

**PLAYWRITING: INTRODUCTION TO PLAY-MAKING**  
**Syllabus**

THEA 3320/Fall 2019

M/W: 9:00-10:20 am

FOX D 180

**Instructor:** Georgina Hernandez Escobar, MFA

**E-mail:** TBA (e-mail is a much better method).

**Office & Hours:** BY APPOINTMENT ONLY until further notice.

**Course Description**

This playwriting course consists of understanding the principles of dramatic writing while diving into an all-immersive, full-throttle experience of devising a new play for the department. The course is made up of lectures, writing prompts, writing room exercises, scene writing, and working closely with the Devising Team to culminate in the structure and pieces that will inspire a new play: *Monsters We Create*. The playwright will also walk away from this course with the tools to devise a new play, write a commissioned piece, and know how to work on pitches, proposals, and new play development.

**Course Objectives**

Through this course, the student can expect to acquire knowledge about the craft of playwriting, expand their understanding of the structure of story, and incorporate improvisation and other collectively generated prompts and tools towards the creation of a new play while cementing its practical execution.

**Class Requirements**

Participation, imagination, and a **WRITING JOURNAL** (to be graded). All of our in-class writing assignments are to be completed on your personal writing journal. Please make sure to bring this to every class, and bring writing tools (pens, pencils, et al.) **NO LAPTOPS** will be allowed except on **WRITING DAYS** or otherwise specified by the instructor.

**REQUIRED TEXTS**

No textbook will be utilized for this class. The goal of this class is to infuse classic playwriting structures and basics with a collective learning method via devising, designing, improvising, and working closely with Directors and other creative collaborators. Think of this class as the laboratory for new play creation.

**GRADING\***

Writing Journal: 20%

Class Participation: 10%

Required Shows: 10% (5% each)

Assignments: 40% (Bottling Clouds: 10%, Outline & Plot: 10%, Fractal Scene: 10%, Rewrite: 10%)

Dossier Final: 20%

**\*I DO NOT DROP STUDENTS FROM A CLASS—THAT IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY.**

**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 REPONSIBILITY TO PLAN IN ORDER TO GET WORK IN ON TIME. COMPUTER ISSUES ARE NOT YOUR INSTRUCTOR’S RESPONSIBILITY; PLAN AHEAD.
- ASSIGNMENTS ARE DUE AT THE **BEGINNING** OF CLASS.
- **GRADES WILL NOT BE DISCUSSED OVER E-MAIL.**

## ASSIGNMENT BREAKDOWN

### The Writing Journal (20%)

A small, compact notebook (a marble Composition notebook would be best) will be required for every student. This will serve as your Writing Journal. All class notes, and in-class writing will live in your Writing Journal; all others as indicated will be typed and turned in (Times New Roman, 12pt, single spaced). NOTE that ALL typed assignments will happen outside of class. You will NOT need to use a laptop during our class unless otherwise specified for a particular assignment. Please make sure to always have your journal and note that you WILL turn in your notebook *for grading* mid semester. DO NOT use loose pages, binders, or other journals where the sheets detach. Due on **December 2**.

### Participation (10%)

It is expected that all students participate in class discussions, readings, feedback and overall collective creation. This is a laboratory. We will be discussing structure, and building our room as a collective writing room as in professional theaters and writing rooms for television. **YOU ARE PART OF THE TEAM.** It is your responsibility to be present, ready, activated, and ready to work and play at all times during our class time.

### Written Assignments 40% (10% each)

There will be 4 typed papers due in class: (all in 12 pt Times New Roman, single spaced and in standard script formatting).

- The first paper will be on Ideas, Themes & visuals (10%) due on **September 9**
- The second will be on Outline & Plot (10%) due on **September 30**
- The third will be your written Fractal Scene (10%) due on **October 16**
- The fourth will be your Rewrite on the fractal scene (10%) due on **November 11**

### Dossier Final (20%)

Your final playwright Dossier will be a 5-10 page paper with images to be treated as a proposal for your own new play. Throughout the semester, as things begin to percolate in our collective play-making, ideas that you begin to formulate or that you would like to spend more time delving into, can live in this Dossier. The Dossier will consist of a collection of images, songs, source materials, style inspirations, play inspirations, sample dialogue, plot, synopsis, character breakdown and other materials relevant for the creation of a new play that you would ideally like to develop if you were to go into a writers room beyond this class. This can be treated as a pitch project for a television series, a new feature length movie, or a new play. The point is to develop and demonstrate your ability to conceive and communicate the elements of narrative and storyteller necessary for every playwright. **Due December 11**

