Stephen F. Austin State University

Introduction to Play Directing

Fall 2020

DRAM 4321.002
DRAM 4021.021

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Office: Miller Science Building Room 100A
Office Hours: MWF 3-4 pm, TR 10:30 am-12 pm, or make an appointment
Zoom meetings preferred

Class Meetings: McKibben Education Building 322 or on Zoom

Monday 1-1:50 pm
Wednesday and Friday 12-1:50 pm

In addition to regular class meetings and individual preparation (traditional “homework”) time, this course requires a substantial amount of audition and rehearsal time that must be arranged with student actors, and, in lieu of a traditional final exam, a performance of a scene that must be scheduled to accommodate student actors and multiple faculty members. To facilitate this process, every student must be prepared to accept scheduling mandated by the instructor and the School of Theatre faculty, including evening and weekend work times.

Important Dates to Note:
Auditions for your scenes will be recorded, and we will gather to review them and cast the scenes on Sunday, October 18 at 1 pm (you will need to arrive early). This is a time-consuming process and you should keep your calendar completely clear at least until 6 pm on that date until and unless we find that we will not need the entire afternoon.

Your scenes will be presented during the week of November 16-20 at times to be announced. You are required to attend all of your classmates’ scenes as well as your own (unless you have another class that prevents you).

Our final meeting will be on Zoom on Monday, December 7 from 1:30-4 pm. This is an important wrap-up evaluation discussion, and attendance is required.
Course Description: Introduction to the art and craft of directing with specific consideration of the major elements of director’s work: play analysis, stage composition, visualization and blocking, rehearsal techniques, and the nature of collaboration. 

Prerequisites: Lower-division theatre core or permission of instructor.

Program Learning Outcomes (PLO’s) Supported in this Course:

PLO’s for BA in Theatre supported in this course:

1. The student will be able to analyze a script in ways that are necessary to a theatre practitioner or scholar/critic.
2. The student will demonstrate an understanding of theatre history and a variety of theatrical styles.
3. The student will demonstrate collaborative and/or leadership competencies appropriate to participate or take a leadership role in an effective theatrical production.
4. The student will demonstrate an understanding of the component areas of theatrical creation, process, production, performance, and study, and their interrelationships.
5. The student will be able to form and articulate a critical analysis and evaluation of a work of theatre.
6. The student will demonstrate intermediate to advanced competence in one or more theatre specialization(s).

PLO’s for BA in Theatre Education supported in this course:

1. See above.
2. See above.
3. See above.
4. See above.
5. See above.
7. The student will be able to use an understanding of educational psychology and appropriate organizational skills to create a positive and disciplined learning environment for students of theatre.

PLO’s for BFA in Theatre supported in this course:

1. See above
2. See above.
3. See above.
4. See above.
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.
9. The student will be able to present an effective presentation appropriate to the student’s specialization.
Student Learning Outcomes (SLO’s) for this course (and supported PLO’s):

When you successfully complete this course, you will be able to…

1. Use basic techniques for preparing to direct a play. (PLO’s 1 and 2)

2. Discuss the origins of play directing and the work of one or more notable stage director(s) of the past and/or present. (PLO 2)

3. Understand and describe how a director is involved in various aspects of play production. (PLO 4)

4. Understand the basic component crafts of play direction and use basic skills in these crafts, especially visual storytelling. (PLO’s 6, 8)

5. Collaborate and lead in basic ways necessary for successful work as a director in the theatre. (PLO’s 3, 7)

6. Direct (rehearse, present and evaluate) a scene from a contemporary, realistic play. (PLO’s 5, 6, 7, 8)

7. Create a director’s prompt script. (PLO 9)

Text and Materials:


Talley & Son by Lanford Wilson, Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 1995. Also required.

You may be required to buy one or two more plays later in the semester, but these will be paperback or acting editions so they should not be as expensive as many textbooks. Other reading will be provided on-line, or in the form of handouts.

You will need some basic school supplies to analyze scripts and create a prompt book (erasable pencils with erasers, paper, hole punch, scissors, glue or tape, photocopying, loose-leaf binder, etc.), and you will need access to a computer and the Internet, especially to use the university’s course management system, D2L Brightspace, and Zoom.
Course Requirements:

1. Consistent, active, productive, collaborative participation. To succeed in this course you must be alert and engaged, willing and able to participate in class exercises, cooperative, supportive and respectful of your fellow students in every class session. The instructor’s assessment of your participation will form 15% of your final grade for the course. You will receive a mid-term assessment of your participation. Any pattern of tardiness or absenteeism may have a negative effect on your participation grade (as few as three absences or three times late for class may be considered a pattern).

