THEATER STUDIES

Director of undergraduate studies: Nathan Roberts, Rm. 102, 220 York St., 432-1310; nathan.roberts@yale.edu; theaterstudies.yale.edu; theaterstudies.yale.edu/dance-studies-yale

As a branch of the humanities and as a complex cultural practice, theater claims a rich history and literature and an equally rich repertoire of embodied knowledge and theory. Theater Studies emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between practice and scholarly study. The major combines practical training with theory and history, while stressing creative critical thinking. Students are encouraged to engage intellectual and physical approaches to explore diverse cultural forms, historical traditions, and contemporary life. As the study of theater is interdisciplinary in scope and global in perspective, students are expected to take courses in cognate disciplines such as history, philosophy, anthropology, political science, film, art, literature, and foreign languages. Faculty members are affiliated with a range of departments; their diverse expertise lends breadth and depth to course offerings and enables students to devise a course of study reflective of their developing interests.

Special features of the program are the production seminars, guided independent study projects, and senior project. Each production seminar concentrates on study, through practice, of one aspect of work in the theater; examples are approaches to acting, directing, writing, dance, design, or digital media in performance. Each seminar involves numerous projects that grow out of the term’s work. For example, the project may be the production of a play or several plays, adaptation or translation of existing works, or creation of original plays, performance pieces, or set design. Independent study projects give the student freedom to pursue individual and group-generated projects under the guidance of a Theater Studies faculty member. All production seminars require permission of the instructor (by application or audition). Independent study project courses are open only to majors.

PREREQUISITES

The prerequisites for the major are THST 110 and THST 111.

REQUIREMENTS OF THE MAJOR

The major consists of ten term courses beyond the introductory prerequisites (THST 110, 111), one of which must be THST 210, Introduction to Performance Concepts. Students are encouraged to enroll in a balanced combination of courses involving studio work and courses with literature, history, and theory content. Of the ten required term courses, four must focus on dramatic literature or theater history. At least one of the four courses should include dramatic literature originating in a language other than English. Students are urged to read plays in the original languages whenever possible. Students should choose additional courses to develop the perspectives achieved in the production and literature courses.

Credit/D/Fail Courses taken Credit/D/Fail may not be counted toward the requirements of the major in Theater Studies.

SENIOR REQUIREMENTS

Majors satisfy the senior project requirement in one of two ways. They may undertake a one-term senior project (THST 491) or, with the approval of the director of undergraduate studies, they may take one of the dramatic literature or theater history courses, or a production seminar, as a senior seminar. Senior projects may take the form of directing, designing, writing a play or musical, performing a role, choreographing a dance piece, or writing a critical essay. Performance-oriented projects are in addition to a senior essay, which is an integral requirement of THST 491. For students interested in mounting a production as part of their senior project, collaboration with fellow seniors is strongly encouraged, and collaborative projects will be given preference in the selection process. While collaboration is an important criterion considered by the faculty, it in itself does not guarantee that a project will be selected for inclusion in the curricular season. Proposals for senior project productions will normally be approved only for students who have previously served as producers of other students’ senior projects.

Students wishing to undertake a senior project must submit a proposal before the deadline announced by the DUS. This deadline typically falls before spring break of the junior year; students in the junior year will be provided with information and guidance towards the preparation of this rigorous proposal in the months leading up to the deadline. Each proposal is submitted to a faculty committee for approval.

ADVISING

Courses in the School of Drama Majors in Theater Studies are encouraged to consider taking selected courses in design, dramaturgy, and theater management, with permission of the instructor, the director of undergraduate studies, and the registrar of the School of Drama. Undergraduates may not, however, enroll in acting or directing courses offered by the School of Drama. Students enrolling in School of Drama courses should note that a maximum of four term courses from the professional schools may be offered toward the bachelor’s degree. Students also should note that the academic calendars of the School of Drama and of Yale College differ. The School of Drama calendar should be consulted for scheduling.

