

Basic info

Amherst College THDA 65
Course in the Arts of Theater and Dance
Keywords: artistic practice, writing attentive,
speaking attentive
Course web page: <http://alturl.com/xyjfh>
Course meets MFs from 10 a.m. to 11:20 a.m.
in Webster 19 (Studio 3)

Assistant Professor Ron Bashford
Department of Theater & Dance, Webster Hall
E-mail: rdbashford88@amherst.edu
Office phone: (413) 542-5349
Office hours: Thursdays 1-3 p.m. or by appt.

Course description

This is a practical course in navigating the myriad positions and tasks that directors master to lead collaborators toward completed theatrical interpretations of dramatic texts. Studio exercises are employed throughout as each student director produces and directs **two medium-length projects**. Topics of focus include the articulation of coherent artistic intent, the role of the audience in performance, and the use of space, sound and light. In addition, this course considers organizational and research methods related to successful production. Readings and class sessions are devoted to the history and practice of directing and to discussion of problems and approaches. Two class meetings per week. Students should expect to schedule a significant amount of rehearsal time for the successful completion of projects.

Class Format

This is a process-oriented course centered on your own artistic work and production and research of related materials. Rehearsals and auditions for your individual projects are to be scheduled outside of class time. You will submit complete rehearsal schedules to me, and I will attend some of your rehearsals.

We meet twice per week as a community of directors. During these meetings I will give you various assignments. We will discuss issues related to your projects and their organization, and undertake studio exercises as needed. My expectations for your work are summarized below.

Materials

You will compile necessary primary and secondary (research) materials related to each project. Production of published material is contingent on securing rights.

Performance Projects

You are required to produce and direct two substantial medium-length theater pieces. Ideally, one piece should be from a pre-written script (i.e., a published play), and the other should require some form of adaptation or text generation on your part. In addition:

- The performances of your pieces may not take place in any of the studios or formal theater spaces of the Theater and Dance Department. Nor will you be given a budget for production beyond photocopying and necessary royalty payments. If you have a special request for any production materials of any cost, ask me first.
- You must arrange for the use of site-specific rehearsal performance space in a way that builds community relationships.
- You must ensure at least one public performance of each piece.
- You may not ask the staff of the Department to work on your pieces, make or get things for you; you may, however, ask for advice, or to borrow small items. You may not request lighting instruments or other technical equipment that requires staff to operate or transport.
- Your pieces should be conceived and rehearsed as complete and finished events, ready for an audience.
- You are expected to attend, and to participate in promoting, all the projects developed in this course.

Research

At a minimum, you should conduct independent research for each project into the following areas.

- At minimum, where applicable, other works and background of the playwright and at least one prior production. Ideally, you should refer to relevant critical material on the work of the writer, a prior director's approach to the play, and contemporary responses. If possible, you should find material on the first production and/or a significant revival.
- Historical and cultural events and artifacts concurrent to, or relevant to, your material.
- Additional artistic works or topics that inform your vision of the play -- you should seek at least one area of inquiry in this regard.
- Visual research or image-banking.
- Research should be summarized in a readable report/discussion format (not just notes), incorporating your analysis of material relevant to your work, and its influence on your project. Research summaries may be incorporated into Weekly Reports (see below), or may be written separately.
- Your research will be evaluated as part of your production portfolios (see below).

Documentation

I will request a variety of practical documentation and other writing as we go, which may include analytical assignments, casting breakdowns, rehearsal schedules, vision statements, summaries of research materials (see above), image and sound collections, and so forth. All such requests should be completed in a timely manner; they will be geared toward helping you with both your process and its documentation. All such materials should be saved to be compiled in a production portfolio for each project.

Weekly Reports

Each week on Monday, you should submit a typed report about your rehearsal and individual director experience. You may use this opportunity to summarize research for inclusion in your portfolios, but reports written during each rehearsal period should discuss rehearsal progress, problems and goals. Additional guidelines will be discussed in class.

Production Portfolios

You will be required to submit two production portfolios, one for each project. Your portfolios should include all of your weekly reports, along with written responses to peer critiques (see below). They should also include all other written and visual materials related to your work as a director, including notes, schedules, script annotations and research summaries. We will discuss guidelines for the portfolios in more detail in class.

Design collaboration

While the design aspects of your projects (space, costume, light sources, sound and objects) are likely to be minimal, they need to be carefully considered as part of a conversational process. To this end, each of you will be designated as "design collaborator" on two of your classmate's projects. Minimum engagement as a design collaborator should include two substantial discussions with the director and two rehearsal visits. You may also wish to provide additional assistance. A summary report of your work as design collaborator should be submitted to your fellow classmate(s) for inclusion in their production portfolios. Copies of these summaries should also be submitted to me separately.

Peer Critiques

You will be assigned to critique your classmates' work in written form, and then to provide a written response to the critiques you receive as part of each production portfolio. Each project will be critiqued by at least two other students. You should expect to write at least four critiques of your peers' work over the course of the semester. We will discuss the guidelines in class. All critiques will be passed on anonymously.

Grading and attendance

While not explicitly listed in the grading breakdown below, it is not possible to succeed in this course without excellent attendance to class meetings, and a pro-active commitment to a significant amount of work and rehearsal time outside of class.

Artistic Evaluation of Performance Projects (2) - 50%

Production Portfolios (2) - 20%

Peer Critiques (4) - 20%

Design collaboration, and summaries - 10%

Course Schedule

- Your Weekly Reports are **due on Mondays**, starting January 31, through May 2. You may skip one week of your choice for a total of 12 reports.
- **Performances** for the first project must take place by or before the last Thursday before Spring Break (March 10). For the second project, performances should take place by or before the end of the penultimate week of class (May 1). All performance dates and venues must be cleared in class.
- **Peer Critiques** must be submitted **within three days** following the applicable performance.
- **Design collaboration summaries** should be submitted at the same time as Peer Critiques.
- **Production Portfolios** should be submitted approximately one week following receipt of peer critiques of each project, but no later than **March 25** for the first project, and **May 11** for the second project.

There is no examination for THDA 65 during the Examination Period.

The absolute deadline for any outstanding writing is 5 p.m. on May 11.

Statement of Intellectual Responsibility and Implications

Every person's education is the product of his or her own intellectual effort and participation in a process of critical exchange. Amherst cannot educate those who are unwilling to submit their own work and ideas to critical assessment. Nor can it tolerate those who interfere with the participation of others in the critical process. Therefore, the College considers it a violation of the requirements of intellectual responsibility to submit work that is not one's own or otherwise to subvert the conditions under which academic work is performed by oneself or by others.

Some implications of the Statement of Intellectual Responsibility for THDA 45 are listed below.

- Our work is cooperative by design. Indeed, creating theater depends on developing skills in collaboration and good communication. In order to maintain optimal learning conditions, it is your intellectual responsibility to yourself and to your peers to attend all scheduled class meetings, to cooperate in scheduling and attending meetings outside of class necessary to complete collaborative work, and to communicate conflicts, time-management problems and related issues openly and promptly.
- Writing that you submit to me must be your own, unless cited otherwise.