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THTR 120A.06: Introduction to Acting

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THTR 120A-06: INTRODUCTION TO ACTING (SPRING 2015)

Section: 30383

Instructor: Joel Shura
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Phone: 406-243-4481
Office: Education Building Lobby
Office hours: Fridays 11-1 PM

Class Meets: Tuesdays & Thursdays 9:40 PM – 11:00 PM

Credit: 3 credits

Final: Wednesday, May 11 from 8 AM – 10 AM

Overview:

Welcome to the 120A: Introduction to Acting! This course is designed to help you broaden your communication, presentation, and social skills. By studying the craft of acting you will come to develop a more articulate, responsive, and expressive identity and begin to view your everyday actions and interactions as performances. By the end of the semester, it is expected that you leave with an extended understanding of yourself and of other people and that you will have a stronger sense of public presentation skills leading to better social and professional interactions. While the class will be challenging and useful for students of varying levels of acting experience, no prior work in theatre is required. I will, however, hold the class to high standards; all members of the class ensemble are responsible for contributing to the group's collective artistic work with seriousness of purpose, dedication, and energy. Enjoy the experience, have fun, and make friends with your classmates!

OUTCOMES:

In this setting you will achieve:

- A demonstrated confidence in the presentation of your self—socially and professionally;
- An ability to further articulate both your personal character and the character of those you take on in dramatic performance;
- An understanding of, and appreciation for, the craft of acting, the skills that actor's employ, and ways non-actors can also use acting skills;
- An understanding of, and respect for, performers and audiences.

CONTENT:

This course is divided into 4 sequential units.

Unit 1: WHAT IS ACTING AND WHAT IS PERFORMANCE?

- An introduction to the history and theory of acting, vocabulary, and audience etiquette. You will create performances and learn how to see yourself as an actor.

Unit 2: DEVELOPING ACTING SKILLS

- Building skills through group exercises, including warm-ups, games, and acting exercises. You will learn how to use specific acting skills in your everyday life.

Unit 3: PERFORMING A CHARACTER

- Rehearsing and performing short scenes with a partner, creating new and original characters, and analysing characters and scripts. You will learn how to use the skills you have developed in the service of a role.

Unit 4: GAINING INFORMATION FROM REHEARSAL AND PERFORMANCE

- Techniques for learning more about your world through performance. You will learn more about other people through role-play and improvisation.

REQUIRED TEXT:

Campana, Jillian. *ACTING SUCCESSFUL using performance skills in everyday life*. Cognella Press, 2014. Available in the UM Bookstore.

The text is also available in paperback and digitally through the publisher's website: universityreaders.com. That website will prompt you to create a password in the student's store section. You will need to identify the institution (University of Montana) as well as the class (THTR 120A). The text is also available on amazon.com and barnesandnoble.com. The prices are the same at all locations. The Bookstore is definitely the easiest and most convenient way to purchase the text and costs no more than other sellers.

EVALUATION:

Attendance & participation: class projects and performances	25%
Effort/respect/attitude	10%
Final Performance	35%
Production attendance/Corresponding assignments	30%

• Participation in Class Projects and Performances

Enthusiastic participation in all in-class activities is essential. Never talk about being tired, and please don't make excuses. You will be performing on a weekly basis and will be given grades for your class work and performances in the areas of *process* and *product*. In other words, you will be graded on the finished performance and also on all of the rehearsals. Your grade in this area is not based on the natural talent you bring to the class; rather, it will be a reflection of your *developed* talent and the progress that you make over the course of the semester.

• Effort/Respect/Attitude

Effort and respect are two very important requirements. You are expected to respond to assignments and performances with effort and enthusiasm. You are expected to show respect for yourself, your classmates, your instructor, and your classroom environment. An excellent performance hinges upon taking risks, which is impossible to do if the environment is uncomfortable or uninviting. It is expected that when you participate in classroom activities, your peers will encourage you to commit to your actions and characters without embarrassment, remorse, or caution. This class requires openness and a willingness to take risks. Once that happens, the fun begins.

