COURSE SUBJECT: This course is a careful look at eight contemporary works of modern American drama to include four Pulitzer prize-winning plays and four other highly lauded, critically well-received works that represent each playwright at the top of her form. At the outset, we might—and should—ask ourselves: where is the distinction and virtuosity in each play? Why have these eight plays fascinated audiences and why might these works continue to do so in theaters in the future? Ideally, each of you will begin to “see” and understand each play as a carefully constructed linguistic event; as a precise reproduction of speech effects and actor’s voices in each playwright’s effort to create characters and characterization through language; and, equally importantly, as a controlled visual universe that each playwright has imagined for his/her theater. In other words, we will try to examine each play as language and words; as the sound of a variety of human actors struggling for control i.e., to create a character on the stage; and as visual representations of worlds where we the audience—or we read the readers—have been invited to eavesdrop.

COURSE OBJECTIVES: To read critically and thoughtfully works of American Drama so that we begin to understand and appreciate them not only as words on a page but also as events in space and time performed by actors on a stage.

To gain some attentive understanding of the world and situation of the play—its milieu—but also of the social or historical conditions and concerns which inspired each playwright to produce her text.

To improve our skill as critical writers, thinkers, researchers through various writing assignments.

REQUIRED TEXTS AND MATERIALS:

- Eurydice, Sarah Ruhl 3 days of discussion
- Indecent, Paula Vogel 4 days
- Sweat, Lynn Nottage 4 days
- The Wolves, Sarah DeLappe 4 days
- Three Tall [u1] Women, Edward Albee 4 days
- Buried Child, Sam Shepard 3 days
- Rabbit Hole, David Lindsay-Abaire 3 days
- Fat Pig, Neil LaBute 3 days

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADE DETERMINATION: Each student will take one midterm and one final exam. Each of you will deliver an oral report following the conclusion of our discussion of one of the
plays on the syllabus. There will also be a final paper (typed, eight to ten pages, three secondary sources) due at the end of the term over another one of the eight plays we have discussed.

Your final grade for the course will be determined as follows:

Mid-semester and Final Examination: 40%

Oral Report: 20%

Final Paper: 40%

Class Participation: up to 10% of you grade. Yes, I do require 110% of your effort!

IRKS AND PET PEEVES: First, I value perfect, or near perfect, attendance in my classes. If you want to miss lots of class, or have scheduled other activities for this time slot, this class is really a poor, a disastrous choice for you to have made. I take the roll daily, religiously. If you miss more than four classes (gulp! that’s two full weeks of instruction!) I will remove you from my ledger with an F.

Secondly, I get very distracted when students distracts me with their cell phones, bleepers, laptops, or other prosthetic devices. Park those at the door. Remember, some of the best theater is a poor art, that despite the use of elaborate settings, lights, costumes, or occasional technology, theater relies mainly on elemental effects, staging, the majesty of a great actor’s voice or the full-throated eloquence of a great actor’s love affair with a playwright’s WORDS.

After we get all of these pedantic, but necessary rules out of the way, let me welcome you to Modern American Drama. Teaching drama from the standpoint of an English professor, and not that of a theater professor, has been one of my greatest pleasures at UCA. I feel confident that if you give me your maximum effort from the beginning of this class you will know more about theater--how it works, sings, inspires its audience--by springtime than you ever imagined possible.