COURSE DESCRIPTION:

“Anything you put in a play -- any speech -- has got to do one of two things: either define character or push the action of the play along.” - Edward Albee

Playwriting is like fighting gravity on Jupiter. You need a NASA-like deployment of tools to keep an audience from falling right through their seats. It’s not a matter of dialing the conflict up to 11, delivering consistently sharp-yet-truthful dialogue, or creating larger than life characters—it’s a matter of doing all three, with novelty. In this course, you will read modern and classic plays, write in-class prompts, complete one short script and one longer act, all in the endeavor to successfully begin mastering this mysteriously open, yet absurdly precarious form. You might write plays for the rest of your life, or you might only use these skills to find economy and power in other writing genres. Either way, you will learn what it takes to stay afloat, and that solid surfaces are overrated anyway.

Study of the genre through readings, screenings, discussion and regular submission of original writing for film or theater. Course explores methods for expressing the human condition made available through these collaborative media. Areas of study include Fundamentals of Dramatic Action, Visual Storytelling, Message Movies, Writing the One Act, and Extreme Events. Course may be repeated as the topic changes.

Course Pre/co-requisites
Prerequisite: CWL 202

COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

Students, you will:

• Understand the basic terminology and tools of the playwriting genre
• Develop analytical and critical responses to playwrights and their work
• Write and practice dialogue and its nuances
• Experiment with different forms of plays
• Learn the formal elements of plays and what makes them succeed
• Build characters
• Begin to find voices as playwrights, and explore theatrical languages

1 of 6
COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

**Attendance and Make Up Policy**
One unexcused and undiscussed absence will not affect your grade, but 2 bites a quarter from your Participation grade, even if you are the most vocal student. 3 unexcused, undiscussed absences forfeits Participation. 4 unexcused absences and you fail the course. 3 latenesses make an unexcused absence.

**Required Readings**
- *Fences* by August Wilson
- *This Is Our Youth* by Kenneth Lonergan
- *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* by Edward Albee
- *Topdog/Underdog* by Suzan-Lori Parks
- *Sam Shepard: Seven Plays* by Sam Shepard
- *The Seagull* by Anton Chekhov
- *The Whale; A Bright New Boise* by Samuel D. Hunter
- *The Glass Menagerie* by Tennessee Williams
- *Sarah Kane: Complete Plays* by Sarah Kane
- *Serial Black Face* by Janine Nabers
- Ten-Minutes, One-Acts, and Full Plays on Blackboard

**Assignments**
- Exercises in-class and at-home
- Ten-minute ideas
- Draft of ten-minute play
- Plan/Material for full length
- Final portfolio (revised ten-minute, revised outline/synopsis for full length, first act, responses)

**GRADING:**
- Exercises (graded for completion/readiness to share) - 20%
- Participation - 25%
- Draft of ten-minute play - 10%
- Plan/Material for full length - 10%
- Draft of first act - 20%
- Revised ten-minute play - 10%
- 3 Responses - 5%
MEETING SCHEDULE:

Act I. Nuts and Bolts

9/1: What is a Play? AKA That Initial Impulse
Discussion: Introductions, what do we know, or remember from 202/other CWL classes?
What is central? Do’s and Don’ts?
Play Ideas - Where do we get them?
Exercise: Sturdy Ideas
Discussion: Jose Rivera article
Fences, play elements in practice
Assignment: Memorize a favorite poem to recite
Read This Is Our Youth
100monologues.com and watch monologues by Eric Bogosian
Write observations

9/8: Character, Desire, Monologue, and Voice
Discussion: Character objectives—what makes a need?
Monologues, when are they appropriate?
How do they fit? What makes a good one? Bogosian and Lonergan
Share: Poems - Are they dramatic? In our voices? What speaks to us? How is a play like a poem?
Exercise: Poem line to kick off monologue for Main Character
Share: Select Monologues
Assignment: Read Topdog/Underdog
Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?
Write conflict observations
Write a conflict scene

9/15: Scene and Conflict
Discussion: Parks and Albee plays, conflict, scene structure/options
Share: Selection of class’s Conflict scenes
Assignment: Read ten-minute plays on Blackboard
Write observations on them
3 ideas for your own

9/22: (Your) Beginning, Middle, End
Discussion: Ten-minute plays you read, special elements, how to tell a mini-story
Exercise: 3-idea pitch with groups - why are you the one to write this story?
Settle on one for ten-minute play
Exercise: Ten-minute play material
Assignment: Group A writes ten-minute plays, prints to bring in