### UTEP Play Attendance 10% (5% each)

This is a THEATRE course and theatre is a vital component; in order to understand the element of performance, students should experience the theatre. You are required to attend a minimum of **TWO** of the following shows produced by the Department of Theatre and Dance (*El Paso Strong Reading Series*, *Un(Documented)*, *Real Women Have Curves*, *Tommy* or *A Christmas Carol, en la Frontera*). All other shows you might see such as student shows, events, or the community, will be counted as extra credit. There are ushering opportunities for every show (ushers see the show for free) and specific discounted nights for every production.

EXTRA CREDIT will also be given for being an usher at a UTEP show (Dinner Theatre, Wise Family Theatre, or Studio Theatre), OR attending other productions around the city—you MUST provide a ticket stub and a program with your name in order to receive credit!!!! **All extra credit ticket stubs/programs must be turned in by DECEMBER 6<sup>th</sup>.**

### **PLEASE NOTE FOR ALL REQUIRED AND EXTRA CREDIT SHOWS AT UTEP:**

**You are required to sign an attendance sheet at the end of the performance you attend. If you do not sign this sheet at the end of the performance you will not get credit for attendance. The house manager will have the sign out sheet available at the end of each performance.**

## **SUBJECT MATTER:**

The performing arts have a power to stir strong emotions, or possibly touch on subjects you might not feel comfortable seeing on stage. If you have concerns about viewing or discussing specific subjects, please see me as soon as possible to discuss possible accommodations. As I will respect your individual's rights to choose what shows you want to see, I expect all our discussions—including any that may occur outside of class—to be conducted in a respectful and professional matter.

## **COMMITMENTS & CONSIDERATIONS**

- **RECIPROCITY:** Treat this course as you would any intensive in a conservatory setting. Everyone is here because they absolutely want to be. Admit that you know nothing, and also know everything necessary to create something *new*. There is no right or wrong in playmaking. In order for us to create a safe, thriving, and productive writing environment, we must gear our commentary and be receptive from a place of abundance and not scarcity. Generosity of spirit is key to new play creation, especially in a collective environment. Also, please remember that everyone's time is money. Anyone who disrupts can expect that the instructor will take the appropriate steps to ensure that all students interact in a safe classroom that is conducive to the learning process.
- **GENEROSITY:** Remember that your instructor is also a human being. She is also a working, commissioned playwright whose home and artistic base remains New York City: She is **BUSY**. Please know that as a practicing artist she has many other responsibilities outside of this class, just as the student has several responsibilities outside of this one class, however she is well-versed in the creation of new plays. Trust that your best interests are **ALWAYS** at the center of her teaching and focus and know you can always reach out to her as someone who is in the interest of, and a champion of your artistic growth.
- **ACCOUNTABILITY:** Please read the syllabus, stick to class/university policies, utilize common etiquette and respect, and know that your instructor wants you to succeed in this course, but she is not responsible for that, you are. In addition, do not expect the instructor to make exceptions for you.
- **ABUNDANCE:** When participating in class discussions, feedback, and creation, make sure that you access all the things you've listened to, thought about, and considered, from a place of abundance. This means, think about what you can **ADD** to the discussion rather than thinking of it as lacking in something. It's the "yes, and" version of the writers room. Participate freely and know that you are in a safe environment where no question is a 'stupid' question.
- **RESPECT:** Like in the movies—Please make sure that you turn your cell phone **OFF** prior to the beginning of class. Also, please **DO NOT** text during class. If this becomes a reoccurring issue, the instructor will take the appropriate steps necessary.