2. Four brief, scheduled quizzes over lecture/discussion and reading material. The average of your grades on these four quizzes will form 5% of your final course grade. If you miss a quiz because of an unexcused absence you will receive no credit (a score of 0, a grade of F); if you miss a quiz because of an excused absence you must make an appointment for an oral make-up quiz (which will be at least as difficult as the written quiz).

3. Two written critiques (also called “reviews”) describing and analyzing the direction of two of the School of Theatre faculty-directed “Mainstage” productions of the semester. Each critique should be about 500 words in length. In order to write it, you will purchase a ticket for and attend each of these productions at least once (you may have to pay the student ticket price). If you have a cast or crew assignment on one or both of these productions your assignment will still be to describe and analyze the direction from the perspective of your role/job. If you miss one of these productions you will receive no credit (a score of 0, a grade of F) for that critique. Each critique is due on the Monday immediately following the closing performance. The average of your critique grades will form 10% of your final course grade.

4. Independent reading and oral reports. You will find an article or book chapter in which a well-known contemporary director describes their work (it may be written by the director or may be an interview with them). Read the article and make notes from which you will give a five-minute report to the class on the director you studied, citing the material you read. To prepare for this report you may also need to do a little background reading on the director for context—an encyclopedia entry, for example. If the oral report is not delivered on schedule, the make-up assignment will be a five-page research paper on the same director using multiple sources fully and correctly cited. Together, these will total 5% of final grade.
Each of the following assignments relates to a scene that you will direct as your major project for the semester:

5. **Play analysis.** Read a well-known, full-length, realistic, modern (1879-present) play approved in advance by the instructor and analyze it by answering a series of questions about the play’s form and structure. These questions will be provided by the instructor. The results will comprise a paper about five pages long. This will be due before you begin work on your directing scene and will not be accepted after auditions. **10%**. **Note:** Failure to complete this assignment with a grade of “C” (73/100) or higher will result in the lowering of the grade on the directing scene (see #11 below) by one full letter grade (10 points) in the case of a grade of “C-minus” to “D-minus” (72 to 60) or two full letter grades (20 points) in the case of a failing grade or failure to complete the assignment at all. For this reason, one revised play analysis (which will not be accepted after the beginning of rehearsals) will be accepted from each student that elects to submit one. In these cases, the original grade will be averaged with the revised grade to determine the assignment grade.

6. **Casting breakdown and rehearsal plan.** Write brief character descriptions and actor requirements for each significant role in that same play (and any small roles that appear in your scene). This will be due before auditions and will not be accepted late. Also, design a schedule of rehearsal activities outlining the amount of time required for each phase of the “production” process for your directing scene. This will be due before the first rehearsal and will not be accepted late. Together, a total of **5%**.

8. **Scene score.** Prepare a script annotated for performance, called a “score,” for a scene from that same play. The form of your score will be prescribed by the instructor (you will need access to a photocopier, a pair of scissors, some blank paper, invisible tape or glue stick, a stapler, an erasable pencil—not ink pen—and an eraser). A draft of your score must be available for the instructor to see before you start rehearsal on your scene. Your final score will be due before the performance of your scene and will not be accepted late. **10%**.

9. **Ground plan.** Design a ground plan for your scene’s setting and submit it as a casually drafted schematic (form prescribed by the instructor). This assignment does not require any special drawing talent or skill, but it will test your spatial ability. Your ground plan will be due before you start blocking your scene and will not be accepted late. **5%**.

10. **Prompt book.** Prepare a graphical representation of the planned staging of your scene, illustrating a copy of your scene score (this will require more photocopying, and a small loose-leaf binder). The form of your prompt book (also called a “prompt script”) will be prescribed by the instructor. A draft of your prompt book must be available for the instructor to see before you start blocking the actors in rehearsal. Your final prompt book will also include lists, schedules and other documentation that will be specified by the instructor. Your final prompt book will be due before the performance of your scene and will not be accepted late. **10%**.
11. **Directing scene.** Direct a scene from your play, using actors enrolled in THR 221 (Beginning Acting). To facilitate this process, you will be required to cooperate in a process and adapt to a schedule designed by the instructor and the School of Theatre faculty. Your scene must conform to guidelines provided by the instructor. Your scene will be rehearsed at times arranged by you and in spaces found by you in the final weeks of the semester and performed at a time that may be outside of regularly scheduled class times. Leadership and collaboration are essential to the nature of directing, so it follows that your success on this project is dependent to some extent on other people. By taking this course you are embracing this fact and setting out to succeed as a leader of a collaborative process. Your scene must be presented on schedule and will not be accepted late. **25% of final grade** (see grading note in #5 above).

Because your work as leader of your scene has such an important impact on the actors involved, you must demonstrate through your behavior in the part of the semester before auditions that you are capable of taking on the leadership role of a director. The instructor reserves the right to substitute an alternative assignment for any student whose behavior fails to instill trust that s/he is capable of the discipline, professionalism, and maturity necessary to lead other students to success in a scene.

