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Teaching Portfolio

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Teaching Philosophy

In the classroom I stress an inter-disciplinary approach to creating theatre and it is my goal to facilitate students' acquisition of life-long skills in creating theatre in whatever form they chose. As a playwright, improviser, actor and director I have devoted my life to creating new work in a variety of forms. A focus on creation and creativity will prepare students to function in a theatre environment, whether they chose to pursue playwriting, acting, directing, design or education. Likewise, I stress the connections that theatre has to other fields. One way I do this is by stressing the improvisational concept of "yes, and." By encouraging students to accept ideas, they learn how to work with others and how to create and generate a wealth of new ideas and experiences. Furthermore, in concert with more traditional exercises I also challenge students to stretch their accepted ideas. I accomplish this by challenging traditional notions of text and performance, and through exercises such as "world of the play." In this exercise students are required to bring in scents, fabrics, music, images, textures, drawings and other things that represent the plays they are writing or studying. This exercise not only helps develop the necessary theatrical vocabulary to discuss plays with directors and designers, but also helps to expand the horizons of how one approaches, thinks about and writes/performs a play.

I stress the interdisciplinary nature of theatre because collaboration is at the very heart of making theatre, and it is a skill that translates to nearly every profession – both within the theatre and beyond. I achieve this interdisciplinary approach in the classroom in a number of ways. First, nearly every class that I teach is a closet dramatic literature and history course. I feel it is vital for students to read plays and understand the context of dramatic movements. I found that many budding young playwrights come to my class having read only a handful of plays and it is my goal to arm them with a wide array of structural examples, from award winning student plays found in *The Kennedy Center Presents* to master works like Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story*, and playwrights experimenting with form like Sarah Ruhl, Itamar Moses and Eric Overmeyer. Likewise an acting student benefits greatly from studying the various ways a role like Iago has been performed over time.

Another way that I work to create theatre artists is to combine elements from my various courses. For example, I often will have my acting classes perform a ten minute play that has been written by one of my playwriting students. While it is important for acting students to work on established scenes and plays (which is what they do for their first two performances), I also believe it is essential for them to work on new plays. From the actors perspective they get to not only analyze a character, but they get to work with a playwright to actually create a character. The level of analysis and investment is almost always markedly higher for students than on their earlier scene work, and students routinely point to the experience as the high point of the class. These interactions are equally important for a playwright. Too often young playwrights toil on a play only to have it graded and then filed away. Since I preach to my playwrights that they are writing a play that is going to be seen, I try to find creative ways for them to see their work. Aside from public readings at The Missouri Playwrights Workshop, and concert readings in the Mizzou New Play Series, these collaborations with budding actors help teach playwrights how a work undergoes revision through a rehearsal process, but more importantly teaches them how various elements of the artistic team approach a play, and provides them with experience working in a collaborative environment. Outside of my own classrooms, I have also teamed up with the Dramaturgy course on campus to provide playwrights with a fresh and objective take on their work. I also am the co-founder and managing director of 23:59, Mizzou's 24 hour new play festival, which provides production opportunities for student writers, directors and actors.

As someone with experience in public relations, I also bring to the classroom real world experience and examples of how training in theatre and creativity can reap rewards off-stage. For example, with MU Improv aside from regular performances, we also have done outreach and training throughout the university and community. By having students leading creativity and leadership workshops, they are learning more than just the theory of improvisational theatre – they are also learning how to apply it.

In the classroom I strive to get students working from the very beginning, both independently, in groups and through improvisation. Therefore it becomes vital that I create a safe environment for the students to risk failure. I see my job in the classroom as giving the students the freedom and safety to push their boundaries, to try new things, to stretch their skills in creating something new. It is important for students to explore their own creative process by challenging themselves in order to develop not only a body of work, but also to discover their most effective creative system. My classroom is not simply about failure though (I do give out a few C's every now and then), most importantly it is about helping students to learn from both their successes and their failures. A good ten-minute play is only a great play if the student understands how they constructed the play and what elements make it work. A bad ten-minute play is only a bad play if a student cannot recognize the flaws in the play's construction and execution.