## **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.

**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 one's 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 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. 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. 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)

**Tentative Class Schedule:**  
UPDATED: 8/23

- M 8/26: Syllabus Review, Course Orientation + Devising a New Scripted Work (the structure, the world, the characters.)
- W 8/28: “Sourcing Inspiration or Bottling Clouds.” What do I write about? HOMEWORK: Collect images, songs, and other sources of inspiration for our ‘bottling clouds’ assignment and be ready to share on 9/9.
- M 9/2 OFF Labor Day
- W 9/4: NO CLASS- Students encouraged to attend Paula Vogel’s Bootcamp.
- M 9/9: **“BOTTLING CLOUDS” DUE** + GROUP REFLECTION: On Feedback, sharing, joining the writers room conversation, and responding to the written work.
- W 9/11: “Distilling Themes, Concepts & Ideas.” How do my ideas become a play? What am I trying to do with this piece? What am I writing? WRITING PROMPT: The tag line, the synopsis, the blurb.
- M 9/16: “Structure; The Basics.” Identifying style, aesthetic & form (Circular, landscape, vignette, et al.) Aristotle’s Poetics, Joseph Campbell’s “A Heroes Journey”, the Once Upon A Time trope, and more.
- W 9/18: “Structure: The Architecture.” The 8-point structure, TV drama + the formula. Identify plays, TV shows, or movies with classic and distinct form and structures.
- M 9/23: GROUP REFLECTION: On identified style, structures, and other discoveries.
- W 9/25: “Shape to Structure: The Outline Phase.” We will dive into the purpose and service of the outline and how to implement the structure, style, and themes/concepts/ideas as a bare-bone structure to build a play off of.  
HOMEWORK: Build an Outline for an existing show, one you want to create (think of your dossier), or *Monsters We Create*.
- M 9/30 **OUTLINE DUE** + “Identifying World & Character” Archetypes, Genres, and Creating Worlds & Situations characters can change through (i.e. the What If?) WRITING PROMPT: Stage Directions as world makers + Character Breakdowns.
- W 10/2: Character & World CONT’D + Inviting them to a collective outline plot.
- M 10/7: “The Planning Stage.” What scenes NEED to happen? We will work with index card and creating the wall of ideas w/Outline for *Monsters We Create*.
- W 10/9: “On Fractals and building a scene.” Identify a point/scene in the outline in *Monsters We Create* that you want to write about.  
WRITING PROMPT: Writing a Scene with a partner (with beginning middle and end).  
HOMEWORK: begin to formulate your “fractal scene” assignment.
- M 10/14 FRACTAL SCENE in class WRITING DAY\* (\*Laptops welcome)
- W 10/16 **FRACTAL SCENE DUE** + GROUP DISCUSSION.
- M 10/21 Playwrights Meet w. Devising Team to review & discuss *Monsters We Create* rough draft.
- W 10/23 Playwrights Meet w. Devising Team to review & discuss *Monsters We Create* rough draft.

- M 10/28 Playwrights Meet w. Devising Team to work on STAGING and DEVISING moments.
- W 10/30 Playwrights Meet w. Devising Team to work on STAGING and DEVISING moments.
- M 11/4: **GROUP DISCUSSION:** On discoveries, distilling, and devising next steps.  
**WRITING PROMPT:** The one about memory and what percolates; writing the same scene 3 times.
- W 11/6 “The Rewriting Phase.” Identifying conflict, wants, and arcs for rewrites of *Monsters We Create* and your Fractal Scene.
- M 11/11 **REWRITE SCENE DUE + Feedback & Discussion.**
- W 11/13 Playwrights Meet w. Devising Team for 1<sup>st</sup> **READ-THRU** draft of *Monsters We Create*.
- M 11/18 “The Commissioned Play.” On working through a Dossier for this class, and pitches/proposals for the professional playwright.
- W 11/20 Playwrights Meet w. Devising Team: Staging moments & transitions. How to write what does not end up on the page?
- M 11/25 “The Dream Design.” The playwright will experience how their words inspire the minds of designers in this special session with designers (TBD) invited to the conversation and the world of *Monsters We Create*.
- W 11/27 Dossier preparation in class **WRITING DAY\*** (\*Laptops Welcome) +  
**WRITING PROMPT:** Write a scene where something startling happens.
- M 12/2 **WRITING JOURNAL DUE +** in class **WRITING DAY** for Dossier and/or brainstorm for final draft of *Monsters We Create*.
- W 12/4 In class **WRITING DAY** for Dossier and/or brainstorm for final draft of *Monsters We Create*.
- M 12/9 No Classes
- W 12/11 **FINAL DOSSIER DUE (if not turned in previously)**

**PLEASE NOTE THAT THIS IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE as per your instructor’s discretion.**

### INSTRUCTOR BIO

**Georgina 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)