REQUIREMENTS OF THE MAJOR

Prerequisites THST 110, 111

Number of courses 10 term courses beyond prereqs (incl senior req)
Specific course required  THST 210
Distribution of courses  4 courses in dramatic lit or theater hist, 1 with reading in lit other than English
Senior requirement  Senior seminar or senior project (THST 491)

FACULTY ASSOCIATED WITH THE PROGRAM OF THEATER STUDIES

Professors   Christopher Bayes (Practice) (School of Drama, Theater Studies), Daphne Brooks (African American Studies, American Studies, Theater Studies), James Bundy (School of Drama, Theater Studies), David Chambers (Adjunct), *Toni Dorfman (Adjunct) (Theater Studies), *Daniel Harrison (Music), Joan MacIntosh (Practice) (Theater Studies, School of Drama) *Lawrence Manley (English), *Deb Margolin (Practice) (Theater Studies), Donald Margulies (Adjunct) (English, Theater Studies), *Charles Musser (Film & Media Studies, American Studies, Theater Studies), Tavia Nyong’o (Theater Studies, American Studies), *Marc Robinson (School of Drama, Theater Studies, English), Gregory Wallace (Practice) (School of Drama, Theater Studies)

Assistant Professors Erich Bolton (Adjunct) (School of Drama, Theater Studies), Emily Coates (Adjunct) (Theater Studies, School of Drama), Elise Morrison (Theater Studies)


*Member of the Executive Committee for the program.

Core Curriculum in Theater Studies

THST 110a and THST 111b, Survey of Theater and Drama  Elise Morrison
An introduction to theater history, plays, aesthetic theories, and performance techniques. From antiquity to the Restoration period in the fall and continuing through to the present in the spring.  HU

* THST 210a, Introduction to Performance Concepts  Staff
A studio introduction to the basic techniques of acting, including the actor’s vocabulary and performance tools. Improvisation, performance exercises, and scene work based on Stanislavsky, Vakhtangov, Michael Chekhov, Strasberg, Adler, Meisner, and Hagen. Admission by audition. Open to Theater Studies majors only. Required for Theater Studies majors in the year immediately following THST 110, 111.  RP

Drama and Dance: History, Theory, Literature

* THST 097a, Anatomy in Motion  Bronwen MacArthur
The connection between advances in human anatomy and kinesiology—the science of human movement—and dance practices from the early 1900s to the present. Study of seminal texts and practical exercises that drove the research of Frederick M. Alexander, Mabel Elsworth Todd, Barbara Clark, and Lulu Sweigard and the application of their ideas in contemporary movement practices today. Topics include the synthesis of dance and science; the reeducation of alignment, posture and balance; the use of imagery; and the unification of mind and body. No prior dance experience required. Enrollment limited to freshmen. Preregistration required; see under Freshman Seminar Program.  HU

* THST 099b / FILM 045b, Dance on Film  Emily Coates
An examination of dance on film from c. 1920 to the present, including early Hollywood pictures, the rise of Bollywood, avant-garde films of the postwar period, translations of stage choreography to screen, music videos, and dance film festivals. The impact of industry, circulation and audience, aesthetic lineages, and craft in the union of the two mediums. Students develop an original short film for a final class project. No prior dance or filmmaking experience necessary. Enrollment limited to first-year students. Preregistration required; see under First-Year Seminar Program.  WR, HU

* THST 228b / ENGL 244b / FILM 397b, Writing about the Performing Arts  Margaret Spillane
Introduction to journalistic reporting on performances as current events, with attention to writing in newspapers, magazines, and the blogosphere. The idea of the audience explored in relation to both a live act or screening and a piece of writing about such an event. Students attend screenings and live professional performances of plays, music concerts, and dance events.  WR, HU

* THST 235b / ART 235b, Dance Theater  Irene Hultman Monti
A practical and theoretical survey of dance theater history. Introduction to movement vocabularies, physical techniques, and repertoire from post-1950 modern and postmodern dance theater. Open to students of all levels and majors.  HU

* THST 236a / MUSI 185a, American Musical Theater History  Daniel Egan
Critical examination of relevance and context in the history of the American musical theater. Historical survey, including nonmusical trends, combined with text and musical analysis.  WR, HU

* THST 326a / EAST 405a, Chinese Opera  Staff
This course introduces students to varieties of Chinese opera through plays, Chinese theories of music and acting, modern scholarship, and recorded media. Furthermore, students learn strategies to evaluate written and performed aspects of Chinese opera in a manner that can be extended to Western opera, film, and other performed genres.  HU
* THST 329a / ENGL 361a, Theater Now  Marc Robinson
Study of the drama, performance, and dance theater created in the last ten years, with special attention to works produced in 2017-2018. Readings from both published and unpublished American and British plays, contemporary criticism and theory, interviews, and essays by the artists themselves. Video of works created by companies such as Elevator Repair Service and the Nature Theater of Oklahoma. May include attendance of productions at performance spaces in and around New York City.  HU

* THST 333b / MUSI 377b, Stephen Sondheim and the American Musical Theater Tradition  Daniel Egan
The musical theater of Stephen Sondheim, both as a popular phenomenon of the contemporary Broadway stage and in relation to models and forms employed in the past.  HU  RP

