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Graduate Programs—NEW COURSE PROPOSAL

DEPARTMENT NAME: THEATRE AND DANCE COLLEGE OF: SCHMIDT COLLEGE OF ARTS AND LETTERS

RECOMMENDED COURSE IDENTIFICATION:
 PREFIX THE COURSE NUMBER 5000 LEVEL LAB CODE (L or C) _____
 (TO OBTAIN A COURSE NUMBER, CONTACT ERUDOLPH@FAU.EDU)
 COMPLETE COURSE TITLE DRAMATIC WRITING FOR STAGE AND SCREEN 1

EFFECTIVE DATE
 (first term course will be offered)
 _____ FALL 2010 _____

CREDITS: 3

TEXTBOOK INFORMATION: "STORY" BY ROBERT MCKEE, SELECTED PLAYS AND FILMSTRIPS.

GRADING (SELECT ONLY ONE GRADING OPTION): REGULAR PASS/FAIL _____ SATISFACTORY/UNSATISFACTORY _____

COURSE DESCRIPTION, NO MORE THAN 3 LINES: ADVANCED PRACTICAL WORKSHOP IN PLAYWRITING AND SCREENWRITING WITH FOCUS ON SUCH MATTERS AS DRAMATIC CONSTRUCTION, CHARACTERIZATION, AND REALISTIC DIALOGUE. IN-CLASS READING OF WORKS AND END-OF-TERM PUBLIC READINGS.

PREREQUISITES W/MINIMUM GRADE: *
 NONE

COREQUISITES: NONE

OTHER REGISTRATION CONTROLS (MAJOR, COLLEGE, LEVEL):
 NONE

PREREQUISITES, COREQUISITES & REGISTRATION CONTROLS SHOWN ABOVE WILL BE ENFORCED FOR ALL COURSE SECTIONS.
 *DEFAULT MINIMUM GRADE IS D-.

MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS NEEDED TO TEACH THIS COURSE:
 MFA IN THEATRE

Other departments, colleges that might be affected by the new course must be consulted. List entities that have been consulted and attach written comments from each.
 English Department

Tom Atkins, tatkins@fau.edu, 561-297-3814
 Faculty Contact, Email, Complete Phone Number

SIGNATURES

Approved by:
 Department Chair: _____
 College Curriculum Chair: _____
 College Dean: _____
 UGPC Chair: _____
 Dean of the Graduate College: _____

Date:

SUPPORTING MATERIALS

Syllabus—must include all details as shown in the UGPC Guidelines.
Written Consent—required from all departments affected.
 Go to: <http://graduate.fau.edu/gpc/> to download this form and guidelines to fill out the form.

Email this form and syllabus to sfulks@fau.edu and eqirjo@fau.edu one week **before** the University Graduate Programs Committee meeting so that materials may be viewed on the UGPC website by committee members prior to the meeting.

DRAMATIC WRITING FOR STAGE & SCREEN 1

THE 5000 level

Pre-requisites: None

Writing experience recommended.

Co-requisites: None

Instructor: Tom Atkins

Office: AH 185

Telephone: 297-3810

E-mail: takins@fau.edu

Required texts:

Tennessee Williams' VOLUME 6: SHORT PLAYS (New Directions, 1981)

Horton Foote's THREE SCREEN PLAYS (Grove Press, 1989) and

THE ROAD TO THE GRAVEYARD (Dramatists Play Service, 1988)

Caryl Churchill's FAR AWAY (TCG, 2000)

THE PLAYWRIGHTS COMPANION (Feedback Theatre Books, Latest Ed.)

