

# THEA 481: DIRECTING

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Spring 2018

## INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

| Instructor | Email              | Office Location & Hours   |
|------------|--------------------|---|
| Peter Wood | pcwood@olemiss.edu | Isom 207<br>Tues: 1pm – 4pm<br>Thur: 1pm – 4pm<br>Mon, Wed, & Fri times are by<br>appointment only and at my discretion |

## CLASS INFORMATION

Tuesday/Thursday: 11am – 12:15pm  
Isom 302

## GENERAL INFORMATION

### *Description*

*“In a sense, the playwright’s meaning disappears the moment it reaches the stage, because on the stage it becomes part of the action, every element of which is as pertinent to its meaning as the text itself. A change of gesture, inflection, movement, rhythm or in the physical background of a speech may give it a new significance.”*<sup>1</sup>

The shift from text to action is one that is full of difficulties, excitement, fear, humility, hard work, mistakes, dedication, fun, disappointment, heartbreak, and joy. At the center of the modern process of turning text into action, of making a play into a *production*, is the director. This course is designed to give someone with a background in theatre the tools to take on the challenge of turning a play into a production. Through a combination of reading, research, exercises, and

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<sup>1</sup> Harold Clurman, “In a Different Language,” in *Directors on Directing*, Eds. Toby Cole and Helen Krich Chinoy. Pearson College Division, 1963, 276.

directing projects, this class examines both the art *and* the technical challenges of directing a play. Students will apply their growing knowledge of directing practices to a variety of plays, including ones by William Shakespeare, Anton Chekov, Sarah Ruhl, Christopher Durang, and Sarah Kane, ensuring that they will be able to approach a wide range of play styles and genres with confidence. Throughout the course, students will also have a number of informal conversations with designers, theatre technicians, and other theatre practitioners focused on building good working relationships with members of a production team.

### *Objectives*

By the end of the semester students are expected to:

- Demonstrate a clear understanding of the modern director's role in theatre production
- Constructively research and analyze a play text
- Verbalize their own philosophy of directing and artistic style
- Understand the complexities of working with actors
- Stage theatre scenes with clarity and artistic sensibility
- Show an ability to constructively criticize their own strengths and weaknesses as a director

## COURSE MATERIALS

### *Required Texts*

*The Director's Craft*, by Katie Mitchell (ISBN: 9780415404396)

*The Seagull* by Anton Chekov (In *Chekhov Plays*, trans. Michael Frayn ISBN: 9780413181602)

*Dead Man's Cell Phone* by Sarah Ruhl (ISBN: 9781559363259)

*Vanya and Sonia and Misha and Spike* by Christopher Durang (ISBN: 9780802122384)

*Romeo & Juliet* by William Shakespeare (ISBN: 9781903436912)

*4:48 Psychosis* by Sarah Kane (ISBN: 9780413748300)

### *Required Performances*

Aquila Theatre's *Sense and Sensibility*

*Zombie Prom*

Dance Company Performance

*Macbeth*

## *Required Materials*

3" 3 Ring Binder (x2)  
paper notebook  
pencils

## GRADED PROJECTS

### *Director Presentation* *100 pts*

Students will prepare a 10-minute presentation on an important director from the 20<sup>th</sup> or 21<sup>st</sup> century and share this presentation with the class. Details will be given in a separate assignment sheet.

### *Scene 1 Performance* *100 pts*

This project will demonstrate the student's basic understanding of stage pictures and clear communication through the presentation of a 10-minute scene. Details will be given in a separate assignment sheet.

### *Scene 2 Director's Book* *150 pts*

The Director's Book for scene two will reflect the necessary research on, and the thorough analysis of, the *entire play* chosen for the project, as well as detailed rehearsal notes for the performed scene. Details will be given in a separate assignment sheet.

### *Scene 2 Performance* *150 pts*

Students will select a 10-15 minute scene from one of the available plays for their second scene project. This will culminate in a performance during finals week that will demonstrate the student's skill as a director by communicating a clear artistic idea/goal to an audience. This performance will be graded on how effectively the director has staged the scene in order to communicate their stated artistic intent. A detailed assignment sheet and rubric will be distributed. Please note that as this is a directing class, the actor's performances will be *part* of the grade, but your score will not hinge *entirely* on the actor's talents and abilities.

### *Project 2 Post-Performance Analysis* *50 pts*

Every student will assess their final scene performance and note areas for further development and clarification, as well as how their own performance as a director impacted the rehearsal process. They will also self-grade both their director's book and the final performance of scene two. These

grades will then be factored into the final grade for both of those assignments. Details will be given in a separate assignment sheet.

## OTHER COURSE GRADES

### *In Class Participation*

*200 pts*

Participation is central to this kind of class and is thus worth twenty percent of your entire grade. To achieve full marks for participation I expect you to fulfill the following:

- Be in class and *ready to begin* our work promptly at 11am
- Complete all assigned reading and assigned homework on time and be ready to discuss these materials with the class
- Demonstrate a willingness to accept critique of one's ideas, practices, and artistic output. This does not mean you always have to agree with such critique, but it does mean that you must not behave defensively or negatively to it.
- Be generous and specific with your critique of other's work. Generosity means that you approach giving critique with the goal of helping our colleague with their process and communication and not as a tool to prove yourself "better" or "smarter" than them. Specificity means that you strive to offer critique that is focused on a particular aspect of the exercise rather than general or vague comments.
- Show respect to your peers and help to create a safe and supportive classroom
- Focus on the work and refrain from using cell phones or other technology in the class unless directed to do so

### *Class/Rehearsal Journals*

*150 pts*

During the first half of the semester, students will be expected to journal for the final five minutes of class about how that particular class has expanded upon or changed their perspectives on theatre in general or directing in particular. Students will then select seven of these journal entries for submission (70 pts). In the second half of the semester, students will be expected to keep a rehearsal journal for their scene two rehearsals. At the end of the semester, students will select eight of these entries for submission (80pts).

