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Undergraduate Distance Education Review Form
(Required for all courses taught by distance education for more than one-third of teaching contact hours.)

Existing and Special Topics Course

Received

Course: THTR 347: Playwrighting

2-12-10

Instructor(s) of Record: Jason Chimonides

Liberal Studies

Phone: 7-4026

Email: hemo@iup.edu

Step One: Proposer

A. Provide a brief narrative rationale for each of the items, A1- A5.

1. How is/are the instructor(s) qualified in the distance education delivery method as well as the discipline?

In the Fall of 2007 Prof. Chimonides, a produced and published playwright, built his "standard" section of THTR 347 using WebCT extensively with a nod towards the prospect of eventually developing it for a distance education offering. (In fact in all his courses he uses Web based course interfaces).

Assignments, discussion postings, and final projects were all conducted successfully via WebCT outside of class meeting time. In Summer 2008 Prof. Chimonides began teaching and implementing THTR 101 (Online) – Introduction to Theater (for non-majors) and is currently in his third semester of instructional refinement on that course. He is a department leader in applications of instructional technology, he understands good pedagogy, and is committed to active learning principles.

2. How will each objective in the course be met using distance education technologies?

a. Students will develop a better understanding of the subjective creative process as it applies to playwrighting

The course begins with the topic of playwrighting as an authentic creative act. Drama's primacy as an art form is in its vivid expression of subjective (authorial) truth and it is from this premise, (the process of discovery and articulation of authentic "voice,") from which the course will proceed.

Further, the course reader is strong in this regard. In order to bring this objective into higher order learning, students will be required to complete writing assignments and participate in online discussion forums to apply this learning.

b. Students will cultivate an idea generation facility with regard to developing and synthesizing dramatic premises', characters, themes, dialogue and structural motifs.

Informed by theoretical readings and online powerpoint lectures, students will explore a range of tools, exercises and techniques designed to give the beginning playwright greater access to subconscious creative impulses, as well as enable them to practice concretizing and implementing these in play form.

c. Students will demonstrate an understanding of psychological and cultural influences on storytelling, particularly theater, as well as the impact the arts have had on the societies from which they have flourished.

The Course Reader for this course emphasizes a non-dogmatic, practical and diverse approach to drama; exploring a variety of dramatic forms. Instructional modules will embellish the text, and use examples from many cultures and schools of thought. Students will explore related topics by searching links that appeal to and broaden their individual interests. In order to bring this objective into higher order learning, students will explore readings, lectures and creative assignments that directly address drama's connections to consciousness and culture.

c. Students will demonstrate an appreciation of how creative collaboration influences and affects the development of an original play.

Despite the subjective, authorial role of the playwright – no play is brought to life without the substantial contributions of others: directors, actors, dramaturges, designers, and ultimately the audience. Again, the required text for the course is strong in emphasizing the importance of synergy and our online course work will labor to practice it. Through guided and focused critique, discussion forums, group writing projects and the videotaped reading of a final student play performed by professional actors, students will gain valuable collaborative theory and practice to aid them in their development as dramatic artists.

3. How will instructor-student and student-student, if applicable, interaction take place?

Instructor-student and student-student interaction will be a cornerstone of the course. Students learn about art by discussing it. This will be accomplished primarily through Moodle's online discussion tools or a blogging site. I will also be available daily via email and phone.

4. How will student achievement be evaluated?

Students will be graded by the following criteria: (The following is excerpted from my syllabus):

In this course, each student starts with an A = 100 points. Maintaining that A is each student's goal - lapses in each of the following areas will lower your grade accordingly:

CLASS PARTICIPATION:

Put in the time. A good rule of thumb for a (3) hour course is: **approx. (5-6) hours of out of class work per week, two per credit hour, give or take.** If you don't devote the appropriate time and energy, you don't learn. It's as simple as that. If you do not think that you will be able to commit to this amount of outside work, please drop this class immediately so that someone else can take it.

ONLINE POSTING OF WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS:

Unless it was not obvious, this is a "writing intensive" course. In and out of class, written assignments (usually short scenes), will be regularly assigned with clear due dates stated. As this work will serve as a kind of laboratory to be mined for your final projects, students will be charged to collate and compile **all** of their exercises *themselves*. Keep a Playwrighting file!