**Course Calendar** (subject to change):

- **Week 1:** Course overview, overview of directing
- **Week 2:** Periods, styles and research
- **Week 3:** Play analysis
- **Week 4:** Play analysis, continued
- **Week 5:** Scene scoring
- **Week 6:** Theatre spaces, ground plans and other visual/spatial considerations
- **Week 7:** Casting and rehearsal scheduling
- **Week 8:** Blocking as visual storytelling (*casting follows this week*)
- **Week 9:** Blocking as visual storytelling, continued (*meet once w/ actors*)
- **Week 10:** Leadership and collaboration
- **Week 11:** Working with actors (*rehearsals start Nov. 2*)
- **Week 12:** Working with actors, continued; production meetings
- **Week 13:** Culmination: Scene performances
- **Week 14:** *Thanksgiving break*
- **Week 15:** Emergence of the director; notable contemporary directors
- **Week 16:** Evaluation and reflection (during final exam period). Note that we will meet during at least one of the final examination times for this course.
Grading Policy:

The letter grade on each assignment is translated to this numerical scale:

A+ 100
A  95
A- 91
B+  88
B  85
B-  81
C+  78
C  75
C-  71
D+  68
D  65
D-  61
F   0

The final grade is then calculated using the percentages in the “Requirements” section above, and the numerical weighted average is translated to this letter-grade scale:

89.500-100   A
79.500-89.499 B
69.500-79.499 C
59.500-69.499 D
0-59.499     F

Attendance Policy:

In keeping with the School of Theatre policy (see School of Theatre Handbook), the following applies to this course:

“A career in the fine arts demands dedication and discipline; preparation for this career requires conscientious development of effective work habits. To this end, regular and punctual attendance is expected for all classes, laboratories and other activities for which a student is registered or assigned.

“I. It is University policy to excuse students from class attendance for certain reasons related to health, family emergencies, student working the Performing Arts Series, and other situations of similar importance.

“Excused absences from Theatre classes will only be granted upon presentation of written documentation upon the first day of the student’s return from the teacher, sponsor or physician involved. In the case of absences caused by University-sponsored events, inclusion in the University’s public listing of such absences will constitute an official excuse. It is the student’s responsibility to inform the instructor that he/she has scheduled the planned official absence.
“II. A total of…10 excused and/or unexcused absences in Monday-Wednesday-Friday classes will result in the student receiving a failing grade. Excessive unexcused absences will affect your grade. [More than three unexcused absences are considered excessive in this course.]

“III. The student will be allowed a maximum of…three unexcused absences in Monday-Wednesday-Friday classes.

“IV. In the case of missed classes, the student will be held responsible for the successful completion of assigned work and/or projects.”

Also, in this course if you arrive late for or leave early from any class session it will be considered the equivalent of 1/3 of one absence. The same rules apply for excused and unexcused absence from a part of a class session (arriving late or leaving early) as apply to absences from the entire session.

Academic Integrity:

SFA Statement:

“Academic integrity is a responsibility of all university faculty and students. Faculty members promote academic integrity in multiple ways including instruction on the components of academic honesty, as well as abiding by university policy on penalties for cheating and plagiarism.

Definition of Academic Dishonesty
Academic dishonesty includes both cheating and plagiarism. Cheating includes but is not limited to (1) using or attempting to use unauthorized materials to aid in achieving a better grade on a component of a class; (2) the falsification or invention of any information, including citations, on an assigned exercise; and/or (3) helping or attempting to help another in an act of cheating or plagiarism. Plagiarism is presenting the words or ideas of another person as if they were your own. Examples of plagiarism are (1) submitting an assignment as if it were one's own work when, in fact, it is at least partly the work of another; (2) submitting a work that has been purchased or otherwise obtained from an Internet source or another source; and (3) incorporating the words or ideas of an author into one's paper without giving the author due credit.

Please read the complete policy at http://www.sfasu.edu/policies/academic_integrity.asp”

In keeping with the School of Theatre policy (see the Handbook), the following applies:

“‘It is the responsibility of the student to abstain from cheating. Dishonesty of any kind with respect to examinations, written assignments, in or out of class, alteration of records, or illegal possession of current examinations or keys to examinations shall be considered
cheating….Courtesy and honesty require that any ideas or materials borrowed from another must be fully acknowledged [NB. “another” includes any Internet resource]. Offering the work of another [including an anonymous or group Internet author] as one’s own is plagiarism. The subject matter of ideas thus taken from another may range from a few sentences or paragraphs to entire articles copied from books, periodicals, or the writing of other students [or web sites]. The offering of materials assembled or collected by others in the form of projects or collections without acknowledgement is also considered plagiarism. Any student who fails to give credit for ideas or materials taken from another is guilty of plagiarism.’

