THEATER STUDIES

Director of undergraduate studies: Shilarna Stokes (shilarna.stokes@yale.edu), Rm. 102, 220 York St., 432-1310; 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, with the approval of the director of undergraduate studies (DUS), take one of the dramatic literature or theater history courses, or a production seminar, as a senior seminar; in such cases, the expectations for the term paper are substantially higher for students using the course to fulfill their senior requirement. Or, a student may undertake a one-term senior project (THST 491). 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 DUS, 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 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)

Associate Professor Emily Coates (Adjunct) (Theater Studies, School of Drama)

Assistant Professor 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  Shilarna Stokes
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 097b, 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 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 212a / ENGL 434a, Writing Dance  Brian Seibert
The esteemed choreographer Merce Cunningham once compared writing about dance to trying to nail Jello-O to the wall. This seminar and workshop takes on the challenge. Taught by a dance critic for the New York Times, the course uses a close reading of exemplary dance writing to introduce approaches that students then try themselves, in response to filmed dance and live performances in New York City, in the widest possible variety of genres. No previous knowledge of dance is required.  WR, 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 330b / HUMS 320 / LITR 324b, Representations of the Underworld  Toni Dorfman
What is the underworld? What questions have different ideas about the underworld posed about mortality, freedom, and goodness? Topics include dreams, hell, ghosts, the unconscious, and string theory. Sophomore standing required.  HU

* THST 338b, Current Trends in Musical Theater  Daniel Egan
Exploration of musical theater created in the last ten years, with consideration of works conceived as commercial vs. those produced in non-commercial venues or developmental readings. Texts include librettos, scripts, recordings, videotapes, published essays, and
analyses. These multiple approaches to understanding scores incorporate questions of how best to access multi-genre work. Attendance at
selected performances in and around New York City. Music reading ability is assumed. Permission of instructor required.  

* THST 347b, Stanislavski and His Rebellious Protégés: Foundations of Modern Acting and Directing  David Chambers
We begin in Moscow with a deep study of the radical stage innovations of Konstantin Stanislavski, and explore America's insufficient
knowledge of his lifetime of research. Of equal value for theatre-makers today will be our active examination of the artistic rebellions of
Stanislavski's most brilliant proteges of the revolutionary era: Vsevolod Meyerhold (biomechanics), Evgeny Vakhtangov (fantastic
realism), and Mikhail Chekhov (psychological gesture). Through reading, video research, student presentations, and on-the-floor
physical exercises, we engage in lively conversations with these foundational masters, always seeking inspiration and revelation for our
own theatrical work in today's world.

* 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.  

* 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.  

* THST 390a / ENGL 222a, Modern European Drama  Marc Robinson
Intensive study of the major playwrights of modern European drama—Ibsen, Chekhov, Strindberg, Shaw, Brecht, and Beckett—along
with pertinent theater theory.  

* THST 416a / ENGL 384a / FILM 461a / LITR 364a, British Cinema  Katie Trumpener
Survey of the British film tradition, emphasizing overlap with literature, drama, and art; visual modernism; documentary's role in
defining national identity; "heritage" filmmaking and alternative approaches to tradition; and auteur and actors' cinema.
* 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 211.

* THST 233b / ART 233b, Dance Theater  Irene Hultman Monti
A studio-based introduction to movement vocabularies, physical techniques, and choreographic repertoire from post-1950 modern and postmodern dance theater to the present. Through a historical survey of major aesthetic shifts in dance, the course focuses on building the essential skills of a dance artist: the heightened awareness of time and space, the ability to read and translate diverse choreographic ideas, and the ability to question in motion. Open to students of all levels and majors.  HU  RP

* 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 308b, Performing Design  Nathan Roberts and Deborah Margolin
Exploration of the theatrical design and production process in a devised theater setting. Study and application of collaborative strategies of experimental theater groups (Living Theater, Split Britches) for the generation of design and production elements. Consideration of the elements that shape theatrical experiences; generative exercises leading to weekly design-performance pieces in response to textual, imagistic, and aural prompts; and technologies and techniques for adaptive, flexible design. Development of a devised theatrical work that culminates in a public performance.

