INTRODUCTION TO PLAYWRITING: SYLLABUS

Instructor – ERIC REYES LOO
(Aurorae Khoo returns for final three weeks)
THEA 596 – Spring 2016
Wednesdays 3:30-6:10 PM, Room DA 101
(email hours: 1 PM – 3 PM Wednesdays, by appointment)
Email: elo@mail.sdsu.edu

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

This is an introductory class in writing specifically for the stage. This semester you will learn the vocabulary to help you write an effective play with logical cohesion and compelling characters. What is an effective play? A play that elicits a response: laughter, tears, understanding, or the recognition that you’re not the only one who has ever felt a certain way. My goal is to help you articulate what you want to say as clearly as possible. That doesn’t mean you have to write a literal, linear play—although I will give you the tools to write a well-made play with a beginning, middle and end. You must support the message of your play through character, intention, action, conflict and image. This is what smart people like to call craft. And that’s what you’ll be learning this semester.

We will WRITE a lot. In class, out of class, plays, exercises, lists, all sorts of stuff. REWRITING too. We will also READ plays and talk about them using the vocabulary I will teach you. You can’t write a play if you don’t know what it looks like on the page. TALK. Lots of talking about plays, playwrights, procrastination, theatre, money, life, and each other’s work through class discussions.

The class will be built upon in-class writing exercises, reading assignments, lectures and workshop, where you will give each other feedback.

In the first 12 WEEKS of class your main assignments this semester will be...

- A short monologue (1 page or two-minutes in length)
- A ten-minute play (first draft and rewrite)
- A staged ten-minute play reading in conjunction with the Moxie Theatre.
- Final: A One-Act play (first draft and rewrite)

Run by Aurorae at the last 3 WEEKS of the semester:

- An “impossible to stage” play (1-2 pages)
- Other exercises. (2 to 3 pages in length each)
- FINAL EXAM
ASSIGNMENTS

There will be in-class and take-home writing assignments, which will be read and discussed in class. Please have Xerox copies for each member of the class and the instructor, and be sure to keep a copy of everything you turn in.

READ CAREFULLY: All writing must be neatly typed in standard play script format and on time. LATE WORK WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED. Handwritten work will not be accepted. Emailed work will not be accepted (unless you are missing class that day). Please be sure to put your name, the name of the assignment, the date, and number your pages. Points will be taken off if any of these are not on your assignments or handwritten in last minute.

Always proof your work!!! That means no misspellings, typos, or grammatical errors. Points will be taken off for excessive misspellings, typos or grammatical errors. This is the PROFESSIONAL STANDARD and the standard you will be held up to. If your work does not meet this standard every time, it will be considered lazy and unprofessional and reflected in your score for each assignment.

WARNING: This writing course has a heavy workload. So pace yourself and don’t wait to finish your assignments the night before they’re due. Give yourself ample time to REWRITE and PROOF.

Because it bears repeating...NO LATE WORK WILL BE ACCEPTED FOR GRADING. Not even for a lower grade. If you have to miss a class (read the rules on that below) it’s your responsibility to email it to me before the start of class. And it’s your responsibility to get the assignment from your classmates.

NOTE: If you’re more than 15 minutes late to class, the work will be considered “late” and not eligible for grading. Late work will be given feedback for your benefit, but graded as a zero (0).

HOW TO DO WELL IN THIS CLASS (aka “If You Want Higher than a B”)

• Do everything that’s asked of you. On time.
• Go above and beyond.
• Meet with me (regarding your work in class) if you have questions.
• Show your work ethic in your participation, in your assignments, in your comments in class on the assigned reading.
• Be respectful of your fellow writers and the work they’ve put in. Listen, participate and engage in class discussions.

Because we only meet once a week, I’m a fan of giving email notes or thoughts on revisions so you can utilize your time most effectively. Hard work is more
important to me than innate talent. Don’t get lazy because all of your friends think you’re a good writer. Get better.

GRADING CRITERIA:

Specifically, your grade will be based on these factors:

- 30% - Class participation: includes monologue (5%), attendance, participation in discussions and production duties (25%)
- 20% - Midterm (Ten Minute Play – first draft and rewrite)
- 20% - Bake Off Project – includes rehearsals and writing
- 30% - Final (One-Act Play – first draft and rewrite)

My grading system is very transparent and clear. It’s based on 500 points. Everything has a point value (including participation and attendance).