ONLINE DISCUSSION POSTS:

Beyond our in-class dialogue, discussion will also happen online - in the form of written "*Discussion Posts*" to be posted online (through Moodle). These discussion posts are powerful tools to help you to attack and digest the work and increase learning. These posts will not be "graded" with a written mark, but I or your classmates MAY feedback liberally online.

READINGS:

This course outlines a progression of assigned readings. Discussion of these will form a strong component of our discussion board dialogue. As these selections are culled from a variety of sources, a COURSE READER is assigned (currently available for purchase at COPIES NOW.) Many selections are excerpted from (but not limited to) the following, essential list:

- The Playwright's Handbook*, by Stuart Spencer
- To be a Playwright*, by Janet Nepris
- The Art and Craft of Playwriting*, by Jeffrey Hatcher
- Story*, by Robert McKee.
- The Anatomy of Story*, by John Truby

It is your responsibility to read each selection carefully and to make notes on each in the interest of contributing to in-class discussion. *Every student will contribute to every discussion.* Though we will not necessarily discuss EVERY reading in the course reader in class, *it remains my expectation that you read ALL of them and use them as reference in your work.*

FINAL PROJECT

A polished "Ten Minute" Play. (*Note: Ten Minutes does not literally denote TEN exact minutes. What we mean here is a short play between 5 and 10 minutes. NO LONGER!!!*) This project may also be a short excerpt or scene from a longer work, should you choose to pursue that road instead. So that students may see their work performed, each final project will be read by professional actors in New York City, videotaped and posted to the course website for viewing by the entire class.

GRADING SCALE:

Your final letter grade for the course is determined by the scale:

A=90-100 pts., B=80-89 pts., C=70-79 pts., D=60-69 pts., F=59 pts. or less

4. How will academic honesty for tests and assignments be addressed?

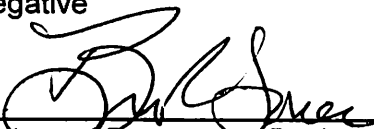
This isn't really an issue. Students will be expected to uphold the University expectations for academic integrity. The structure of the work (individual, creative) eliminates the likelihood of "canned" or purchased papers.

Submit to the department or its curriculum committee the responses to items A1-A5, the current official syllabus of record, along with the instructor developed online version of the syllabus, and the sample lesson. This lesson should clearly demonstrate how the distance education instructional format adequately assists students to meet a course objective(s) using online or distance technology. It should relate to one concrete topic area indicated on the syllabus.

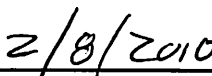
Step Two: Departmental/Dean Approval

Recommendation: Positive (The objectives of this course can be met via distance education)

Negative



 Signature of Department Designee
 Chair person



 Date

Endorsed:

Michael J. Hood 2/11/10
Signature of College Dean Date

Forward form and supporting materials to Liberal Studies Office for consideration by the University-wide Undergraduate Curriculum Committee. Dual-level courses also require review by the University-wide Graduate Committee for graduate-level section.

Step Three: University-wide Undergraduate Curriculum Committee Approval

Recommendation: Positive (The objectives of this course can be met via distance education)

 Negative

Signature of Committee Co-Chair Date

Forward form and supporting materials to the Provost within 30 calendar days after received by committee.

Step Four: Provost Approval

Approved as distance education course Rejected as distance education course

Signature of Provost Date

Forward form and supporting materials to Associate Provost.

DISTANCE EDUCATION –

PLAYWRIGHTING

THTR 347

An introduction to the art of the Playwright.

Syllabus, Summer 2010

Instructor: Jason Chimonides (*Hee-mo-NEED-eez*)

Phone: 724 - 357 - 4026

Email: jason.chimonides@iup.edu

Office: 206C Waller

MISSION STATEMENT AND COURSE GOALS FOR THE STUDENT:

What are the stories *you* are dying to write? Who are the people *you* most want to make speak? What are the eeriest, most riveting or funniest moments *you* want to create on stage? What moral vision of life do *you* want to express? Most importantly, how can playwrighting form and craft assist you in making an audience really sit up in their seats and *experience* your singular creation?

This course is designed to offer you an introductory exploration of both the theoretical underpinnings as well as the creative practice of playwrighting craft. The primary focus of the class will be hands on exercises and projects designed to liberate your dramatic imagination as well as engage you in the unique tenets of the Playwright's demanding job description.

