Beginning Acting  
THR 221-001 / 221L-020  
Fall 2018  

Professor: Rosie Brownlow-Calkin / brownlowr@sfasu.edu  
Class Time: M 2-2:50, WF 2-3:50  
Room: The Downstage  
Office Hours: M 11-1, T 10-1 or by appointment  

The commonly accepted definition of acting today (and I think it's a great one) is "living truthfully under imaginary circumstances". Working from this definition, we will learn basic principles of acting and apply them to our work onstage through exercises, sustained practices, and scenework.  

This course features an eclectic approach to learning acting fundamentals. During the first few weeks, we will be focusing on full body listening, following impulses, imagination, concentration, and building ensemble, drawing primarily from the the techniques of Jerzy Grotowski by way of Stephen Wangh, as well as Rudolf von Laban, Mikhail Chekhov, Uta Hagen, and Viewpoints (Anne Bogart, Tina Landau and Mary Overlie). During the first part of the semester we’ll also work monologues in preparation for auditions for Directing scenes. Next, we’ll learn how to craft scenes through the use of contentless material, and we’ll finish our semester with a unit on actions and objectives via Robert Cohen. Underpinning all of our acting work will be an ongoing study of approaches to American actor training.  

A Note on Rigor:  
Beginning Acting is widely recognized in this country as a student’s chance to undergo foundational acting training (kind of like Intro to Calculus means you learn calculus). There are a lot of ways to teach this training, and all of them involve rigor and risk-taking. I know that some of you are BFA Actors, and some are BFA Designers, and some are non-theatre majors. I do not expect anyone to execute exercises or scenes perfectly (nor would I want you to - perfection has no place in art) but I expect you to throw yourself into this work. It’s the only way to learn what the class needs to teach. It’s going to be a wild ride, and you will reap what you sow. Hold onto your hats.  

Program Learning Outcomes Supported in this Course  
3) The student will demonstrate collaborative and/or leadership competencies appropriate to participate or take a leadership role in a theatrical production. (All degree plans)  
4) The student will demonstrate an understanding of the component areas of theatrical creation, process, production, performance, and study, and their interrelationships. (All degree plans)  
6) The student will demonstrate intermediate to advanced competence in one or more theatre specializations. (BA)
8) The student will be able to complete and document a major project as a stage manager, as a designer or technician, or as an actor or director, demonstrating advanced competence in the student's specialty. (BFA)
9) The student will be able to present an effective presentation appropriate to the student's specialization. (BFA)

**Student Learning Outcomes Supported in this Course (and supported PLOs)**
- An ability to apply terminology and techniques introduced in class to our work as actors (PLOs 3, 4, 6, 8, and 9)
- Increased sensitivity to one's own impulses (PLOs 6, 8 and 9)
- Increased responsiveness to others and to the environment (PLOs 6, 8 and 9)
- An understanding of how to craft a scene (PLOS 3, 4, and 8)
- A freer physical, vocal, emotional and imaginative self (PLOs 6, 8, and 9)
- A working knowledge of the history of performance theory and contemporary approaches to actor training (PLOs 3 and 4)

**Catalog Description**
Emphasis on the understanding and exploration of the actor's tools and the application of the actor's basic skills through the creative process.

**Grading Policy**
- Participation/Effort 50%
- Preparation of Assignments 20%
- Monologue work 10%
- Journals 10%
- Quiz 10%

**Required Reading**
- The Training of the American Actor by Arthur Bartow

**Classroom Policies**
- NO CELL PHONES.
- No gum chewing or eating are allowed in the class.
- Any drinks must be in a non spill container.
- Wear black clothing that permits you to move freely and comfortably.
- Always come to class with writing utensil and paper. Use of computers for note-taking is not permitted.
- Talking amongst classmates during, before, or after classwork is distracting and disrespectful. Quiet attention required.

**Journals**
One of the most fundamentally important parts of your process this quarter will be keeping a journal about your day-to-day work in and outside of class. This journal offers you a space to reflect
on your progress and the challenges you're facing, to work out your evolving understanding of what makes good acting as reflected in your classmates' work, to ask me questions, and to receive feedback from me. Journal entries should be at least 1.25 pages, double spaced, 12 point font, standard margins, and e-mailed to me as an attachment by the beginning of class on the day they're due.

Papers
As part of your coursework, you will complete two papers this semester. Paper 1 will discuss the acting in *Sweat* and is due 10/8 at the beginning of class. Paper 2 will discuss the acting in *Oklahoma* and is due 11/12 at the beginning of class. Additionally, you may write up to two extra credit papers discussing the acting in Downstage productions or the Reduced Shakespeare Company. These are due one week after the production closes. You may only write about one Downstage production only. All papers should be submitted to me via email in an attachment.

Quiz
You will be assigned one quiz this quarter. It will be pen-and-paper and given in class on Monday, 11/5. It will test your knowledge of performance theory. If you complete the reading, listen actively in class, ask questions and participate in discussions this quiz should not be a problem for you. Topics covered will include Stanislavski, the Group Theatre, how performance theory evolved in the United States, Meisner, Strasberg, and Adler. It will touch on Grotowski and Hagen.

Participation/Effort
It is impossible and pointless for you to assess or control your talent level, and it is impossible for me to judge or grade the same. Therefore, your participation/effort grade will depend on how willing you are to enter into every exercise, your thoughtfulness and curiosity in your progress and in asking questions, and your level of engagement in class. Try your best to work through any resistances you encounter and reflect on them either by talking to me in person or in your journal.