Here’s the good news, most of your homework assignments are tied to class projects. So the assignments will help you pace your workload and get those projects done. The bad news is: if you blow those assignments off, your grade will go into free fall very quickly.

Participation is a big part of your grade. If you don’t read the play assignments and it’s obvious when I call on you: INSTANT ZERO. The plays I’m assigning are fun, and interesting. They won’t put you to sleep. They’re fairly easy reads and should give you a lot to think about and to discuss.

As I mentioned earlier, promptness counts. Don’t push the 15-minute rule. If I find that students are abusing it and consistently showing up late, I will make it a 10-minute rule and then a 5-minute rule.

Because this class is so dependent on in-class assignments and participation (and because we are not meeting for two weeks because of the 10 minute play projects), you are only allowed one excused/unexcused absence (that’s an e-mail TO THE PROFESSOR at least one hour BEFORE class). But remember if you miss class (even for an excused absence), you will lose your in-class points for any assignments or participation. If you exceed that, here are the consequences:

- Two absences lowers your final grade by a half letter. Three absences lower your final grade a full letter. Four absences will result in a dismissal from the class.
- FYI: two late arrivals (15 minutes or more) equal an unexcused absence.
ONE FINAL WORD ON GRADES: If you do the minimum, you’ll get a B. If you work your ass off, you’ll do better. If you turn in lazy work and/or miss class, you’ll do worse.

CLASS SCHEDULE:

REMEMBER: IF YOU MISS A CLASS, CHECK WITH A CLASSMATE FOR THE ASSIGNMENT. YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE IF YOU MISS CLASS.

WEEK ONE – 1/20/16 (INTRODUCTIONS)
--Introductions
--Go over syllabus
--Playwriting format
--Basics of Dramatic Structure: Beginning, Middle and End
--What makes a good monologue? Creating character.
--In class reading of select monologues.

WEEK TWO – 1/27/16 (SCENES)
--How to give feedback.
--Read and Discuss select monologues in class.
--Discuss “Sex with Strangers” in terms of its scenes and events.

WEEK THREE – 2/3/16 (THE TEN MINUTE PLAY/BEGINNINGS AND MIDDLES)
--Go over two-person scenes.
--Ten-minute play structure. What kind of stories can you tell in ten-minutes?
--Break down both ten-minute plays in terms of their structure.
--In Class Writing: The Beginning (pick one of your ideas which you have an idea about how to begin)

WEEK FOUR – 2/10/16 (CONFLICT/WRAP IT UP)
--Table Work: Conflict
--In-Class Writing: Choose Your Own Adventure
--Wrapping Up the Story

WEEK FIVE – 2/17/16 (THE BIG FINISH/REWRITING)
--Table Work: The End
--Discuss “Frilly” in terms of theatricality and structure.
--Rewriting : Questions to ask yourself.

WEEK SIX – 2/24/16 (PRODUCTION)
--Peer Critique: Go over the rewrites
Discussion: What did you learn for next time?
In Class Writing Assignment: Generating Ideas
Discussion of Moxie Project.
Student producer assignments given.

WEEK SEVEN - 3/2/16 (ALTERNATIVE STRUCTURES)
--In Class Writing Assignment
--Discuss "The Big Meal"
--Present ideas for a 30 page one-act play.
--In-Class Writing Assignment

WEEK EIGHT - 3/9/16 (WORKSHOP: FIRST TEN)
--Peer Critique: First ten pages.

WEEK NINE - 3/16/16 (WORKSHOP: SECOND TEN)
--Whole Class Presentation of Second Ten Pages.

WEEK TEN - 3/23/16 (WORKSHOP: DRAMATURGS AND DIRECTORS)
--TENTATIVE JOINT CLASS with DRAMATURGS and DIRECTORS. What is the role of a dramaturg? The role of a director?
--Peer Critique: Last Ten Pages

***SPRING BREAK*** (3/28/16 - 4/3/16)

WEEK ELEVEN - 4/6/16
NO CLASS DUE TO MOXIE THEATRE BAKE OFF APRIL 8-10
--TURN IN YOUR LONGER PLAY TO ERIC. This is your final project due for class. It is due today, NO EXCEPTIONS. DUE BY CLASS TIME 3:30 PM.

MOXIE THEATRE BAKEOFF:
FRIDAY APRIL 8: WRITING PROMPT ANNOUNCED
SATURDAY APRIL 9: Ten students meet at Moxie.
SUNDAY APRIL 10: Ten students have their NEW ten-minute plays produced at Moxie. MANDATORY ATTENDANCE FOR EVERYONE.

