Theatre 421.1/20: Introduction to Play Directing

Griffith 300, M 1:00-1:50, WF 1:00-2:50

Rick Jones

Spring 2020

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 (THR 162, 221, 223, 231, 241 and 242) or permission of instructor.

Course overview: This course introduces students to the basics of the director’s process, including script analysis, casting, working with production teams, composition, rhythm, etc. Each student will direct a short scene including at least three actors as a culminating project.

Contacting me:
Office: 217 Fine Arts, ext. 1290 (department office is room 212, ext. 4003). Office hours: MWF 9:30-10:30, TR 10:30-11:30, or by appointment.

E-mail: My e-mail address is rjones@sfasu.edu. This is my preferred means of contact. I check e-mail at least three times a day. I do receive literally dozens of e-mail messages each day: please include the prefix “421” (e.g., “421: problems with analysis”) in the subject line of all messages so I’ll recognize you immediately as a student in this class. I would also add that I plan to use Brightspace (formerly D2L) to send messages to the entire class from time to time. You can configure Brightspace to forward messages to another account. You are responsible for any information included in general mailings through this system.

Texts and Materials:
Catron, Louis and Scott Shattuck. The Director’s Vision, 2nd ed. (Waveland.)
Lawrence, Jerome and Robert E. Lee. Inherit the Wind. (Random House). [N.B. Please buy this book, even if you already have the play in some other form: we will be referring to the script by page number with some regularity. Please bring this book to class as soon as we start talking about it in class.]

You will need ready access some basic school supplies to analyze scripts and create a prompt book (pencils with erasers, paper, hole punch, scissors, glue or tape, photocopying, loose-leaf notebook, etc.), and you will need access to computer equipment and the Internet.
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:
1-5. 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:
1-4. 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):
Students who successfully complete this course will be able to:
-- Use basic techniques for preparing to direct a play. (PLO’s 1 and 2)
-- Discuss the origins of play directing and the work of one or more notable stage director(s) of the past or present. (PLO 2)
-- Understand and describe how a director is involved in various aspects of play production. (PLO 4)
-- Understand the basic component crafts of play direction and use basic skills in these crafts, especially visual storytelling. (PLO’s 6, 8)
Collaborate and lead in ways necessary for successful work as a director in the theatre. (PLO’s 3, 7)

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

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

Class schedule:
Class meets M 1:00-1:50 and WF 1:00-2:50. Attendance and promptness are expected. See School Attendance Policy below.

N.B. A note on reading assignments. Listed below are the dates when a given text is due, not when it is assigned.

Course Calendar (subject to change):

Note: specific due dates for paperwork related to the final scene will be announced as the semester progresses.

F 1/17 Course introduction.
What directors do.

M 1/20 No class. MLK Day.
W 1/22 Read Chapter 1.
The emergence of the director.
F 1/24 Presentations. (Historical, current directors.)

M 1/27 Read Chapter 2.
W 1/29 Read Chapter 3.
F 1/31 Read Chapter 4.
Complete plot worksheet.

M 2/3 More on Plot.
W 2/5 Read Inherit the Wind.
Complete analysis worksheet.
F 2/7 More Inherit the Wind.

M 2/10 Still more on The Piano Lesson.
W 2/12 Read Chapter 5.
F 2/14 More on Character.
M 2/17 Read Chapter 6.
W 2/19 More on Thought.
F 2/21 Read Chapter 7.

M 2/24 More on Diction.
W 2/26 No class. Rick out of town.
F 2/28 No class. Rick out of town.

M 3/2 *Pride and Prejudice* discussion.
**Response paper due.**
W 3/4 Read Chapter 8.

F 3/6 Read Chapter 9.

M 3/9 Read Chapter 10.
W 3/11 Read Chapter 16.
F 3/13 Blocking. Read Chapter 17.

**SPRING BREAK**

M 3/23 Read Chapter 18.
W 3/24 Read Chapter 19.
F 3/27 Read Chapter 20.

M 3/30 Read Chapter 11.
W 4/1 Read Chapters 12 and 13.
F 4/3 Preparations for auditions.

**Su 4/5 Auditions for scenes. 1:00 p.m.**
M 4/6 Audition post-mortem.
W 4/8 Periods and styles.
F 4/10 No class. Easter break.

M 4/13 Working with actors.
W 4/15 Read Chapter 14.
F 4/17 Read Chapter 15.

Week of 4/20: Rehearsals. Class will meet to discuss questions and problems, but attendance is not required.
Week of 4/27: Scenes. Times TBA (including scenes not in class time).

W 5/6, 1:30 p.m. Evaluation and reflection (scheduled final exam period).