While the goal of my courses is to create interdisciplinary artists, I also realize the benefits of specialization. In order to help connect the classroom to the stage, I always incorporate the university production schedule into my courses. Students read at least one play that will be staged during the semester so that they can see the play come to life – so they can learn to read and write like a playwright; to analyze a script like an actor, director, designer or dramaturg; to discover that a script on the page is only the beginning. Furthermore, students are required to read two other works by said playwright in order to develop a familiarity with the writer's style and to better evaluate the production they do see.

Since a large theme of my class is to push students to explore their creativity, and stretch their boundaries, I grade students based on their dedication to craft. It takes more than talent to become a professional theatre artist. Students that put forth an earnest effort with the various exercises and assignments and push their boundaries as artists by taking risks, seriously revising work and trying out new ideas and techniques are rewarded with higher grades. Plays or performances are only one measure of a student's progress and I use several methods to evaluate students (and my effectiveness). It is important to me that students walk away from my class with a basic understanding of the philosophy and theory of the discipline, dramatic structure and dramatic literature therefore conventional testing is an important part of my courses. Creativity, problem solving skills and collaboration are also a central aspect of student learning and projects and assignments are given in which students must utilize these skills – such as developing a buddy system of peer evaluation; a ten minute presentation on a professional playwright; and a group writing/devising theatre project.

Studying theatre has many benefits beyond writing a new play or acting in a scene. Students leave the classroom with a better understanding of their own creative process, enhanced analytical and critical thinking skills, the ability to collaborate on highly personal and subjective work, and many other skills that are applicable not only to the theatre, but to many other professions. As a teacher, I have tried to create artists that are aware of their place in the world and how their work speaks to society.

Teaching CV

PROFESSIONAL TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Graduate Instructor, University of Missouri, 2008-Present

MU Improv, University of Missouri, 2009-Present

Adjunct Faculty Instructor, Moraine Valley Community College, 2007-2008

Graduate Instructor/Teaching Assistant, Illinois State University, 2003-2005

COURSES TAUGHT

Improvisational Theatre, University of Missouri (Introduced course to curriculum)

- History, theory and practice of Chicago style improvisational performance. Students perform short-form, long-form, and a group devised show, as well as write a paper on a scholarly aspect of improvisation.

Beginning Playwriting, University of Missouri (cross listed with English)

- Introduction to basic playwriting structure and technique, as well as a survey of relevant dramatic literature culminating in the writing of a ten-minute and one-act play. Course is cross listed with the English department.

Screenwriting for Television & Film, University of Missouri (cross listed with Film Studies)

- An upper-level writing course exploring the fundamentals of storytelling utilizing tools and structures used by film and television. Students write a short screenplay and television spec episode.

Acting, University of Missouri

- Introductory theory and practice of Stanislavski based actor training. Students perform three pieces throughout the semester as well as writing acting critiques of university productions, and analyzing dramatic texts.

The Theatre in Society, University of Missouri (TA)

- Introduction to the basic history, theory and practice of theatre arts geared toward the non-major.

Introduction to Improv, Moraine Valley Community College

- Basic performance techniques for improvisational theatre, culminating in a public performance.

Children's Acting, Moraine Valley Community College

- Acting technique for children's theatre, including a public performance of a children's theatre piece.

Experiencing Theatre, Illinois State University

- Introduction to the basic history, theory and practice of theatre arts geared toward the non-major. Intended to help students think and write critically about theatre and the creative process.

Queer Theatre, Illinois State University (TA)

- A survey of the main dramatic and theoretical works pertaining to queer theatre in the United States.

Theatre History I, Illinois State University (TA)

- An advanced history course covering dramatic history from the Greeks to the Restoration.

Theatre History II, Illinois State University (TA)

- An advanced history course covering the Restoration to the present day.

GUEST LECTURES

- “New Play Development,” The Theatre in Society, University of Missouri, 2011.
- “Creativity Under Pressure: The Tension Between Process & Product,” *Vox Magazine*, University of Missouri, 2011.
- “Improvisational Theatre: History, Theory & Practice,” The Theatre in Society, University of Missouri, 2008, 2010.
- “Improv for Actors,” Acting II, University of Missouri, 2009.
- “A Radically Reduced History of Acting,” The Theatre in Society, University of Missouri, 2008.
- “The English Renaissance, Christopher Marlowe & *Doctor Faustus*,” Theatre History I, Illinois State University, 2005.