- **Final Performance**

The class will culminate to mini performances of an assigned scene from a published play with an assigned scene partner ranging from 5-10 minutes long. You will have some in-class time to work on the scene but expect to spend a majority of your time working outside of class. **You must be present for the final to pass the class.**

- **Production Attendance:**

Part of your grade for this class requires that you attend three of the School of Theatre & Dance's performances this semester and complete the corresponding quiz or paper. **Production and paper must both be completed to receive credit.** Missing one production will drop your grade one full letter. Missing two productions will drop your grade two full letters. If you do not attend any of the productions, you will not be able to pass the class. In other words, production attendance is a major part of your grade. You will have writing assignments on two of the productions (see below) and one quiz for the other production.

- **Writing Assignments**

1. **Worksheets:** There are several worksheets in our text that you will be asked to fill out and discuss with the group in and outside of class.
2. **2 Performance Reviews:** Each student is required to write a performance review for *Hot n' Throbbin* and *Romeo and Juliet* due the Thursday AFTER it closes. The reviews will be two pages, typed, double spaced and will discuss the following information:
 - A. Discuss two specific director or design choices that you found interesting in this production. Were these choices effective? Why or why not?
 - B. Choose two specific actors in the production and analyse their particular performance. Which particular scenes or moments were effective? What could have been improved? **Use specific examples to support your observations.** Consider the acting vocabulary and techniques we've been developing in class. What would you have done differently? Dig deeper than "she was good" or "he wasn't a good actor". See the attached page entitled *Performance Critique Questions* for additional writing inspiration.

TICKETS:

The materials fee you paid when you registered for this course allows you to obtain your ticket for these shows at no additional expense. You must pick up your ticket at the UMArts Box Office, located in the lobby of the PARTV Center, in person between 10 AM and 6 PM Monday-Friday. You may pick up only one ticket—your own; you cannot pick up a ticket for a classmate. If you pick up your ticket to a production and wish to change performances, you will be charged a \$2 exchange fee before the performance date printed on the ticket. If you come in to exchange your ticket after the performance date printed on the ticket (and therefore need a new ticket), you will be charged the full student ticket price.

When you go to the Box Office to obtain your ticket, you must present your Griz Card. Please tell the box office staff that you are a 120A student and that you are picking up your ticket. Tell them who your instructor is and what section you are in and you must identify which class you are taking.

You are in section: 30383

Your instructor's name is: Joel Shura

Seating in the Masquer Theatre is general admission. Seating in the Montana Theatre is reserved. The fee that you have paid does not guarantee you a ticket on a particular night, nor does it guarantee that you will be able to get a ticket if the show sells out. Do not wait until the evening of the performance you plan to attend to pick up a ticket.

- **Required Productions (You have free tickets to these shows!)**

The three productions you will be seeing this semester are:

All My Sons. January 28-30 and February 4 & 6. Montana Theatre. 2 & 7:30 pm

Hot n' Throbbing. February 23 – 27 & March 1 - 5. Masquer Theatre 7:30 pm

Romeo and Juliet. April 27 – 30 and May 2 - 7. Montana Theatre. 2 & 7:30 pm

- **Required Production (\$6 discounted ticket)**

- *All in the Timing*. March 15 – 19. Masquer Theatre. 7:30 PM

Attendance and Promptness is also considered in your final grade:

Attendance is compulsory because acting is participatory. There is no way to learn without doing, no adequate substitute for a missing partner, and no way to “make up” a missed experience. Therefore, I will close the door and begin class promptly at 9:41 AM every morning. If you are not in by the time the door closes, do not enter. You are absent for the day. **After 2 absences your grade will begin to be effected. 3 absences will result in loss of half a letter grade (A-). 4 absences will result in loss of a complete letter grade (B). 5 absences will result in automatic failure in class (F). Please contact me if you plan on being absent or arriving late and I will be more lenient.**

POLICIES:

You are expected to abide by the following School of Theatre & Dance regulations.