Our emphasis will *not* be on proffering a specific playwrighting "method," however. Instead, we will proceed with the recognition that playwrighting, despite eternal elements, remains an *individual* form of expression and thus, a very personal quest.

Upon successful completion of this course, each of you will have:

- **Discovered** a process whereby you can *increase* your capacity to articulate what it is you have to say as an artist;
- **Developed** an acquaintance with the Playwright's job description, and been given a solid "workout" in the most essential elements dramatic mechanics, such as: Authorial Voice, Ideas and The Creative Process, Basic Dramatic Structure, Character Design and Dramatic Dialogue;
- **Studied** the work of selected playwrights as well as readings from dramatic theory to broaden your understanding of the form as well as to model successful tools so that you may employ them in your *own* work;
- **Experimented** with a variety of creative writing techniques and shared the results aloud *in class*, receiving regular peer evaluation in addition to conference with the instructor;
- **Been given** an opportunity to put knowledge and theory into practice by completing a three part final project, a component of which will receive an informal **staged reading** for an invited audience at the end of the semester.

COURSE UNITS

Voice (The Playwright's Vision)

Ideas (The Creative Process)

Story (The Structure of Drama)

Character (The Engine of Drama)

Language (The Playwright's Instrument)

GRADING:

First off – this isn't a Calculus class; it's a theater class. We're investigating an *art form*, not a quantifiable science. So. With that distinction in mind, I invite you to forget *immediately*, any previously held notions you might have about how "grading" typically works in a college course. I can assure you, I work differently. Thus, the way that you will be graded this semester is likely to seem somewhat unorthodox to you, and most certainly will be a departure from traditional practices, which focus on student "evaluation" as opposed to student "practice." Let me explain ...

Your final grade in this class this semester will NOT be based upon my evaluation of the "quality" of your work, I don't "grade" any assignments with a written mark, as I find it irrelevant and even counterproductive to creative growth. Instead, we will focus on **practice**. Our key emphasis is on "working out" with the material with the goal of increasing our capacity to more fully understand and engage with theater. Think of the way a musician or a painter or an athlete trains; **THEY PRACTICE and PRACTICE and PRACTICE!** That's what we're going to do this semester!

So. If you're expecting every assignment to be "certified" in some way, stamped with an arbitrary "A, B, C, or D" – I can assure you will be VERY frustrated in this course. I'm sorry. Rather, your final grade will be entirely dependent upon your successful completion of the course requirements and assignments. The trick? These requirements are often substantial, rigorous and demanding of significant time outside of class.

Your grade in this class is NOT based upon my subjective evaluation of the "quality" of your work. Though, I offer substantial feedback, I don't "grade" individual assignments as I find it irrelevant and even counterproductive to creative growth. Rather, evaluation is entirely dependent upon your successful completion of the course requirements, (which are substantial, rigorous and demanding of time outside of class).

Simply put – if you come to class consistently, participate in the work with focus and commitment and complete all assignments by their due dates, with clear thought and preparation taken, you will be rewarded accordingly. If you fail to accomplish these requirements, your grade will suffer.

HARD WORK AND COMMITMENT = GOOD GRADES

So. How does this work in practice?

In this course, each student starts with an A = 100 points. Maintaining that A is each student's goal - lapses in each of the following areas will lower your grade accordingly:

CLASS PARTICIPATION:

Put in the time. A good rule of thumb for a (3) hour course is: **approx. (5-6) hours of out of class work per week, two per credit hour, give or take.** If you don't devote the appropriate time and energy, you don't learn. It's as simple as that. If you do not think that you will be able to commit to this amount of outside work, please drop this class immediately so that someone else can take it.

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FINAL PROJECT

A polished "Ten Minute" Play. (*Note: Ten Minutes does not literally denote TEN exact minutes. What we mean here is a short play between 5 and 10 minutes. NO LONGER!!!*) This project may also be a short excerpt or scene from a longer work, should you choose to pursue that road instead. So that students may see their work performed, each final project will be read by professional actors in New York City, videotaped and posted to the course website for viewing by the entire class.