* THST 340a or b, Ballet Now  Staff
A practical investigation of seminal ballets in the repertory of New York City Ballet. Tracing a sweeping history of artistic innovation from the early twentieth century to the present, this course covers the technique and aesthetic details that constitute New York City Ballet’s style and follow the ways that these stylistic strengths are applied and transformed in the contemporary ballets of the 21st century. Repertory excerpts move through foundational works by George Balanchine and Jerome Robbins to ballets created in the past fifteen years by some of the most prominent ballet choreographers working today. Prior dance training required. Admission is by audition.  HU

* THST 370b / PLSH 248b, Polish Theater and Its Traditions  Krystyna Illakowicz
Exploration of the rebellious, defiant, and explosive nature of Polish theater, including ways in which theater has challenged, ridiculed, dissected, and disabled oppressive political power. Polish experimental and absurdist traditions that resulted from a merger of the artistic and the political; environmental and community traditions of the Reduta Theatre; Polish-American theater connections. Includes attendance at live theater events as well as meetings with Polish theater groups and actors.  HU  TR

* THST 380b / AMST 370b, The History of Dance  Brian Seibert
An examination of major movements in the history of concert and social dance from the late nineteenth century to the present, including ballet, tap, jazz, modern, musical theater, and different cultural forms. Topics include tradition versus innovation, the influence of the African diaspora, and interculturalism. Exercises are used to illuminate analysis of the body in motion.  WR, HU

* THST 388b / HUMS 178b, Revenge Tragedy and Moral Ambiguity  Toni Dorfman
A study of plays and films variously construed as revenge tragedy that raise aesthetic and ethical issues, including genre, retribution, "just wars," public vs. private justice, and the possibility of resolution. How questions of crime, punishment, and justice have been posed in drama, from classical Greece through the twentieth century.  HU

* THST 402a / ART 386a, Experimental Writing and Performance  Emily Coates and Elise Morrison
A practical and theoretical exploration of formal experiments in writing as means of creating and analyzing contemporary performance. The course considers a broad range of written forms, including the artist-essayist, performative writing, writing for virtual and blended reality scenarios, and ethnographic and experimental writing for performance. Guest artists and field trips to see performances augment class time. Admission is by application, with a writing sample included.  WR, HU

* THST 406a / AFAM 428a, Dance and Black Popular Culture  Brian Seibert
Examination of dance in black popular culture and of black dance in American popular culture, more generally, from 19th-century slave dances and blackface minstrelsy through MTV and Beyoncé’s Lemonade. Course materials include primary source documents from the white and black press, theoretical and historical essays, and film.  WR, HU

* THST 420b / AFAM 413b / AMST 448b / WGSS 415b, Race, Sex, and Gender in Downtown New York City 1945—1984  Tavia Nyong’o
Archival-driven exploration of the post-war downtown scene in New York City. Particular attention to the intersections of jazz, nightlife, avant-garde performance, literature, and visual art, within the context of social movements for black and brown power and women's and gay liberation.  HU

Playwriting, Production, and Performance

How does a play move from concept to page to production? What are the steps involved along the way? What are the techniques within each phase that playwrights, directors, and actors utilize towards developing a play? This course seeks to show potential theater studies majors the practical aspects of new play development beyond the role of actor. Students are introduced to voices and stories that have recently emerged, treating the script more as a fluid blueprint rather than an unchangeable text. Students will analyze and compare various versions of a playscripts through reading, staging and discussion. Each student will explore texts through the eyes of directors, playwrights, actors, designers and dramaturgs - and will at times adopt those roles within exercises. The course will highlight the last fifteen years in American theater which has seen an unprecedented explosion of new plays, playwrights and new play development incubators. Works by playwrights Will Eno, Annie Baker, Danai Gurira, Sarah Ruhl, Branden Jennings-Jacobs and Sam Hunter will be investigated, analyzed, and explored.

* THST 098a, Composing and Performing the One Person Play  Hal Brooks
First-year actors, playwrights, directors, and even students who have never considered taking a theater class, create their own work through a combination of reading, analysis, writing, and on-your-feet exercises. Students read texts and view performances that are generated by one actor in an attempt to discover the methodology that works best for their own creations. The course culminates with
a midterm and final presentation created and performed by the student. Enrollment limited to freshmen. Preregistration required; see under Freshman Seminar Program.

