Fall 9-1-2017

THTR 120A.04: Introduction to Acting I

Joel Shura

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INTRO TO ACTING I
School of Theatre & Dance – University of Montana
THTR 120A-04 / Fall 2017 / 3 credits / CRN 74709
T/TH 2:00 – 3:20 pm; SG 124
Final: December 19, 2017 from 3:20 – 5:20 pm

Professor   Contact Information                            Office Hours
Joel Shura   joel.shura@umontana.edu                      Education Bldg. Lobby
General Office: 406-243-4481                    F 1:00 – 3:00 or by apt.

COURSE AIM: Welcome to the 120A: Acting for Non-Majors! 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 course 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.

REQUIRED TEXT:

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.

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.

EVALUATION:
Attendance & participation: class projects and performances 25%
Effort/respect/attitude 10%
Final Performance 30%
Final Performance Character Collage 5%
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.

- Final Performance Collage
  Due the day of your final. This is a creative project that will allow you to further investigate your final scene character. Thoroughly examine the text and compile a
collection of pictures, fabric, and assorted objects to help reflect your character’s emotions, likes, dislikes, favourite possessions, hopes, dreams, desires, goals, social status and more. Be creative and have fun!

- **Production Attendance:**
  Part of your grade for this class requires that you attend two 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**
  - **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 Performance Reviews:** Each student is required to write a performance review for *As You Like It* and *Peter and the Starcatcher* due the class period AFTER it closes. The reviews will be three pages, typed, double spaced, **printed out**, 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”.

  **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, you are considered late. 2 late entries or 2 early exits equal one absence. **After 2 absences your grade will begin to be effected. 3 absences will result in a loss of one-third a letter of your final grade (A to A-). 4 absences will result in loss of a complete letter grade (A to B). 5 absences will result in automatic failure in class (A to F).** Please contact me if you plan on being absent or arriving late and I will be more lenient.

  **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: 74709
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:
  *As you Like it* October 11-15, 18-22, Masquer Theatre at 2 & 7:30 pm
  *Peter and the Starcatcher*, November 21, 24-26, 29 - Dec 3, Montana Theatre 2 & 7:30 pm

  Highly Encouraged Production (It’s not free but it’s super cute, fifty minutes long, family friendly, and a lot of fun!)

**GRADING RUBRIC for ACTING EXERCISES / PERFORMANCES**
Your performance and technical growth grades are based on my evaluation of how your acting skills have developed over the course of the semester. The following scale will be used to assess your acting exercises / performances, indicative of your growth in the class:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>9-10</td>
<td><strong>Superb Acting.</strong> The student has transcended the level of craft they brought to the course, mastered the intellectual preparation, demonstrated elementary technical prowess, and has begun to play imaginatively “in the moment.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>8-8.9</td>
<td><strong>Good Skills.</strong> The student has mastered the intellectual preparation necessary to move on to more advanced skills, made some basic advances in craft, but is not yet playing fully “in the moment.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-7.9</td>
<td><strong>Fair Work.</strong> The student is prepared intellectually for the work, and is making progress with some of the skills, but it is evident that stronger choices could be made and more practice is necessary.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6-6.9</td>
<td><strong>Poor Work.</strong> The student has not or is not prepared for the work and it is painfully obvious to the both the student and the audience.</td>
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Below 6  **Failure.** The student has not or is not prepared at all, has made no specific choices, and is wasting theirs and the audience’s time.

**NOTE: NO LATE ASSIGNMENTS WILL BE ACCEPTED. NO EXCEPTIONS.**

**TIPS FOR SUCCESS:** *In order to foster an appropriate environment for our work, we will treat SG 124 as a sacred space, respecting the facility and each other as we work on the craft of acting. Here are some reminders as to artistic and professional protocol:*

- **Arrive to class early and ready to work.** Warm up a bit on your own, getting into a focused, positive, and receptive place -- physically, emotionally, and mentally. As noted below, two late arrivals equal one absence. **Leave class only after restoring the studio to its original state.**

- **Wear exercise clothing that promotes a "neutral" state of being (not flashy, controversial logo-bearing or overtly skin-revealing).** If you need other "character" clothing for scene work, bring items that you can slip on over your exercise clothing or change during class. **Be prepared to work barefoot and on the floor.** We will most likely be working up a sweat. Keep hair back and out of your face. We will also be working our voices. Bring water (in a capped container). **Leave all digital devices in backpacks, with phones set to "Airplane Mode." No texting EVER in class (unless your character does it in a scene).** I will grant an exception if you are Googling something related to class or using tech for a class project, but you must ask permission and/or let me know.

- **Come to class with an open and willing attitude.** Be willing to try all the exercises before you pass judgment on them. And then be willing to try them again.

- **Participate in discussions.** Your thoughts and observations are integral to our development in this class, and I expect you to share them. Ask questions! Challenge assumptions (and me!)

- **Be respectful of your classmates:** listen to them during the exercises and in the discussions and respond thoughtfully, even if you disagree with their choices or comments. Frame responses in a constructive manner. NEVER attempt to "direct" your fellow actors.

- **Always communicate with me about any concerns or questions** you have regarding the course, your progress, further areas of exploration, how this connects to other coursework you’re doing, and so on.

- **Decide to enjoy the work we do together.** If you find yourself overwhelmed, **step back and practice the mantra: "I am enough for me today."** Then, do your best to dive back in and be ready to share yourself with others in a variety of playful and inquisitive ways. If you are having a particularly rough day (physically or emotionally), please feel free to speak with me in private and we will discuss strategies by which you can still participate in and contribute to class that day. **If an illness should cause you to miss class to the point of failing, it is up to you to obtain a medical withdrawal** so that the course can be attempted again once you have recovered.

- **This course requires work outside of class hours.** All Acting and Design courses may include officially scheduled, unsupervised rehearsal or studio time. Students enrolled in these courses are not to schedule other activities during time dedicated for independent work and collaboration with project and scene partners.
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.

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.