Okay. Here's how it breaks down - things that will diminish your grade and their corresponding point penalty:

You start with 100 points

- Any class assignment not turned at due date = -2 points
 - Additional penalty for same class assignment if not turned by the end of the final exam time slot = - 2 points, (equaling 4 points of penalty total)
 - Any part of Final project not turned in on time = -10 points

 - Any part of Final project not turned in before end of the final exam time slot = -20 points per part
 - Poor attitude / participation / commitment / disruptive behavior = Instructive determined/subjective.
 - (Note: This penalty is employed only in extreme circumstances. If a student is penalized for this, they will be made personally aware.)
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GRADING SCALE:

Your final letter grade for the course is determined by the scale:

A=90-100 pts., B=80-89 pts., C=70-79 pts., D=60-69 pts., F=59 pts. or less

FINAL NOTES ON GRADING:

An "A" student is committed, participatory, positive, respectful and delivers all assignments on time with clear thought, preparation and care taken.

The student loses the "A" by exhibiting the following: Refusing to participate, missing assignments, (or partially or lamely completing them), crafting relentless excuses, disrespect to others, un-preparedness and poor focus.

EXTRA CREDIT OPPORTUNITIES:

Stuff happens, problems arise and I understand this. If lapses occur, and you are not able to turn in your written

assignments and discussion posts on time you want to attempt to boast your grade, I will determine, **on an individual basis**, how or whether to award you such an opportunity and what that might mean in terms of make-up work. **Avoid this scenario at all costs**, as I can assure you, Make-Up work will be INCREDIBLY demanding on your time and energy. Believe me, in the long run, it's a lot easier just to come to class and complete all your assignments on time!

IMPORTANT NOTE: Whether or not to award you extra-credit remains my subjective decision. If you think you might need it, see me immediately during office hours. If you don't see me, I will assume you are not interested. I WILL NOT CONTACT YOU! Your grade and education are ultimately YOUR responsibility, not mine!

"DO IT YOURSELF": INSTRUCTOR FEEDBACK IN THIS COURSE:

The emphasis of this course is on the personal creative impulse and MUCH LESS on hard-nosed "evaluation" on the "quality" of your attempts. Writing is a very personal thing. It's a very intimate thing. And ultimately it is an INVESTIGATORY thing. As beginners, what will hook you into making playwrighting a part of your future, is to begin your writing journey in a safe, supportive, non-judgmental environment.

It's important to me that you write and write and write and not feel as though each of your attempts is going to be picked apart. Or even that they're such a "big deal." I want this to be fun for you. And I want to cultivate in you, a fearless joy of doing. Writing is a practice. And practice is about PROCESS. Not PRODUCT. Class environments that open early student attempts to critical dissection can be sometimes be helpful, but more often than not, in my experience, they enervate students, are often irrelevant or can sometimes even be psychically damaging.

Take it from a man who has received some NASTY, DEVASTATING reviews of his own writing; the world is WAITING TO PASS JUDGEMENT ON YOUR WORK. (Think of how critical you are of everyone else's!) This is not an energy we will cultivate in this course. Ultimately, you must learn to be your own critic, develop your own standards and trust your expression.

All this to say, I de-emphasize critical evaluation in this class in favor of encouragement, exploration and creative cajoling. Early in your writing career, you have to feel safe to experiment, try, fail and above all, trust your own instincts. Still, you need feedback to grow. That of your peers and that of your instructor. So....

This course will "dial in" safe constructive feedback *gradually* so that by the end of the course, as you are working on your Final Project, you will be able to enjoy informed and precise impressions about your work when you are most ready to absorb them. Still, as our class time is limited, and each student has different goals and needs, I will willingly provide individual feedback throughout the semester IF AND ONLY IF IT IS REQUESTED.

PRIVATE CONFERENCES WITH THE INSTRUCTOR:

If you are interested in more detailed evaluation / feedback of your writing, you must seek it out from me PERSONALLY. I am also making myself available for up to 2 hours of one on one phone consultation for each student should it be requested.

Privately, on the phone, I can accommodate your needs and inquiries much more specifically - on a student by student basis. Still, it is UP TO YOU to avail yourself of this opportunity. As your instructor, I am a RESOURCE to you, and will generously work to accommodate your learning, but ultimately, only you can be responsible for your growth.

In addition to student feedback during office hours, at some point in the semester, each student will have a mandatory private conference with me regarding their **Final Projects**. Missing this appointment will be equal to missing a scheduled class period. *Do not hesitate* to contact me throughout the semester if you have ANY private concerns, questions etc. that need addressing or are simply interested in extending your discussion of the course material, I am more than happy to try and accommodate you.

