

Department of English & Writing Studies

English 3666F
American Drama: American Drama from the Playwright's Perspective
Fall 2015**Location:** AHB 2R21**Time:** Tuesdays, 11:30 AM – 12:30 PM;
Thursdays, 11:30 AM – 1:30 PM**Instructor:** George Ramos**Email:** rramos2@uwo.ca**Antirequisite:** English 2460F/G**Prerequisite(s):** At least 60% in 1.0 of English 1020E or 1022E or 1024E or 1035E or 1036E or both of English 1027F/G and 1028F/G, or permission of the Department

Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

Course Description

The course considers American drama from the period of the Great Depression to the present, the major themes it confronts, the artistic trends that emerge from it, and the historical and cultural contexts that determine it. Instead of treating dramatic texts as prose pieces consisting of series of dialogue lines, stage directions, and monologues, students are invited to analyze the material from a playwriting or dramaturgical perspective. Students use elements of dramatic style and technique utilized by the playwright, director, and actor (dramatic action, dramatic objective, conflict, tactics, obstacles, inciting event, tension, etc.) as tools for close reading.

Special emphasis is given to playwriting. Students will be divided into three or four groups or "companies." During the semester, the companies will prepare style analyses of particular plays in the syllabus, and, using these documents as bases, write short original one-act or multi-scene imitations. The student companies will then workshop their plays in class (i.e., the plays are informally performed/produced, and the company members are given feedback). These workshop performances/productions can range from simple staged readings (i.e., actors read from scripts with limited movement or none at all) to fuller minimalist productions with greater, but limited, degrees of polish. Each company will workshop two or three original imitations during the semester, and the roles of playwright, director, actor, production designer, dramaturge, etc. will rotate amongst the company members. While students are encouraged to try a range of roles during the course of the semester, neither taking on the role of the company playwright nor submitting an original imitation as a Shorter Written Assignment (see Methods of Evaluation) is required. Prior to their workshops, companies should be prepared to meet as a group outside of class hours for short periods of time for discussion, preparation, and rehearsal.

By writing plays inspired by the specific dramatic approaches of the playwrights they select and by helping bring these plays to life, students will be able to intensively engage with both the formal and thematic aspects of the materials. Some students will also get the opportunity to directly engage with one of the dramatists covered in the syllabus, Joe Sutton, a Pulitzer Prize nominee. He will answer questions from students electronically about his play *Voir Dire*. As a whole, the course explores the significance of the different ways American playwrights have used dramatic conflict as a strategy with which to process the profound cultural and historical struggles that concern such issues as race, gender, patriarchy, religion, politics, capitalism, and national identity.

Course Materials

Plays (Required):

Thornton Wilder, *Our Town* (1938)

Tennessee Williams, *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947)

Arthur Miller, *The Crucible* (1953)

Edward Albee, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962)

LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka, *Dutchman* (1964)

David Mamet, *Glengarry Glen Ross* (1983)

Tony Kushner, *Angels in America, Part One: Millennium Approaches* (1991)

Joe Sutton, *Voir Dire* (1995)

Suzan-Lori Parks, *Venus* (1996)

Lynn Nottage, *Ruined* (2008)

Playwriting Text (Required):

David Ball, *Backwards and Forwards: A Technical Manual for Reading Plays* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1983)

Methods of Evaluation

Class Participation and Attendance 5%

Playwriting and Performance Group Work 20%

Shorter Written Assignment 15%

(individual work due one week after first or second group workshop):

- An Original Imitation (15-20 minute play script)
- A Style Analysis (1200-1500 words)
or
- A Performance/ Production Essay (1200-1500 words)

Research Paper (1800-2400 words, due Nov. 24) 25%

Final Exam 35%

Note: 1200-1500 words is about 4-5 pages; 1800-2400 words is about 6-8 pages. Due dates tentative.

A student must receive a passing grade for both term work and the final examination in order to receive a passing grade for the course. This applies to all courses in all programs offered by the department. Students whose term and final exam grades average 50% or above, even though one of the two is a failure, shall receive a default grade of 48%. **Please note:** The department of English & Writing Studies does not release final grades. All undergraduate grade reports will be available online from the office of the registrar.

Students are fully responsible for looking at and being familiar with the information posted on the department website at <http://uwo.ca/english/undergraduate/Student%20Information.html>.

Attendance

Regular attendance at lectures, and particularly during your company workshop performances/ productions, is essential. Students will sign an attendance sheet at the beginning of each class. Absenteeism can result in debarment from writing the final examination, which in the Department of English & Writing Studies results in failure of the course.

Computers and Electronic Devices

Students may use laptops during class for note taking purposes only. Please respect your classmates, the instructor, and the learning environment. Recording (audio or video) lectures, discussions, and workshops is prohibited. No student may have any electronic device on his or her person while taking the final exam. Electronic devices and laptops must be kept inside students' bags or jackets, which will all be placed to one side of the final examination room.

Accommodation

Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. Academic accommodation cannot be granted by the instructor or department. Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the Office of the Dean of the student's Faculty of registration, together with a request for relief specifying the nature of the accommodation being requested. The necessary form and further information regarding this policy can be found at http://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf.

Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

Plagiarism

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence. (We will be discussing plagiarism later in the term.)

Plagiarism Checking

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com <http://www.turnitin.com>.

Support Services

Registrarial Services <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca>
Student Support Services <https://student.uwo.ca/psp/heprdweb/?cmd=login>
Services provided by the USC <http://westernusc.ca/services/>
Student Development Centre <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/>

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to MentalHealth@Western: <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.