

# Playwriting II

## Syllabus

THEA 4340/Fall 2020

M/W: 9:00-10:20

**Instructor:** Georgina Hernández Escobar, MFA

**E-mail:** ghernandez9@utep.edu

**Office & Hours:** MW 11:30-1:30pm. BY APPOINTMENT ONLY. Please send me an e-mail, make sure that you identify yourself and CLEARLY state your concern.

**Course Description:** This course will work in both the traditional approach to theatre, which is rooted in character, plot, and narrative structure through a clear arc (beginning, turning point, end) as well as encourage fearless experimentation paying special mind to instincts, process, and form. It will consist of in-class writer warm-ups, exercises, and prompts designed to trust our first instincts and to write both visually and concretely, as well as ask the writer to complete drafts of three different 10-minute plays.

**Course Objectives:** The primary goal of this course is to encourage students to write quickly, fluidly, and fearlessly. We will focus on structure, experimentation, and process. This is a laboratory of ideas. Throughout the course you will be engaging in a rigorous writing practice as well as learning the craft of completing full drafts of your ideas. As reading is a component of writing, much of our work will be read in class and the group will respond with feedback.

**The Walk & The Lab:** Our course will meet synchronously on both Mondays and Wednesdays at our scheduled time of 9:00-10:20 unless otherwise indicated and communicated to you with plenty of time to adjust. For our purposes, I am calling our meeting times “The Walk” and “The Lab.” The **Walk** refers to a day in which you can expect a lecture, a conversation, a processing of information, a gathering and bottling of clouds. We walk together (figuratively and literally when and if able) on the journey of your writing and these are the days we talk about what we know and don’t know together. The **Lab** is about doing. These are the days on which your writing prompts will be activated, we will write together, read our work out loud, and share *work* together. Most of your participation grade will be adjudicated from your work during Lab days.

**NOTE:** Writing prompts will be given IN CLASS ONLY in the first few minutes of our Wednesday classes. They are not graded but you must be present to receive them. I will not email the prompt, nor will I read any if you do not complete in class.

**Transparency in Flexibility:** The times are changing and so is our craft. I believe in decolonizing our classroom as much as possible and with that in mind, nothing that I put forth is set in stone. As we progress through the course, be prepared to change direction of reading assignments or shape of the overall course. If we collectively agree to focus our attention elsewhere, we can actively reformat the shape of this course. You cannot demand to change the shape of the course based on your sensibilities alone, rather, you can exercise your analytical skills to justify why we *should*. Should your argument be fact-rich and evidence worthy and should the class agree, we will take a vote and move forward accordingly.

## ONLINE REQUIREMENTS

The course content is delivered via the Internet through [Zoom](#), Blackboard, and email. Here are some things to remember:

- Ensure your UTEP e-mail account is working and that you have access to the Web and a stable web browser.
- Google Chrome and Mozilla Firefox are the best browsers for Blackboard; other browsers may cause complications. When having technical difficulties, update your browser, clear your cache, or try switching to another browser.
- You will need to have access to a computer/laptop, a webcam, and a headphone/microphone combo. You will need to download or update the following software: Microsoft Office, Adobe Acrobat Reader, Windows Media Player, QuickTime, and Java. Check that your computer hardware and software are up-to-date and able to access all parts of the course.
- If you do not have a word-processing software, you can download Word and other Microsoft Office programs (including Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook and more) for free via UTEP's Microsoft Office Portal. Click the following link for more information about [Microsoft Office 365](#) and follow the instructions.

**IMPORTANT:** If you encounter technical difficulties beyond your scope of troubleshooting, please contact the UTEP [Help Desk](#) as they are trained specifically in assisting with technological needs of students. Please do not contact me for this type of assistance. The Help Desk is much better equipped than I am to assist you!

## STATEMENT REGARDING COVID-19 PRECAUTIONS

You must **STAY AT HOME** and **REPORT** if you

1. Have been diagnosed with COVID- 19
2. Are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms, or
3. Have had recent contact with a person who has received a positive coronavirus test.

Reports should be made at [screening.utep.edu](#). If you know anyone who should report any of these three criteria, encourage them to report. If the individual cannot report, you can report on their behalf by sending an email to [COVIDaction@utep.edu](mailto:COVIDaction@utep.edu).

