PLAYWRITING THESIS GUIDELINES

Prerequisites: Courses: Script Analysis, Playwriting, Dramaturgy (Classic and Modern)
Approval by: Playwriting instructor

Deadline: Proposal is due to the Playwriting Thesis Advisor no later than one week prior to the faculty meeting at which the proposal will be discussed.

Length: Project length will be determined by the structure of the work proposed. A two-act play is preferable, but a long one-act may be acceptable. Running time should be at least 45 minutes in order to demonstrate the writer’s ability to sustain narrative, develop character, and structure a work of substantial length.

Budget: The Theatre Department can provide a maximum of a $100 budget for the Playwriting Thesis. Download the Thesis Budget Guidelines and Template for more information. The Budget Proposal must be submitted with your Thesis Proposal. It will be reviewed and finalized when your thesis project has been approved. Outside funding and fundraising is not permitted.

WRITTEN PROPOSAL

Candidates should initiate projects by contacting the Director of Graduate Thesis Projects to discuss their interest and the scope of their project.

Following this initial step, candidates should contact the Playwriting Thesis Advisor in order to further discuss the project and outline a Playwriting Thesis Proposal. Once this proposal is approved by the Advisor, it should be submitted to the faculty to read at least one week before the faculty meeting at which it will be discussed. Revisions may be requested by the faculty prior to approval.

Write and submit a proposal that includes the following criteria.

1. A prose outline or synopsis of the basic plot elements needed to tell the story.

2. A character list identifying all characters, including a brief description of each character and that character’s function in the play.

3. The thought and intentions behind the play. What does the writer wish to explore with this piece?

4. A brief description of style and genre, including approach to language, use of setting, and acting style.

5. An outline of necessary dramaturgical research with bibliography.
6. If at the time of proposal the play has already been fully or partially drafted, the writer should briefly summarize the writing process to date – course work on the play, major decisions or changes of direction, areas of research already explored, etc.

Proposals may be accepted for projects at any of three stages of development:

1. A play that exists as a completed first draft
2. A play already in progress but not yet fully drafted
3. An idea for a new play

AFTER THE PROPOSAL IS ACCEPTED

After the Playwriting Thesis project is approved, it is up to the candidate and the Playwriting Thesis Advisor to establish the writing, revision, and reading schedule.

Since projects potential starting points may differ greatly, the amount and type of work required for each project will vary, as will the expectations of a final presentation. For example, if a project begins as a completed first draft, the writer will be expected to complete a second and third draft of the play, making changes and revisions as recommended prior to the final reading. If a project begins as an idea only, or as a work-in-progress, the writer will be expected to complete a first draft of the play and make changes and revisions (some of which may be substantial) as recommended by the Playwriting Thesis Advisor prior to the final reading. It is understood that the expectations of the committee will be higher when assessing projects that have begun at a later stage of development.

It may be useful to note that, unlike many Artistic Thesis projects, the Playwriting Thesis is not tied to an established production schedule. As a result, a Playwriting Thesis project requires a great deal of discipline, careful time management, and independent work. Generally, the most successful projects involve a close working relationship between the writer and the Advisor. It is recommended, therefore, that new and revised scene work be delivered and discussed on an ongoing basis so that the Playwriting Thesis Advisor can help the writer navigate the play’s particular challenges and pitfalls.

THE PLAYWRITING THESIS PROJECT DEFENSE

When the Playwriting Thesis Advisor determines that the play is ready to be seen by the student’s Project Committee, the student will provide script copies to committee members. At this time, the student will also coordinate a script-in-hand reading of the play for the committee and any invited guests desired. If necessary, the Playwriting Thesis Advisor or other committee members will assist the student in identifying appropriate actors for this reading.
Immediately following this reading, the student will meet with the committee to discuss the work completed and the future development of the play. The student will be asked to lead off this discussion with a 10 minute self-assessment. Be prepared to answer questions from the committee that will arise in response to this self-assessment and to the work presented.

The Committee votes Pass or Fail at the end of the Thesis Project Defense, but may choose to wait a week before issuing the decision in order for one or more Committee members to write a response to be issued along with it. A response may also be written even if a Pass or Fail is issued at the conclusion of the Thesis Project Defense.