- Eating, drinking, or gum chewing during the class are not permitted. Please let me know in writing if you have a medical exception to this policy. Water in a capped container is acceptable.
- No smoking in class. Ever.
- Absolutely no weapons, real or fake, are allowed in the classroom.
- Late work is not accepted; this includes late or unprepared performances.
- There is inherent risk involved in many Theatre & Dance classes as they can be physical in nature. Please proceed through class and rehearsal with caution. Always be mindful of your personal safety and the safety of others.
- Due to safety considerations, at no point during a student's time spent in class or serving on a production (in any capacity) should non-enrolled persons be guests of that student

without my consent. Presence of such unauthorized persons in a class, shop, or any backstage/off-stage area will negatively affect a student's grade.

Movement Clothes:

Please wear clothing to class that does not restrict movement: tight-fitting and restrictive clothing and anything too revealing is not acceptable. Hooded sweatshirts, hats, and hair that cover the face make it hard for others to see you, so remove them before work commences. Please clean your shoes appropriately before you enter the building to keep our floors as clean as possible. You may be asked to work in bare feet.

Personal Comfort:

The study of acting often requires the instructor or peers to touch each other or be in close proximity. We all have bad days when we do not want such contact. Feel free to bow out of a particular exercise if you are in pain. However, frequent sitting out is a sign that you are having a difficult time with the class material.

Cell Phones:

Please turn off your cell phone in class. My phone will be set to vibrate in case an emergency text message should be sent by the University. If your phone rings during class, please silence it as quickly as possible. Anyone caught texting in class will be immediately dismissed from class, resulting in an absence for the day.

School of Theatre & Dance Handbook:

All Theatre & Dance students must have an in-depth knowledge of the practices and procedures outlined in the School of Theatre & Dance Student Handbook. The Handbook is available online at <http://www.umt.edu/umarts/theatredance/About/handbook.php>.

UM Academic Misconduct and the Student Conduct Code:

All students must practice academic honesty. Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or disciplinary sanction by the University. All students need to be familiar with the Student Conduct Code. The Code is available for review online at http://www.umt.edu/vpsa/policies/student_conduct.php.

DSS:

The University of Montana assures equal access to instruction through collaboration between students with disabilities, instructors, and Disability Services for Students (DSS). If you think you may have a disability adversely affecting your academic performance, and you have not already registered with DSS, please contact DSS in Lommasson 154. I will work with you and DSS to provide an appropriate accommodation.

Performance Critique Questions

Physical Technique

- 1) Do the actors appear relaxed on stage? Is there excess tension beyond that which is necessary for the truthful playing of the action?
- 2) Are the actors remembering to breathe?
- 3) Are the actors' words clear and audible? If not, is the problem sloppy diction? Ineffective breathing? Lack of resonance?
- 4) Are the actors' physical movement/physicalization of the characters appropriate given the circumstances of the play?
- 5) Are their unnecessary pauses that drag down the scene?

Emotional Technique

- 1) Have the actors personalized the circumstances of the play? If not, which specific circumstances require greater commitment?
- 2) Are the actors utilizing proper tactics/ moment to moment objectives in the pursuit of their scene, play, life objectives?
- 3) Are the actors' objectives met by strong obstacles which give them active challenges to overcome through each beat of the scene?
- 4) Are the relationships between the characters clearly defined? Are their elements of the relationship that need to be deepened or more fully explored?
- 5) Are the actors actively and authentically listening to each other? Are their responses full and truthful?

Design and Stagecraft

- 1) Do the costumes seem appropriate for the characters and situations of the play?
- 2) Are the lighting instruments sufficient? Too dark? Too flashy?
- 3) Does the stage and set help tell the story or get in the way? Would additional objects, structures, or furniture be helpful?
- 4) How has sound helped or detracted from telling the story?
- 5) Did the director make any unusual choices that stuck out in your mind?