For each day that you attend campus—for any reason—you must complete the questions on the UTEP screening website ([screening.utep.edu](#)) prior to arriving on campus. The website will verify if you are permitted to come to campus. Under no circumstances should anyone come to class when feeling ill or exhibiting any of the known COVID-19 symptoms. If you are feeling unwell, please let me know as soon as possible, and alternative instruction will be provided. Students are advised to minimize the number of encounters with others to avoid infection.

Wear face coverings when in common areas of campus or when others are present. You must wear a face covering over your nose and mouth at all times in this class. If you choose not to wear a face covering, you may not enter the classroom. If you remove your face covering, you will be asked to put it on or leave the classroom. Students who refuse to wear a face covering and follow preventive COVID-19 guidelines will be dismissed from the class and will be subject to disciplinary action according to Section 1.2.3 *Health and Safety* and Section 1.2.2.5 *Disruptions* in the UTEP Handbook of Operating Procedures.

## GRADING\*

The components of your grade are....

20% Participation

20% Collective Theme 10 Minute Play

10% Your 10 Minute Play 1<sup>st</sup> Draft \*

10% Your 10 Minute Play Final Draft\*

\*Or 20% for a 23-Minute TV Spec or Pilot.

35% Final Play

**\*I DO NOT DROP STUDENTS FROM A CLASS—THAT IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY. ALSO, KEEP TRACK OF YOUR OWN ATTENDANCE AS I CERTAINLY WILL.**

## GRADE BREAKDOWN

90-100: A

80-89: B

70-79: C

60-69: D

0-60: F

- **LATE WORK IS NOT ACCEPTED**—IT IS THE STUDENT'S RESPONSIBILITY TO PLAN IN ORDER TO GET WORK IN ON TIME. COMPUTER ISSUES ARE NOT YOUR INSTRUCTOR'S RESPONSIBILITY; **PLAN AHEAD.**

## REQUIRED TEXTS

- *Perfect 10* by Gary Garrison

Any additional reading(s) of online articles will be posted on BlackBoard and available to you with enough time to complete the reading assignment.

## ASSIGNMENT BREAKDOWN

### Participation

(20%)

This is a writer's room. Your participation is not about YOU. Your participation grade is about collective accountability. Writing is a personal practice that often (and more so currently) happens in collaboration. Though we will not be collaborating on a script together, we are all members of this 2020 Writing Room. We will be reading each other's work. Come prepared to listen, to work, to push yourself out of your comfort zone and grow. Your participation grade is not about you showing up, it's about your growth and collaboration during our Lab days.

### Collective Theme 10-Minute Play

(20%)

Your first 10-minute play will be crafted from a collective theme or idea. The class will vote on a theme to explore for this first play (i.e. revenge, plague, economic distress, climate change, etc.) and your individual play must somehow reflect the theme.

Your 10-Minute Play 1<sup>st</sup> Draft\*

(Peer Reviewed)

(10%)

Your second 10-minute play will be about a theme or idea of your choosing. This is not an excerpt, this is not a scene, this is not an unfinished piece: it is a 10-minute play and it will be crafted according to Gary Garrison's *Perfect 10* as reviewed in class. You will be reviewing another peer's work and responding to it as they will to yours.

Your 10-Minute Play Final Draft\*

(10%)

Using the feedback gathered from your peer, you will complete a round of rewrites on your second 10-minute play and transform it into your Final Draft.

\*Optional Substitute: 23-Minute TV Spec or Pilot

(Peer Reviewed)

(20%)

You may choose to forgo Your 10-Minute Play and instead turn in a 23-minute TV Spec or Pilot script. Please note that if you choose this option, you will not be eligible for submission to the 10-Minute play award for the Kennedy Center.

Final Play

(40%)

For the final play you will choose to either turn in a 10-Minute play that you fully CAST and REHEARSE to be presented for the class, or a 30-Minute play that will not be read in class and for which you will get responses/feedback after the semester ends.