“The School of Theatre expects students to maintain the highest standards of academic conduct. Misrepresenting someone’s work as your own or knowingly allowing someone else to represent your work as his/hers constitutes academic dishonesty. Such behavior is antithetical to our work as scholars, as artists, and as members of a community founded on trust and mutual respect. It is an insult to faculty and an affront to honest students.

“Penalties for academic dishonesty may range from failure of a specific project to failure of the course, suspension from the production season for up to one year, and referral to university authorities for further action, which may include suspension or expulsion from the university.”

It is the student’s responsibility to know the definition of plagiarism and to avoid unintentional as well as intentional plagiarism. In this course, unintentional plagiarism will be treated no differently from intentional cheating. All of your work must be your own original work (unless appropriately cited). In recent years professional directors have successfully asserted legal ownership of staging. In other words, it is possible to plagiarize another director’s concept, blocking or other ideas. This too is a form of cheating and carries all of the consequences described above.

**Withheld Grades:**

SFA Statement: “Ordinarily, at the discretion of the instructor of record and with the approval of the academic chair/director, a grade of WH will be assigned only if the student cannot complete the course work because of unavoidable circumstances. Students must complete the work within one calendar year from the end of the semester in which they receive a WH, or the grade automatically becomes an F. If students register for the same course in future terms the WH will automatically become an F and will be counted as a repeated course for the purpose of computing the grade point average.”
Acceptable Student Behavior:

According to the General Bulletin, “A student enrolling in the university assumes an obligation to conduct himself/herself in a manner compatible with the university’s function as an educational institution.” In this course, you must uphold the highest standards of respect for the teaching and learning process. Any behavior that distracts from our educational or artistic work, or would cause a reasonable person working as instructor or student in this setting to feel uncomfortable or distracted, will not be tolerated. This includes whispering or talking out of turn or making other distracting sounds at any level of volume, no matter how low, or making irrelevant or inappropriate gestures or signs of any kind, no matter how small. If you engage in such behavior, you will receive one warning from the instructor. If the same behavior or any other disruptive behavior occurs after a warning, you will be required to leave the class immediately, counted absent (unexcused) from the class, and held responsible for assigned work and/or projects due or assigned in the class. You will have to satisfy the instructor that you intend to behave appropriately for the rest of the semester before returning for the next class meeting. Any disruptive behavior after one ejection will result in a failing grade for the course; you will not be permitted to return for the rest of the semester. Serious conduct violations will also be referred to university authorities for further action.

SFA Statement: “Classroom behavior should not interfere with the instructor’s ability to conduct the class or the ability of other students to learn from the instructional program (see the Student Conduct Code, policy D-34.1). Unacceptable or disruptive behavior will not be tolerated. Students who disrupt the learning environment may be asked to leave class and may be subject to judicial, academic or other penalties. This prohibition applies to all instructional forums, including electronic, classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. The instructor shall have full discretion over what behavior is appropriate/inappropriate in the classroom. Students who do not attend class regularly or who perform poorly on class projects/exams may be referred to the Early Alert Program. This program provides students with recommendations for resources or other assistance that is available to help SFA students succeed.”

Policy on Late Work:

When an assignment’s scheduling affects other students (scenes with student actors and/or student audiences, for example) it is never accepted late if the change of schedule might inconvenience or affect the work of others. Written work that must be completed in sequence to build for success on a complex project is never accepted late. Individual written assignments such as critiques may be accepted late at the instructor’s discretion, but the grade on the assignment will always be affected negatively (the later it is, the larger the penalty), and the instructor will always make it his top priority to be fair to students that submitted their work in on time.
Guidelines for Written Work:

Except where otherwise instructed, whenever it is reasonable to expect it, written work such as critiques, play analyses and casting breakdowns should be word-processed using Microsoft Word or Apple Pages software and submitted in the appropriate Dropbox of the course management system. It should be printed in black ink on regular white copier/printer paper in a widely-used, highly readable font such as Times New Roman, no less than 10 nor more than 12-point size, with margins of approximately one inch. In other words, it should look much like this document except that it should be double-spaced. It should have your name word-processed on the front page (no title page is necessary). (For more details on standards for college papers in the arts and humanities, consult the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers.) Unless otherwise specified, due dates refer to the scheduled class start time.

Students with Disabilities:

SFA Statement:

“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/.”

Please Note:

This syllabus is a plan for the course, and every effort will be made to follow the plan. However, the year 2020 has taught even the most confident and flexible among us that circumstances can cause plans to change. If and when adjustments become necessary, priorities will be to seek alternative ways to meet our learning goals, and to ensure that every student is treated fairly with no student penalized by external circumstances which affect us all.