* THST 207b, Introduction to Dramaturgy  Lynda Paul
Introduction to the discipline of dramaturgy. Study of dramatic literature from the ancient world to the contemporary, developing the core skills of a dramaturg. Students analyze plays for structure and logic; work with a director on production of a classical text; work with a playwright on a new play; and work with an ensemble on a devised piece. WR, HU

* THST 211b, Intermediate Acting  Joan MacIntosh
Continued study of acting as an art, building on performance concepts introduced in THST 210. Various approaches to the actor’s task, requiring deeper understanding of conceptual issues and increasing freedom and individuality in building a character. Exercises, monologues, and scene work. Admission by audition. Prerequisite: THST 210. HU RP

* THST 212a or b, Community Engaged Theater: US Companies, Productions, and Practices  Staff
This seminar introduces students to the contemporary art and practice of community engaged theater, which connect professional artists to people from various walks of life who have stories to tell and ideas to express, and who want to explore performance as a medium of communication. Alongside readings that introduce students to the historical, theoretical, ethical, and artistic contexts of community-engaged theater in the United States, students learn about several major companies currently producing work in this field: Theatre of the Oppressed-NYC, Cornerstone Theater Company, Roadside Theater, Sojourn Theatre, Albany Park Theatre Project, and Urban Bush Women. In addition to studying their productions and processes through readings and visual materials, students have regular opportunities to acquire “on-your-feet” practice with techniques used by these companies as well as opportunities to converse with artists in the field. HU

* THST 224a / MUSI 228a, Musical Theater Performance I  Andrew Gerle
The structure and meaning of traditional and contemporary musical theater repertoire. Focus on ways to “read” a work, decipher compositional cues for character and action, facilitate internalization of material, and elicit lucid interpretations. For singers, pianists, and directors. Prerequisites: MUSI 211 and 219, or with permission of instructor. Admission by audition only. May be repeated for credit. For audition information e-mail dan.egan@yale.edu. HU RP

* THST 226b / MUSI 229b, Musical Theater Performance II  Annette Jolles
The collaborative process and its effect on musical theater performance. Choreography, music direction, and origination of new works. Analysis of texts, scripts, and taped or filmed performances; applications in students’ own performance. May be repeated for credit. For audition information e-mail dan.egan@yale.edu. RP

* THST 230b, Advanced Acting and Scene Study  Joan MacIntosh
Combination of exercises and scene study to deepen the understanding and playing of action. Admission by audition. Open to junior and senior Theater Studies majors only. May be taken more than once. Prerequisite: THST 210. RP

* THST 231a, Chekhov in Performance  Gregory Wallace
A studio-based exploration of the world of Anton Chekhov, focusing on acting technique through scene work as well as character analysis and development. Admission by audition only. HU

* THST 300a, The Director and the Text I  Toni Dorfman
Basic exercises in approaching dramatic or other literary texts from the director’s perspective. Particular attention to the many roles and functions of the director in production. Rehearsal and production of workshop scenes. Open to junior and senior Theater Studies majors, and to nonmajors with permission of the instructor. Prerequisite: THST 210. HU RP

* THST 301b, The Director and the Text II  David Chambers
Advanced study of the director’s role to bring together all production elements of a play into one unified vision and honor the intentions of the playwright. Focus on staging and ground plan exercises; how to meet and work with writers of new work; text analysis for directors; pitching to producers; casting; and the director’s design process. Outside rehearsals are required. THST 300 or permission of instructor. May be taken more than once. Intended primarily for junior and senior Theater Studies majors, open to sophomores and nonmajors when space permits and with permission of the instructor. HU

* THST 315a / ENGL 211a, Acting Shakespeare  James Bundy
A practicum in acting verse drama, focusing on tools to mine the printed text for given circumstances, character, objective, and action; noting the opportunities and limitations that the printed play script presents; and promoting both the expressive freedom and responsibility of the actor as an interpretive and collaborative artist in rehearsal. The course will include work on sonnets, monologues, and scenes. Admission by audition. Preference to seniors and juniors; open to nonmajors. HU RP

* THST 318b / MUSI 340b, Analyzing, Directing, and Performing Early Opera  Grant Herreid
Study of a seventeenth-century Venetian opera, with attention to structural analysis of text and music. Exploration of period performance practice, including rhetorical expression, musical style, gesture, dance, Italian elocution, and visual design. Production of the opera in conjunction with the Yale Baroque Opera Project. Open to all students, but designed especially for singers and directors. Prerequisites: MUSI 211 and 219. Admission by audition only. May be repeated for credit. For audition information e-mail grant.herreid@yale.edu. HU RP
* THST 319a / AFAM 313a, Embodying Story  Renee Robinson
The intersection of storytelling and movement as seen through historical case studies, cross-disciplinary inquiry, and studio practice.
Drawing on eclectic source materials from different artistic disciplines, ranging from the repertory of Alvin Ailey to journalism, architectural studies, cartoon animation, and creative processes, students develop the critical, creative, and technical skills through which to tell their own stories in movement. No prior dance experience necessary.  HU