Attendance/Tardiness
Because acting happens in the moment and depends on partners and observers showing up, the class suffers when people are absent, and it is impossible to make up work from home. Furthermore, because acting involves a high degree of vulnerability and concentration, latecomers can cause unpleasant disruptions. If you are sick or have a conflict and need to miss a class, please notify me in advance by email. Each absence that is not cleared in advance as well as each and any absence beyond three will lower your semester grade by 5%. Exceptions are made on a case-by-case basis in case of serious emergency or illness. It is school-wide policy that ten or more absences will result in an automatic semester grade of F. And please, do not be late.

Diversity and Inclusion
This class may engage in material covering a diverse range of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age, marital status, familial status, sexual orientation, and disability. While I encourage you to formulate and express your thoughts and opinions throughout the semester, discriminatory
remarks will not be tolerated and may constitute disruptive behavior under the student code of conduct.

**Students with Disabilities**
Throughout this class you will be asked to share your thoughts in class and in writing. If English is not your first language or if you experience a speech, vision, hearing, or other learning difficulty, please bring this to my attention.

To obtain disability related accommodations, alternate formats and/or auxiliary aids, students with disabilities must contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), Human Services Building, and Room 325, 468-3004 / 468-1004 (TDD) as early as possible in the semester. Once verified, ODS will notify the course instructor and outline the accommodation and/or auxiliary aids to be provided. Failure to request services in a timely manner may delay your accommodations. For additional information, go to http://www.sfasu.edu/disabilityservices/

**Academic Honesty**
Go see the plays you are required to see. And whenever you are writing something for this class, make sure you are using your own words and your own thoughts. Any instance of plagiarism or academic dishonesty will result in a 0 grade on the assignment. There will probably be other very unpleasant consequences. It’s not worth it.

**Course Schedule (subject to change)**

**August and September**

- **Weds 8/29**  Introductions and Syllabus
  What is acting?
  Ensemble-building exercises

- **Fri 8/31**  Grotowski
  Ensemble, concentration and imagination-building exercises

- **Mon 9/3**  Grotowski
  Ensemble, concentration and imagination-building exercises

- **Weds 9/5**  Grotowski
  Ensemble, concentration and imagination-building exercises
  Performance Theory discussion
  *Due: Read “The Training of the American Actor” (Introduction, pgs. xv-xxv)*

- **Fri 9/7**  No class - complete Brightspace assignment during class hours:
  “What does this have to do with acting?” and “My journey with the work”
Mon 9/10  No class - complete Brightspace assignment during class hours:

Do 20 minutes of Grotowski warmup on your own, run through your
Monologue three times and journal

Weds 9/12  Grotowski
Ensemble and concentration-building exercises

Fri 9/14  Grotowski
Ensemble, concentration and imagination-building exercises
Strasberg discussion
Due: Read p 3-24 in "The Training of the American Actor" (Strasberg)

Mon 9/17  Grotowski
Ensemble, concentration and imagination-building exercises
Due: Read p 29-46 in "The Training of the American Actor" (Adler)
Due: Journal

Weds 9/19  Grotowski
Ensemble, concentration and imagination-building exercises
Meisner discussion
Due: Read p 51-72 in "The Training of the American Actor" (Meisner)

Fri 9/21  Grotowski
Ensemble, concentration and imagination-building exercises
Hagen exercises discussion
Due: Initial monologue selection
Due: Read p 160-164 in "The Training of the American Actor"
(Guidelines for Approaching Uta Hagen Exercises)

Mon 9/24  Grotowski
Ensemble, concentration and imagination-building exercises

Weds 9/26  Hagen Lesson 4 (Telephone exercise)

Fri 9/28  Hagen Lesson 4 (Telephone exercise)

October
Mon 10/1  Grotowski
Ensemble, concentration and imagination-building exercises
Due: Final monologue selection
Due: Journal
Weds 10/3  Hagen Lesson 1 (Slice of Life exercise)
Fri 10/5  Hagen Lesson 1 (Slice of Life exercise)
Mon 10/8  *Sweat* discussion  
          *Due: Sweat* papers
Weds 10/10 Hagen Lesson 3 (Lost Object Exercise)
Fri 10/12 Hagen Lesson 3 (Lost Object Exercise)
Mon 10/15 Work monologues
Weds 10/17 Work monologues
Fri 10/19 Work monologues  
          Grotowski discussion  
          *Due: Read p 169-181 in "The Training of the American Actor (Grotowski)*
Mon 10/22 *Due: Journal*  
          Present monologues w/ notes
Weds 10/24 Scenework with Grotowski
Fri 10/26 Hagen discussion  
          Scenework with Grotowski  
          *Due: Read p 127-160 in "The Training of the American Actor" (Hagen)*
Mon 10/29 Work contentless scenes
Weds 10/31 Work contentless scenes

**November**
Fri 11/2  Actions  
          Performance Theory discussion
Mon 11/5  *Performance Theory Quiz*
Weds 11/7 Present contentless scenes w/ notes
Fri 11/9 Objectives, Obstacles, Expectations
Mon 11/12  Oklahoma discussion  
Due: Oklahoma papers

Weds 11/14  Actions exercises

Fri 11/16  Final presentation of contentless scenes  
Due: Final Journal

Mon 11/19  No class (Thanksgiving break)

Weds 11/21  No class (Thanksgiving break)

Fri 11/23  No class (Thanksgiving break)

Mon 11/26  Directing scenes

Weds 11/28  Directing scenes

Fri 11/30  Directing scenes

**December**

Mon 12/3  Directing scenes

Weds 12/5  Directing scenes

Fri 12/7  Directing scenes

Fri 12/14  Final (8-10 AM). No class activities scheduled at this time.