your agenda for this course?**

****What are your experiences/habits/sensibilities with regard to theatre?**

Use Times New Roman 12 font, double spacing, and 1 inch margins all around. The heading need contain *only* your name.

Play Analyses:

You are required to submit **three** play analyses this semester, including one on one of the two EIU productions, *Mr. Marmalade* and *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf*. See course schedule for performance dates.

For each analysis, read the play as a technician (how is this play assembled? how does it move?). Write a 2-3 page response in which you explain what dramaturgical choices most resonate for you (positively or negatively) and articulate what specifically from this writer will carry over and inform your own work in progress. **For the play you see in production**, discuss also what you discovered in experiencing the stage versus just the page and how it will impact your craft as a writer.

***Use Times New Roman 12 font, double spacing, and 1 inch margins all around. The heading need contain *only* your name.**

***Each analysis is due by 1:59 PM on the Tuesday the class discusses the play.**

Final Self-Reflective Assessment

In 4-5 pages, chronicle and assess your own work (process *and* product) and development as a writer during the semester and share goals for future development as a writer. What aspects of your craft do you feel have grown or deepened this term? How? What specific examples can you point to? What techniques have you found most useful? How? What areas of your craft do you still feel less confident about? How will you strengthen it as you move forward? Please use 1-inch margins all around, double spacing throughout, and Times New Roman 12 font. **Due Friday May 3rd via D2L dropbox by 11:59 PM.**