COURSE MATERIALS:

- **Ink.** D'you got me? INK CARTRIDGES! Am I clear here? INNNNNNKKK!!!!!!!!!! You will be writing and printing DOZENS of pages this semester to be read and shared in class. Not having something

Chang ink

printed is NO EXCUSE. Budget extra this semester for ink. I'm serious.

- **A notebook** and or computer file to record all of your caroming ideas / images / fragments of dialogue / impressions etc. EACH and EVERY writing etude we have in this course will form the raw material from which you will develop your larger, refined projects. You MUST to collect it for yourself!
- **Something to write with and on** every day you are in class. (Pen and Paper, Laptop computer...)
- **A COURSE READER** from COPIES NOW. It is available for purchase under course number and instructor name.
- **A TEN MINUTE PLAY COLLECTION.** At a certain point in the semester, I will ask that you read a handful of ten minute plays to get a basic sense of the form. You will choose which you read, not I. There are many such collections available in public and university libraries. Buying a collection (preferably one published in the last 10 years) is relatively inexpensive online. I recommend it.
- **MOODLE** – Regularly, we will be using some of the basic tools of MOODLE to facilitate your learning in this course. If you are not at least somewhat familiar with this program, get familiar or contact IT support.

Playwrighting - Distance Education Version.

Assignment Sample

Built on a chassis:

This week's exercise asks you to take an existing story and develop a completely new piece based on that story's structural elements. There is a key point I must raise, however: you are not "re-writing" an existing story, necessarily. You are reverse engineering that story, breaking it apart into its compositional elements and creating something entirely new. In this week's case, the very DNA of the story you choose will serve as the creative "obstructions" that will inspire your work.

When we "broke apart" *The Cat in the Hat* – we discovered more or less the following 5 story "bones."

- Characters find themselves in a state of boredom and lassitude after an authority figure has left them alone.
- Enter Chaos.
- Chaos increases in magnitude, intensity and duration as the characters unsuccessfully attempt to adjust.
- Characters confront chaos, conquer it and bring it under control.
- Exit chaos, order restored.

See what I'm asking you to do? I'm asking you to "boil down" a story to its absolute essence first, and then write a new story based on that essence. As for "The Cat in Hat" example, previous classes have interpreted it in a different way; let's have a look at what previous classes came up with:

One class developed a story about a journalist who is confronted with a homeless person at his door. After several failed attempts at making the man a successful interviewee, the journalist finds himself forced to stop this man from unleashing bedlam: he is eating all his food, destroying his house and thoroughly unraveling his life. In desperation, the journalist binds the homeless man, gags him and locks him in a closet. Unsure what to do next, he then tortures the hungry vagrant by forcing him (still bound) to crawl towards piles of food arrayed in a trail towards the door, (his attempt at luring him out of the house.) Finally successful at getting the hungry man to cross the door's threshold, the journalist throws the man into a car and drives him immediately to a homeless shelter.

Another class developed a story about a bored and despondent pair of college roommates who one evening, find themselves unsuccessfully attempting to study. When a drunken frat-boy wanders into their apartment, mistaking it for his own, he unleashes chaos by, pied-piper like, bringing a massive party with him. Baccinalia, debauchery and destruction ensue, culminating when a particularly pernicious gaggle of Sigma Chi brothers ritualistically urinate on the notes of the hapless roommates. The police arrive, naturally, but to our amazement, arrest the roommates, who they happen to discover engaged in a terrible deed. In a moment of throaty malevolence, the roommates have wrestled the drunken frat boy to the ground and are savagely urinating on HIM in revenge. The frat boy presses charges and the roommates are hauled off to jail, where, finally, they can study for their exam in peace.

You see? We're working from the same scaffolding – creating vastly different stories at each turn.

So. Step by step:

1 – Choose a fairy tale or a children's book.

2 – Break that story down in to 5 basic story bones like ones described above. (Be prepared to share these 5 "bones" in class.)

3 – Write a 3 to 4 minute scene **INSPIRED** (interpret that obstruction as you see fit!) by the 5 basic story bones you develop based on your story.

4 - Finally, all I ask is that your story have a clear beginning, middle and end. A ? / / / .

Good luck! Have fun!!!