9/29: Ten Minute Play Festival
Share: Group A’s ten-minute plays
Assignment: Group B writes ten-mute plays, prints to bring in
3 of 6
10/6: Ten Minute Play Festival (CONT’D)
Share: Group B’s ten-minute plays
Discussion: What ten-minutes taught us
Assignment: Watch Nuts in May on YouTube
   Transcribe an overheard conversation
   Write dialogue observations

Act II. Fleshing Out

10/13: Dialogue and Subtext
Discussion: Pinter and Leigh, levels of subtext in dialogue
Share: Select overheard dialogues
Exercise: Object prompt, incorporating the overheard
Assignment: Type and bring in prompts
   Read The Seagull
   Read Buried Child
   Bring in news story

10/20: Metaphor and Symbol
Discussion: Chekhov and Shepard, symbol and metaphor in readings
Share: Select object prompts and news stories
Exercise: News story prompt
Assignment: Group A develops play material (a synopsis, a scene + talking points, or outline)
   Read The Whale; A Bright New Boise

10/27: Structure and Stakes
Discussion: Hunter, gravitas, plot sequencing
Share: Group A play material
Assignment: Group B develops play ideas (a synopsis, a scene + talking points, or outline)
   Read The Aliens by Annie Baker (e-mailed pdf)

11/3: Risk
Discussion: Baker and boldness, taking chances, what might that mean for theatre?
Share: Group B play material
Exercise: Reflect on what might be a risk you can take in your piece
Assignment: Read The Glass Menagerie
   Start first acts

11/10: Multiple Characters, or Why Are Plays Obsessed with Families?
Discussion: The family in Williams and other plays so far, also in our own work
Exercise: 3-person or more “family” scene for play
Assignment: Type and print to bring in
   Read TBD Adrienne Kennedy
   Selected works in Sarah Kane: Complete Plays
11/17: Theatrical Boundaries
Discussion: Kane and Kennedy and finding a new, personal theatrical language
Share: Select family scenes
Exercise: The Impossible prompt
Assignment: Read *Serial Blackface*
  Type and bring in prompts
  Work on plays and ten-minute revisions

12/1: Satisfying Endings, or Does Someone Have to Die?
Discussion: Nabers, and writing based on news story, how she did it
Share: Select Impossible prompts
Exercise: Last scene/Alternative Ending
Assignment: Work on plays, piece things together, fill in blanks

12/8: The Never-Finished Product
Discussion: What we’ve learned, what we’ve yet to learn
Exercise: Monologue—what would a final monologue for your main character look like?
Share: Monologues
Assignment: Post first acts and revised ten-minutes by 12/15
  Post your 3 responses by 12/19
CLASS PROTOCOL
No cell phones. A cell phone going off in the class makes me mark you late. See above for how latenesses affect your grade.

CLASS RESOURCES
Blackboard
Writing Center

The University Senate Undergraduate and Graduate Councils have authorized that the following required statements appear in all teaching syllabi (graduate and undergraduate courses) on the Stony Brook Campus. See also http://www.stonybrook.edu/provost/facultyinfo/Syllabus%20Statement.doc

DISABILITY SUPPORT SERVICES (DSS) STATEMENT (must be the following language)
If you have a physical, psychological, medical or learning disability that may impact your course work, please contact Disability Support Services, ECC (Educational Communications Center) Building, room128, (631) 632-6748. They will determine with you what accommodations, if any, are necessary and appropriate. All information and documentation is confidential.

[In addition, this statement on emergency evacuation is often included, but not required:
Students who require assistance during emergency evacuation are encouraged to discuss their needs with their professors and Disability Support Services. For procedures and information go to the following website: http://www.stonybrook.edu/ehs/fire/disabilities ]

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY STATEMENT (must be the following language as approved by the undergrad council):
Each student must pursue his or her academic goals honestly and be personally accountable for all submitted work. Representing another person's work as your own is always wrong. Faculty are required to report any suspected instances of academic dishonesty to the Academic Judiciary. Faculty in the Health Sciences Center (School of Health Technology & Management, Nursing, Social Welfare, Dental Medicine) and School of Medicine are required to follow their school-specific procedures. For more comprehensive information on academic integrity, including categories of academic dishonesty, please refer to the academic judiciary website at http://www.stonybrook.edu/uaa/academicjudiciary/

CRITICAL INCIDENT MANAGEMENT (must be the following language as approved by the undergrad council):
Stony Brook University expects students to respect the rights, privileges, and property of other people. Faculty are required to report to the Office of Judicial Affairs any disruptive behavior that interrupts their ability to teach, compromises the safety of the learning environment, or inhibits students' ability to learn. Faculty in the HSC Schools and the School of Medicine are required to follow their school-specific procedures.