WEEK TWELVE - 4/13/16
NO CLASS DUE TO BAKEOFF.
WEEK THIRTEEN - 4/20/16
***AURORAE RETURNS TO CLASS.***
LESSON: TBD

WEEK FOURTEEN - 4/27/16
--Discuss bakeoff plays.
--Discuss “Impossible to Stage Plays”

ASSIGNMENT: Write “Impossible to Stage Play.”

WEEK FIFTEEN - 5/4/16
LAST DAY OF CLASS
--FINAL EXAM
--Present your “Impossible to Stage Plays.”

TEXTS (ON BLACKBOARD):

Full-length plays:
SEX WITH STRANGERS by Laura Eason
FRILLY by Sigrid Gilmer
THE BIG MEAL by Dan Le Franc

Ten-Minute Plays:
PARTY FAVORS by Eric Reyes Loo
THE QUINTESSENCE OF DUST by Cory Hinkle

Various essays assigned by Professor.
BAKE OFF PROJECT (CLASS REQUIREMENT)

A bake-off is a short play project where you are given a prompt and have to write a ten-minute play. The prompt will be either a myth or a particular topic. You won’t get the prompt until the night before. Here’s a brief overview of the schedule:

- Friday, April 8: Receive prompt. Discuss with dramaturg.
- Saturday, April 9: Meet creative teams in the morning. Write in the afternoon. Send draft of script via email to dramaturg for notes. Get notes an hour later. Rewrite that night.
- Sunday, April 10: Rehearse in the morning. Director will block play. Short rehearsal in the space in the afternoon. Plays go up at 7 PM.

These will all be script-in-hand staged readings.

The purpose of this project is for you to write quick and see something of yours put up 48 hours later. It’s also to have the experience of working with a student dramaturg (from Shelley Orr’s class) and a professional director (provided by Moxie) on getting a short play up for production. You’ll learn how to talk to actors and how to negotiate your relationship between yourself and the director. And ultimately, it’s to have a sense of accomplishment that something you had an idea for becomes actualized. It’ll be a lot of fun. You’ll learn a lot about certain elements of production. You will also have professional actors assigned to you.

You will also have the opportunity to work in various production capacities. Since this year’s class is smaller than normal, your production duties will not be as strenuous so you can focus on writing and rehearsing your play.

Production roles include (one set for each production): Main Producer, Food/Host Producer, Publicity/Social Media, Stage Managers, House Managers, Runners, Event Photographers. You will get detailed instructions on how to perform your production duties as we get closer to the event.

You’ll get help and advisement from me on how to produce and you will have a specific list of job duties so you know what is expected of you. Again, this is 20% of your grade. You’ll be graded as a writer and collaborator for this project. You’ll also be graded heavily for class participation on this project as well for your production duties.
CONSULTATION:

Office hours by appointment Wednesdays 1-3PM, e-mail: eloo@mail.sdsu.edu. Aurorae’s email: akhoo@mail.sdu.edu. Eric drives in from LA, so if 1-3PM doesn’t work, we can talk on the phone or maybe we can do right after class, depending.

PLAYWRITING / SCREENWRITING SOFTWARE

Final Draft is the industry standard. Especially for TV and Film. If you have it, there’s already a template for stage plays. Worth buying if you don’t have it already. Version 9 is the most current. Otherwise you can use Microsoft Word or other internet software (including Celtx, Montage, Scrivener). Please consult the course page on BLACKBOARD for proper playwriting format.

SOURCES FOR NEW, INTERESTING PLAYS

--Theatre Communications Group - http://www.tcg.org/index.cfm
--Samuel French - http://www.samuelfrench.com
--Playscripts - https://www.playscripts.com
--New Play Exchange – www.newplayexchange.org
--SDSU’s main library, media collection, has DVD’s and scripts you can look at.

HELPFUL BLOGS/ON-LINE RESOURCES ON PLAYWRITING

--Howlround – www.howlround.com
--Adam Szymkowicz (playwright interviews) - www.aszym.blogspot.com

DISABILITIES STATEMENT:

“If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need accommodations for this class, it is your responsibility to contact Student Disability Services at (619) 594-6473. To avoid any delay in the receipt of your accommodations, you should contact Student Disability Services as soon as possible. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive, and that accommodations based upon disability cannot be provided until you have presented your instructor with an accommodation letter from Student Disability Services. Your cooperation is appreciated.”