THE DRAMATISTS GUILD RESOURCE DIRECTORY (Focus Pub., 2008)

Supplementary texts:

Caryl Churchill's ICE CREAM (TCG, 2000)

Edward Albee's WHO'S AFRAID OF VIRGINIA WOOLF (Penguin, 1983)

A.R. Gurney, THE DINING ROOM and SYLVIA (in A.R. GURNEY'S COLLECTED PLAYS, VOL. II, Smith & Kraus, 1996)

John Guare's SIX DEGREES OF SEPARATION (Vintage Books, 1994)

Christopher Durang's BABY WITH THE BATHWATER (Dramatists Play Service, 1984)

David Mamet's AMERICAN BUFFALO and GLENGARRY GLEN ROSS (Grove Press, 1994)

Harold Pinter's A KIND OF ALASKA (in OTHER PLACES, Grove, 1983)

Course description (for catalogue) and instructional objectives:

Advanced practical workshop in playwriting and screenwriting with focus on such matters as dramatic construction, characterization, and realistic dialogue. In-class reading of works and end-of-term public readings.

Method of instruction:

Students in this course may work in playwriting or screenwriting, or both, depending on their interests and background. The class is conducted in a workshop style: students read their work aloud. In response sessions students receive comments and suggestions regarding character action, plot, dialogue and dramatic structure, among other elements, from the instructor and the rest of the class. Rewriting and revisions are required. Several techniques and methods are taught through a series of writing exercises designed to stimulate the writer's observation, imagination, and personal expression. After completing the exercises, students will outline, write and revise two short plays and/or screenplays during the term.

Schedule including weekly topics covered:

- Week 1: Stage or screen: making your choice
- Week 2: Developing your skills: listening and observing
- Week 3: Formatting plays and screenplays, describing your actions
- Week 4: Memorable dialogue: use of subtext—something unspoken
- Week 5: Using all five senses to involve your audience
- Week 6: Personal images: finding your unique voice and style
- Week 7: Planning your script: developing an effective premise for a short play or filmscript
- Week 8: How to begin: the first scene, the opening action
- Week 9: Researching your social and cultural context
- Week 10: Narrative structure and role of conflict
- Week 11: How to end: climax and conclusion
- Week 12: The necessity of revision
- Week 12: Editing for clarity and dramatic impact
- Week 13: Streamlining for pace and momentum
- Week 15: Polishing your final draft
- Week 15: Submission to contests or other producers and theatres
- Week 16: Public reading with audience feedback

Public reading (performed by MFA Acting Students) of one short script by each student in the Dramatic Writing class. At the end of the reading there will be an opportunity for audience feedback and questions.

Assessment procedures:

Grades based on participation (10%), exercises and revisions (30%), and final draft of short plays and/or filmscripts (60%).

Grading criteria:

Regular attendance is required. Participation is defined as taking part not only in discussion and analysis of one's own work and development but also offering thoughtful, perceptive comments and suggestions about his or her fellow students' work.

Evaluation of exercises and short scripts is based on numerous factors including: understanding and execution of purpose of individual exercises; evidence of script revisions and improvement based on classroom discussions and instructor's analysis; believability of dialogue and depth of character; use of subtext to reveal characters' inner lives; clarity of dramatic action; stage or screen worthiness of script; and knowledge and research of relevant social and cultural issues.

A=90-100: Evidence of excellence and professionalism

B=80-89: Evidence of above average knowledge of craft

C=70-79: Average evidence of craft

D=60-69: Below average

F=below 60: Failure

Bibliography:

Ayckbourn, Alan. *The Crafty Art of Playmaking*. New York: Macmillan, 2003.

Artaud, Antonin. *The Theatre and Its Double*. New York: Grove Press, 1958.

Baker, George Pierce. *Dramatic Technique*. Murrieta: Classic, 2001.

Brook, Peter. *The Empty Space*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995.

Cole, Toby. *Playwrights on Playwriting*. New York: National Books Network, 2001.

Field, Syd. *Screenwriting*. New York: Bantam, 2005.

Grotowski, Jerzy. *Towards a Poor Theatre*. Taylor & Francis, 2002.

McKee, Robert. *Story: Substance, Structure, Style, and the Principles of Screenwriting*. New York: HarperCollins, 1997.

Smiley, Sam. *Playwriting: The Structure of Action*. New Haven: Yale, 2005.