**INSTRUCTOR BIO**

**Georgina H. Escobar** is a playwright and director who employs multiple mediums to create and define the Latinx aesthetic as Sci-Femme and Frontera Funk in creating impossible narratives for the stage. She has participated in residencies including the MacDowell Colony, the Djerassi Artists Residency and is a recipient of the Theatre For Young Audiences National Award from the Kennedy Center. Her work has been exhibited throughout the USA and participated in festivals internationally (Denmark, Sweden). Her plays have made Steppenwolf's "The Mix" List, the Kilroy's List, Finalist at the National Playwrights Conference at the O'Neill and the Clubbed Thumb Biennial Commission. Artistic partners and presenters have included Gregory Hancock Dance Theatre, Primary Stages, Two River, INTAR, Clubbed Thumb, Lincoln Center, Milagro, Aurora Theatre, and Bushwick Starr, among others. She serves on the Board of Marfa Live Arts, is on Advisory Committee for the Latinx Theatre Commons, and an active steering committee member for the Climate Commons for Theatre and Performance. [www.georginaescobar.com](http://www.georginaescobar.com)

**ABOUT THE NAME**

UTEP has me as Georgina Hernandez because that is my legal name. As of 2012, I have adopted my mother's maiden name, Escobar, to honor her death and legacy. Until 2022 when I can officially change my name on my passport, I am legally Hernandez, but professionally and to everyone in the arts I am Escobar. ☺

**A NOTE ON DIFFICULT SUBJECTS**

Let us agree that when difficult subjects arise in work that we read, watch, and write, we will lean into exploring these issues, rather than shutting the discussion down. YOU ARE IN A SAFE SPACE. If the subject matter should ever arise concern for you or your wellbeing my goal is that we can discuss it in a circular fashion, with peer leadership, and with collective generosity.

## Tentative Class Schedule:

UPDATED: 8/17/2020

### WEEK 1: THE START

- M 8/24: Syllabus Review, Course Orientation, Writing Commitments.  
W 8/26: THE LAB: Prompt Memory Matters + Writing

### WEEK 2: THE DRAMATIC QUESTION

- M 8/31: THE WALK: How do *you* start a play? Where do I start? The paradox of originality & The Zeitgeist.  
Identify: The Class' Collective Theme  
W 9/2: THE LAB: Prompt Mystery and At'tension + Writing  
Read: **Chapter 1-3 *Perfect 10*** (pp.1-22)

### WEEK 3: THE HOOK

- M 9/7: NO CLASS— LABOR DAY  
W 9/9: THE WALK: Dramatic Writing Basics Review (Structure, Narrative Form, Architecture, Plot and Beats)  
THE LAB: Prompt And then what happens... + Writing  
Read: **Chapter 3-4 *Perfect 10*** (pp.23-40)

### WEEK 4: THE WARNING

- M 9/14: THE WALK: Dreams, prophecies, belief & the mystery  
W 9/16: THE LAB: Prompt The Pictorial Imagination + Writing

**COLLECTIVE THEME 10-MINUTE PLAY (20%) DUE SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 20<sup>th</sup> 11:59 pm MST**

### WEEK 5: THE PUBLIC

- M 9/21: THE WALK: Who are the characters? Whose story are we following? Why do we care?  
W 9/23: THE LAB: Prompt The Partnered Scene + Meet Your Peer

### WEEK 6: THE PRIVATE

- M 9/28: WRITING DAY  
W 9/30: THE LAB— Prompt The Confession/Jump + Writing

### WEEK 7: POINT OF NO RETURN

- M 10/5: THE LAB: **YOUR 10-MINUTE PLAY 1<sup>st</sup> DRAFT due IN CLASS (10%)** + Peer Reading
- W 10/7: THE LAB—Prompt The Unexpected Flaw/Virtue + On Rewrites: Feedback & Peer Meetings

### WEEK 8: THE CLIMAX

- M 10/12 THE WALK: Making the Impossible Possible and the Invisible Visible
- W 10/14 THE LAB — Prompt The Most Important Scene + On Rewrites: Feedback & Peer Meetings

### WEEK 9: THE RESOLUTION

- M 10/19 THE WALK: Narrative Forms, Conclusions, Endings and Satisfaction
- W 10/21 THE LAB: Prompt The Last Scene + On Rewrites: Peer Review Reports Back

**YOUR 10-MINUTE FINAL DRAFT or 23 TV SPEC/PILOT (10% or 20%)  
DUE SUNDAY OCTOBER 25th 11:59 pm MST**

### WEEK 10: KCACTF REGION VI

- M 10/26 THE WALK: Overview for KCACTF Gary Garrison Ten Minute Play Award & Submittable
- W 10/28 THE LAB: In-Class Submission for KCACTF Gary Garrison Ten Minute Play Award.