### *Online Blog Participation*

*100 pts*

Each student will be expected to regularly contribute to the class blog with at least one post per week. Acceptable posts can be a mix of things, from sharing new productions by important directors, to reviews of major productions across the globe, images related to your directing

projects, or other directing resources. In addition, each student will be expected to write at least one longer blog entry (minimum of 400 words) during the semester that expresses their own philosophy of directing.

### ATTENDANCE & LATENESS

You are allowed two unexcused absences without penalty during the semester. Every absence beyond that limit will lower your final grade by 50 points. Habitual lateness to class will count against your class participation grade.

### EXPECTATIONS

What you can expect from me . . .

- I will create a respectful and supportive classroom.
- I will be fair and transparent in my grading.
- I will do my best to help each of you succeed in this class.

What I expect from you . . .

- You will respect your peers and help create a supportive and safe classroom.
- You will focus on the work and will not use cell phones or other devices to text, surf the web, or otherwise take your focus away during class.
- You will do your best to succeed.

### GRADE VALUES

970 – 1000 = A+

870 – 899 = B+

770 – 799 = C+

670 – 699 = D+

< 600 = F

900 – 969 = A

800 – 869 = B

700 – 769 = C

600 – 669 = D

## COURSE SCHEDULE

| Date                         | Subject   | Due  |
|------------------------------|---|--|
| 1/23                         | Introductions / Syllabus / Course Overview<br>Basic History of Directing in Western<br>Theatre Traditions |  |
| 1/25                         | Reading review<br>Staging Exercises   | Mitchell, Ch. 1  |
| 1/30                         | Reading review<br>Staging Exercises   | Mitchell, Ch. 2-3;<br><i>The Seagull</i>                 |
| 2/1                          | Practice analysis;<br>Conversation with Theatre Practitioner  | <i>Dead Man's Cell Phone</i>                             |
| 2/6                          | Reading Review<br>Staging Exercises: Open Scenes  | Mitchell, Ch. 4-8  |
| 2/8                          | Practice Analysis<br>Staging Exercises  | <i>Romeo &amp; Juliet</i>                                |
| 2/13                         | Presentations   | Mitchell, Ch. 9-10;<br>Director Presentations, Group 1   |
| 2/15                         | Presentations<br>Aquila Theatre's <i>Sense &amp; Sensibility</i><br>Discussion                            | Director Presentations, Group 2                          |
| 2/20                         | Conversation with Theatre Practitioner<br>Reading Review<br>Staging Exercises                             | Mitchell, Ch. 11;  |
| 2/22                         | Practice Analysis<br>Staging Exercises  | <i>Vanya and Sonia and Misha and Spike</i>               |
| 2/27                         | <i>Zombie Prom</i> discussion<br>Practice Analysis  | <i>4:48 Psychosis</i>                                    |
| 3/1                          | Introduction to Devising & the Director   |  |
| 3/6                          | Scene 1 Performances & Feedback   | Scene 1 Performances, Group 1                            |
| 3/8                          | Scene 1 Performances & Feedback   | Scene 2 Performances, Group 2<br>7 Class Journal Entries |
| 3/10 – 3/18: SPRING<br>BREAK |   |  |
| 3/20                         | Reading Review  | Mitchell, Ch. 12-14                                      |

| Date                    | Subject   | Due   |
|-------------------------|---|---|
| 3/22                    | Scene 2 Production Concepts   | Scene 2 Production Concept  |
| 3/27                    | Dance Company Discussion<br>Improv as directing tool                                |   |
| 3/29                    | Improv as directing tool  |   |
| 4/3                     | Individual Meetings about Scene 2   |   |
| 4/5                     | Individual Meetings about Scene 2   |   |
| 4/10                    | Conversation with Theatre Practitioner  | Directing Book Due (minus scene rehearsal notes)                      |
| 4/12                    | Observation of Life Exercises   |   |
| 4/17                    | Observation of Life Exercises   |   |
| 4/19                    | Conversation with Theatre Practitioner  |   |
| 4/24                    | <i>Macbeth</i> Discussion   |   |
| 4/26                    | TBD   |   |
| 5/1                     | TBD   |   |
| 5/3                     | TBD   | 8 Rehearsal Journal Entries   |
| 5/8 – 5/10: FINALS WEEK | Scenes will be performed for the department and friends/family of students involved | Time & Place TBD<br>Final Directing Book<br>Post-Performance Analysis |

## DISABILITY ACCESS & INCLUSION

The University of Mississippi is committed to the creation of inclusive learning environments for all students. If there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in barriers to your full inclusion and participation or to accurate assessment of your achievement, please contact the course instructor as soon as possible. Barriers may include, but are not necessarily limited to, timed exams and in-class assignments, difficulty with the acquisition of lecture content, inaccessible web content or the use of non-captioned or non-transcribed video and audio files. You must also contact Student Disability Services at 662-915-7128 so that office can 1) provide you with an Instructor Notification form, 2) facilitate the removal of barriers, and 3) ensure you have equal access to the same opportunities for success that are available to all students.

## UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI CREED:

The University of Mississippi is a community of learning dedicated to nurturing excellence in intellectual inquiry and personal character in an open and diverse environment. As a voluntary member of this community:

- I believe in respect for the dignity of each person
- I believe in fairness and civility
- I believe in personal and professional integrity
- I believe in academic honesty
- I believe in academic freedom
- I believe in good stewardship of our resources
- I pledge to uphold these values and encourage others to follow my example.