**Grading considerations:**

**Class participation:** This includes class attendance and promptness, but is not limited to these criteria. For this course to function effectively, we must rely on active participation in class exercises, discussions, etc. Being physically present is necessary but not sufficient. You will be assessed on the quality and quantity of your classroom contributions. Other intangibles, such as attitude and improvement, are also factored into this grade. Any demonstration of significant and thoughtful engagement with course material works to your benefit; any disrespect of your classmates or disruption of the workings of the course work against you. 15% of final grade.

**Specific classroom assignments:** These include quizzes (announced or unannounced), formal (though brief) class presentations, worksheets, etc. 15% of final grade.

**Production responses:** You will write production responses, centered on directing, for two productions. One will be the SFA production of *Pride and Prejudice.* The other will be any other production approved by the professor. All professional productions, any evening of the Festival of New American Plays, and the Downstage production of *The Disruptive, Discursive, Delusions of Donald* are approved, although you are encouraged to wait a little later in the semester so your understanding of significant concepts will be more developed. Any other production at the college/community level or above is likely to be approved, but you must ask. High school and middle school productions are specifically not approved.

We will discuss the papers as the semester goes along. Please note that these papers are to be non-valuative: in other words, you should attempt as much as possible to describe and analyze directors’ choices rather than discuss whether (or even why) you like/agree with them or not. 5% each, or 10% of final grade.

**Scene paperwork:** You will choose a play—well-known, full-length, realistic (or at least which requires realistic, psychologically motivated, acting) play written after WWII and which does not require dialects other than standard American or a local accent likely to be native to several potential student actors. You will then
analyze the play and according to an assignment rubric. Further stipulations about your scene will be announced early in the semester. You will subsequently prepare a comprehensive analysis of a scene (other than the first or last scenes) from that play and its characters: this is the scene you will present at the end of the semester. You will construct a ground plan, a scene score, a casting rubric, a rehearsal plan, and a prompt book, and you will keep a journal of your scene work. 30% of final grade.

**Final scene:** The scene will be performed by actors enrolled in THR 221 (Beginning Acting), supplemented by other actors as necessary. 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 which 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 except for circumstances demonstrably out of your control (an ill actor, for example). 30% of final grade.

**Important note on grading:** The above percentages apply only if all assignments are completed on time, and only if you have four or fewer absences (excused or otherwise). I reserve the right to further lower the grade of any student who misses an assignment, submits late work, or develops a pattern of absences and/or tardiness.

**Attendance Policy:**
School of Theatre Attendance Policy: It is University policy to excuse students from class attendance for certain reasons related to health, family emergencies, student participation in certain University-sponsored events, theatre tours or 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.
A total of . . . 10 excused and unexcused absences in Monday/ Wednesday/ Friday classes will [automatically] result in the student receiving a failing grade. Excessive unexcused and excused absences will affect your grade.

The student will be allowed a maximum of . . . three unexcused absences in Monday/ Wednesday/ Friday classes.

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

**Academic Integrity:**

The following are the responsibilities of students regarding upholding academic honesty, as described in the official policies of Stephen F. Austin State University and the School of Theatre:

“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. Offering the work of another 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. 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 else'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.”

**My policy:** I am going to trust you not to cheat. That doesn’t mean I won’t be vigilant. It also means that if you do get caught cheating or plagiarizing, I will treat it as a violation of personal trust. You won’t like the result. If innate honesty isn’t enough to keep you from plagiarizing, let my reputation for detecting and prosecuting plagiarists fill you with dread.

*N.B.:* 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:**
The university administration has requested that the following policy be quoted on every course syllabus: “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.” 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.

The university administration has suggested that the following statement be used in every course syllabus: “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 will not be accepted late if the change of schedule might inconvenience or affect the work of others unless the situation is completely unavoidable. Written work may be accepted late, but always with a significant penalty with respect to the student’s grade.

**Guidelines for Written Work:**
Except where otherwise instructed, whenever it is reasonable to expect it, written work such as production responses, play analyses and casting breakdowns should be word-processed and submitted as a hard copy (on paper, not on disk, by e-mail or other digital transmission). 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 printed on only one side of the page and 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:**
The university administration has requested that the following policy be quoted on every course syllabus:

“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/.”

**Religious observance:**
If a religious observance will prevent you from being in class or otherwise participating fully in the class, please inform me as soon as possible so we can make appropriate arrangements.

**A final statement:**
This class will inevitably touch on a host of issues that can make for awkward conversations, including but not limited to race, gender, religion, class, and, inevitably, politics. Students are free, even encouraged, to express opinions which may not be shared by the majority, but discriminatory comments will not be tolerated, and in extreme cases may constitute disruptive behavior under the student code of conduct. As such, it is subject, at the discretion of the instructor, to grade reduction and/or referral to university disciplinary authorities.