### WEEK 11: SUBMISSIONS

- M 11/2: THE WALK: The professional playwright: How to submit, artistic statements, synopsis, & other tips.
- W 11/4: THE LAB: Prompt The Elevator Pitch

### WEEK 12: COMMISSIONS

- M 11/09: THE WALK: The professional playwright: Commissions & The Hired Gun Effect
- W 11/11 THE LAB: Prompt In Other News + Discussion of our Final Play

### WEEK 13: READINGS

- M 11/16 THE WALK: Discussion and Brain Storm Final Play
- W 11/18 NO CLASS — WRITING DAY (or Final Play Reading Option)

### WEEK 14: WORKSHOPS

- M 11/23 READING 10-Minute Play Final (Option)
- W 11/25 NO CLASS — THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY

## WEEK 15: FINAL PLAY

M 11/30 WRITING DAY (Or Final Play Reading Option)

W 12/2 **FINAL PLAYS DUE (35%) (and Final Play Reading Option)**

## CLASS POLICIES

**Punctuality/Attendance:** Punctuality is a necessity in theatre. As such, punctuality is necessary in this course. TEN minutes after the class start time, the doors will close; please DO NOT interrupt the class after the doors have been closed. Do not knock or try the door; chances are someone will be talking at that time and it is very disrespectful to interrupt. Also, if you need to leave class early, please let the instructor know—notification does not equal excuse, but it is the respectful thing to do. Attendance will not be taken regularly. It is each student's responsibility to attend class. All class/group activities will count towards the final grade. **Every student may miss two classes without providing an explanation and without suffering repercussions (i.e. I neither want nor need to know why you were not able to come to class).** Choose your freebies wisely and plan ahead; emergencies with family, cars, and health may happen later in the semester. If there are extenuating circumstances, make sure that you notify your instructor immediately. As your two lowest class participation/quiz grades are dropped there is NO make-up work in this class. Class should only be missed due to EMERGENCIES; you signed up for the course with full knowledge of the date/time. **Be aware that freebies ONLY apply to class participation/quiz grades!**

**Academic Dishonesty:** Academic dishonesty is prohibited and is considered a violation of the UTEP Handbook of Operating Procedures. It includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, and collusion. Cheating may involve copying from or providing information to another student, possessing unauthorized materials during a test, or falsifying research data on laboratory reports. Plagiarism occurs when someone intentionally or knowingly represents the words or ideas of another person's as ones' own. Collusion involves collaborating with another person to commit any academically dishonest act. Any act of academic dishonesty attempted by a UTEP student is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Violations will be taken seriously and will be referred to the Office of Student Life for possible disciplinary action. Students may be suspended or expelled from UTEP for such actions. Academic dishonesty is an assault on the basic integrity and meaning of a university. Cheating, plagiarism, and collusion in dishonest activities are serious acts which erode the university's educational and research roles and cheapen the learning experience not only for the perpetrators, but also for the entire community. It is expected that UTEP students will understand and subscribe to the ideal of academic integrity and that they will be willing to bear individual responsibility for their work. Materials (written or otherwise) submitted to fulfill academic requirements must represent a student's own efforts. Any act of academic dishonesty attempted by a UTEP student is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. Violations will be referred to the Office of Student Life for possible disciplinary action. Students may be suspended or expelled from UTEP for such actions (<http://issweb.utep.edu/home/media/SampleOnlineCourseSyllabus.pdf>). **Any form of academic dishonesty will NOT be tolerated in this course. I do read all of your papers and expect the work you submit to be ORIGINAL work.**

**Students with disabilities:** I will make any reasonable accommodations for students with limitations due to disabilities, including learning disabilities. If you have a documented disability and require specific accommodations, you will need to contact The Center for Accommodations and Support Services in the East Union Bldg., Room 106 within the first two weeks of classes. The Center for Accommodations and Support Services can also be reached in the following ways:

Web: <http://www.utep.edu/cass>  
Phone: (915) 747-5148 voice or TTY  
Fax: (915) 747-8712  
E-Mail: [cass@utep.edu](mailto:cass@utep.edu)

**Please see me personally before or after class in the first two weeks or make an appointment, to discuss any special needs you might have even if I have the letter from CASS.**

### Title IX

The Department of Theatre and Dance is dedicated to providing its students with a learning environment that is rigorous, respectful, supportive and nurturing so that they can engage in the free exchange of ideas and commit themselves fully to the study of their discipline. To that end this course is committed to enforcing University policies prohibiting all forms of sexual misconduct as well as discrimination on the basis of sex and gender. Detailed information regarding these policies and the resources that are available to students through the Title IX office.