FAU Policy on Academic Integrity

Students at Florida Atlantic University are expected to maintain the highest ethical standards. Academic dishonesty, including cheating and plagiarism, is considered a serious breach of these ethical standards, because it interferes with the University mission to provide a high quality education in which no student enjoys an unfair advantage over any other. Academic dishonesty is also destructive of the University community, which is grounded in a system of mutual trust and places high value on personal integrity and individual responsibility. Harsh penalties are associated with academic dishonesty. For more information, see http://www.fau.edu/regulations/chapter4/4.001_Honor_Code.pdf.

FAU Policy on Students with Disabilities

In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), students who require special accommodations due to a disability to properly execute coursework must register with the Office for Students with Disabilities (OSD) located in Boca Raton - SU 133 (561-297-3880), in Davie - MOD I (954-236-1222), in Jupiter - SR 117 (561-799-8585), or at the Treasure Coast - CO 128 (772-873-3305), and follow all OSD procedures.

EXAMPLE PLAYWRITING EXERCISES

These exercises are used to stimulate the playwright's imagination, to help develop a sense of the writer's inner emotional tools and resources, and to understand what makes effective stage dialogue.

FOUND DIALOGUE

The playwright John Guare carries a small notebook in his pocket to record ideas and snatches of dialogue that he has overheard. His own dialogue, in such plays as *LANDSCAPE OF THE BODY* and *SIX DEGREES OF SEPARATION*, has the texture and feel of actual spoken language. David Mamet's dialogue also has this same quality--it lives as spoken language. Both playwrights create dialogue that begs to be acted, to be heard by an audience.

One of the first things that playwrights learn is the difference between written and spoken language. The language of ordinary life is often fragmented, incomplete, full of starts and stops. Sometimes our words are finished by the listener. Sometimes we pause. Sometimes we are interrupted. Sometimes the listener talks while we are talking. The audience recognizes this language as believable, as having the flow and feeling of ordinary human discourse.

Often in spoken language there are meanings hidden beneath the surface, buried feelings, attitudes that cannot be shown directly. The audience listens for this subtext, just as in real life we listen for what people are really saying as opposed to what they want us to think they are saying. Pinter called dialogue a smokescreen hiding one's real feelings.

Playwrights are eavesdroppers, spies on ordinary life. Their ears become attuned to the reality of spoken language, of heated debate or passionate persuasion.

The exercise is to bring back examples of found or overheard dialogue, and then imagine the rest of the dialogue and write a brief dramatic scene using the dialogue.

SUBTEXT

Tennessee Williams has a short play called "Something Unspoken," referring to the unacknowledged and hidden relationship between two female characters. Yet this unspoken truth dominates the play. Constantine Stanislavsky called this the "subtext." He believed that the audience is actually more interested in listening for the subtext than the actual text.

Chekhov's dialogue is often based on subtext, an inner current of emotion that often spills to the surface, as it does when Uncle Vanya finally explodes and makes a pathetic attempt to shoot Serebryakov.

In Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* we learn the inner thoughts of two characters, the thoughts that they are not bold enough to spoke directly, and these thoughts are often the most compelling element of the scene.

In the works of the British writer Henry Green subtext is often a primary ingredient in his dialogue, in such novels as *Doting* and *Loving*.

Write a short scene between two characters in which one of the characters has a hidden secret or subtext.

THREE WORDS

Write a three-page scene using two characters who speak in lines of no more than one to three words.

SENSE MEMORIES

List and briefly describe ten memories based on the five senses from your childhood.

Write a short scene based on one of the memories.

SIXTY SECONDS

Write a scene with two characters, having conflict, a beginning, middle and end, lasting no more than 60 seconds.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF MONOLOGUES:

Write a short monologue using a prop as an important emotional factor.

Write a short monologue of passionate conviction—attempting to change someone's opinion or idea.



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Date: September 16, 2009

To: Ben Low, GPC Chair, Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters

From: Wenying Xu, Professor & Chair, English

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'W Xu', is written over the 'From' line.

Subject: Dr. Tom Atkins's course proposal, "Dramatic Writing for Stage & Screen 1"

I am writing to offer my strong support for this course proposal. English MFA students would greatly benefit from this new addition. This course doesn't conflict with any of the offerings in the Department of English.