* THST 320a / ENGL 453a, Playwriting  Donald Margulies
A seminar and workshop on reading for craft and writing for the stage. In addition to weekly prompts and exercises, readings include modern American and British plays by Pinter, Mamet, Churchill, Kushner, Nottage, Williams, Hansberry, Hwang, Vogel, and Wilder. Emphasis on play structure, character, and conflict.  RP

* THST 321a / ENGL 477a, Production Seminar: Playwriting  Deborah Margolin
A seminar and workshop in playwriting. Emphasis on developing an individual voice. Scenes read and critiqued in class. Admission by application, with priority to Theater Studies majors. A writing sample and statement of purpose should be submitted to the instructor before the first class meeting.

* THST 322b / ENGL 481b, Advanced Playwriting  Deborah Margolin
A seminar and workshop in advanced playwriting that furthers the development of an individual voice. Study of contemporary and classical plays to understand new and traditional forms. Students write two drafts of an original one-act play or adaptation for critique in workshop sessions. Familiarity with basic playwriting tools is assumed. Open to juniors and seniors, nonmajors as well as majors, on the basis of their work; priority to Theater Studies majors. Writing samples should be submitted to the instructor before the first class meeting. Prerequisite: THST 320 or 321, or a college seminar in playwriting, or equivalent experience.  RP

* THST 327b / ENGL 468b, Advanced Playwriting Workshop  Donald Margulies
An intensive workshop in advanced playwriting techniques. Discussion of works by contemporary playwrights. In addition to weekly exercises, students write a full-length play. Admission by application only. Application details and forms are available at english.yale.edu/undergraduate/applications-and-deadlines.  RP

* THST 335b / AFST 435b, West African Dance: Traditional to Contemporary  Lacina Coulibaly
A practical and theoretical study of the traditional dances of Africa, focusing on those of Burkina Faso and their contemporary manifestations. Emphasis on rhythm, kinesthetic form, and gestural expression. The fusion of modern European dance and traditional African dance. Admission by audition during the first class meeting.  HU  RP

THST 405b, Physical Comedy and Clown Technique  Christopher Bayes
A practical study of physical acting and clown technique. Exercises in musicality, playful abandon, and active listening; simplicity and vulnerability through the connection of body and voice. Examination of each actor's unique relationship to the clown and the comic world. Preference to Theater Studies majors; open to nonmajors with permission of the instructor.

* THST 412b, Libretto Writing for Musical Theater  Marsha Norman
Practical instruction in book writing for musical theater combined with close reading of historical and contemporary examples of the genre. Weekly exercises focus on issues of craft, creativity, and collaboration.  RP

* THST 414a, Lyric Writing for Musical Theater  Michael Korie
The craft of lyric writing in musical theater, opera, and crossover works. Both historical models and new composition used as objects of study. Analysis of song form and placement, and of lyric for character, tone, and diction. Creation of lyrics in context. Limited enrollment. Interested students should write to dan.egan@yale.edu for application requirements. May not be repeated for credit.  HU  RP

* THST 427a / AMST 349a, Technologies of Movement Research  Emily Coates
Marshaling both artistic and academic methods, and with dance as the focal point, this course examines technologies that traverse disciplinary boundaries. Topics include: somatic practices that emphasize internal sense perception; choreographic notation; dance dramaturgy; digital motion capture; the intersection of cognitive science and dance; and ethnographies that draw strategies from the arts to probe social problems. Open to all students.

* THST 428a, Projection Design and Technology  Erich Bolton
An introduction to projection design and technology. Media as a storytelling tool; emerging trends in projection design technology. Engagement with and analysis of projection designs in current productions. Students create original storyboards and media based on reading and analysis of both classic and contemporary texts.

Special Projects

* THST 491a or b, Senior Project in Theater Studies  Nathan Roberts and Daniel Egan
Students must submit proposals for senior projects to the Theater Studies office by the deadline announced by the director of undergraduate studies. Attendance at weekly section meetings is required for all students undertaking production projects. Application forms are available in the Theater Studies office, 220 York St.