* THST 314a, Creation of a Musical: Rumspringa  Annette Jolles
Dramaturgy, production preparation, research, and exploration of a new musical theater piece, Rumspringa, by Scott Feiner and Walker Caplan, both Yale class of 2020. Course combines production specific research and rehearsal with new musical development. Parallel lines of inquiry merge in December 2019 performances in the Whitney Theater. Course intended for actors, designers, directors, music directors, producers, and dramaturgs. Permission of instructor.  RP

* THST 312a / ENGL 311a, 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, instrumentalists, and directors. 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 335a / AFST 435a, 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
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* THST 340a, Ballet Now  Daniel Ulbricht
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 358b, Introduction to Lighting Design  Alan Edwards
Exploration of the aesthetics and techniques of professional stage lighting. Priority to Theater Studies majors.  RP

* THST 395a / ART 389a, Postmodern Dance  Emily Coates
A studio-based exploration of the epochal shift in choreographic aesthetics known as postmodern dance. The social and historical context in which postmodern dance emerged, including the reconstruction of key dances from the 1960s and 1970s; the evolution of postmodern dance aesthetics into the twenty-first century.  HU

* THST 401a, Conceptual Sound Design for Theater  Nathan Roberts
Theoretical and practical considerations for conceptual sound design, the creation of aural content and imagery in support of dramatic action. The use of sound to communicate meaning and intention effectively in a theatrical setting. Auditory culture and the phenomenology of hearing; the role of technology in sound design; development of critical listening skills and of a foundational vocabulary for the medium. Projects focus on the generation of content and ideas in support of a text.  HU

* 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

* THST 427a or b / AMST 349a or b, Technologies of Movement Research  Emily Coates
An interdisciplinary survey of creative and critical methods for researching human movement. Based in the motion capture studio at the Center for Collaborative Arts and Media, the course draws movement exercises and motion capture experiments together with literature from dance and performance studies, art, anthropology, sociology, philosophy, cognitive science, and the history of science to investigate the ways that artists and scholars conceive of human movement as a way of knowing the world. Students will develop their own projects over the course of the semester. No prior experience in dance required.

* THST 437a / ER&M 437a, Performance behind Bars: Sacred Music, Sacred Texts, and Social Justice  Ronald Jenkins
Through the study of theatrical works that have been adapted from sacred texts, the course introduces students to playwriting techniques helpful for writing their own scripts based on a socially conscious reading of sacred texts. Possible collaboration with incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals in adapting Dante’s Divine Comedy for the stage.  HU

Special Projects

* THST 471a, Directed Independent Study  Staff
An independent study should generally conform to the standards and procedures of the senior project, THST 491, even when not undertaken by a senior. If the independent study is a performance or directing project, the adviser visits rehearsals and performances at the mutual convenience of adviser and student. The project must be accompanied by an essay of about fifteen pages, worth about half the final grade. Although the paper’s requirements vary with the project and its adviser, it must be more than a rehearsal log. The paper typically engages interpretative and performance issues as revealed in other productions of the work (if they exist). The writing should be concomitant with rehearsals, to enable each to inform the other, and a draft must be presented to, and commented on by, the adviser at least a week before—not after—the final performance. The final version of the paper, incorporating adjustments and reflections, should be turned in to the adviser no later than ten days after the performance closes, and no later than the first day of the final examination period. An essay project entails substantial reading, at least four meetings with the adviser, and a paper or papers totaling at least twenty pages. A playwriting project normally requires twenty new script pages every two weeks of the term and regular meetings with the adviser. A final draft of the entire script is the culmination of the term’s work. Application forms are available from the director of undergraduate studies. Juniors may use one term of these courses to prepare for their senior projects. Open to juniors and seniors. Prerequisites: THST 210 and one seminar.

* 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.