WORKSHOPS/CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

- “Improving in the Workplace: Creativity and Management Using Improv.” Seminar at Central Missouri Chapter of the American Society for Training & Development, 2012.
- “Improv Management: Applying the Lessons of Improv to Managing a Staff.” Seminar for student supervisory staff, Department of Residential Life, University of Missouri, 2012.
- “Improv for Insurance.” Two-day training seminar for Training Staff, Shelter Insurance, 2011.
- “Creating a Character on Your Feet.” Two-day training seminar for Interactive Theatre Troupe, University of Missouri, 2011.
- “Improv for Teachers.” Three-day training seminar for Freshman Interest Group teachers, University of Missouri, 2011.
- “Improv in Life.” One month workshop with the Columbia Area Career Center, 2011.
- “Improv – Level 1.” Guest Instructor at The Brave New Institute at The Brave New Workshop, Minneapolis, MN, 2011.
- “Leadership Training – Creativity Workshop.” Training session with University of Missouri Residential Life Staff, 2011.
- “Improvisational Acting.” Master-Class presented as part of the University of Missouri Larry Clark Actor’s Workshop, 2010.
- “Playwriting Fundamentals: Writing a ten-minute play.” Workshop presented at Rockbridge High School, Columbia, MO, 2009.
- “Creativity Through Improv.” Workshop presented to Theatre/Film FIG at University of Missouri-Columbia, 2009.
- “Sketch Writing 101.” Weekend workshop held at Monmouth College, 2008.
- “The Business of Art: From University to Professional – Making the move from the classroom to the real world – Chicago Edition.” Paper/workshop presented at Monmouth College, 2008.
- “The Business of Art: Professional Identity and Marketing Strategies for Artists and Arts Organizations.” Paper/Presentation presented at Monmouth College, 2008.
- “Writing for the Stage.” Workshop held in conjunction with Shantz Theatre at American Theater Company, 2006.
- “Integrating Teaching Assistants into the General Education Theatre Course; or, The Care and Feeding of Graduate Assistants.” Panelist – MATC Pedagogy Symposium. Kansas City, MO, 2005.
- “Developing Written Material from Improv.” Workshop presented at Monmouth College in conjunction with Shantz Theatre, 2004.

“Improv 101.” Workshop presented at Illinois High School Theatre Festival at Illinois State University in conjunction with Improv Mafia, 2004.

“Improv Basics.” Workshop presented at Monmouth College, 2001.

“Improvisational Theatre: A history and interactive demonstration.” Presented at Somonauk High School in conjunction with Anvilhead Theatre, 2001.

“Improv Comedy.” Workshop presented at Union High School in Biggsville, IL, in conjunction with Anvilhead Theatre, 2000.

HONORS & AWARDS

Excellence in Education Award Nominee, University of Missouri, 2012.

*I was the only graduate student nominated for this university-wide award.

MU Improv Honorable Mention for the Chancellor’s Excellence Award for Most Improved Student Organization, 2012.

MU Improv nominated for the Chancellor’s Excellence Award for Most Outstanding Small Organization, 2011.

Sample Syllabi

Improvisational Theatre – Theatre 2005

Instructor: Matt Fotis

COURSE DESCRIPTION: In this course we will explore the major theoretical, historical and practical aspects of improvisational theatre. We will investigate the development of improvisational theatre, with specific emphasis on improv's evolution and influence on American comedy over the past fifty years. We will be reading two of the foundational texts in improv – *Truth in Comedy* and *Improv*, as well as selections from leaders in the field such as Mick Napier and Jeanne Leep. The crux of the course is performance, and you will develop and exercise your improvisational abilities through class exercises and performances. The concepts you learn in this course will benefit you in nearly every other course and throughout your life. In performance, you will sharpen your acting skills, your analysis abilities, your sense of staging and storytelling, and you will improve your ability to craft pieces of theatre. But the skills you develop in this class are not limited to theatre. You will learn how to successfully collaborate with a wide range of individuals; you will access your creative well and learn how to generate a higher quality and quantity of ideas; and you will learn how to open yourself up to new experiences and people.

COURSE GOALS:

- To enhance the understanding of the craft of improvisation.
- To gain an historical and theoretical understanding of improvisation.
- To gain experience in performance.
- To use improvisation to enhance other theatrical areas including scripted acting, directing, writing and design.
- To develop critical thinking regarding theatrical performance.
- To broaden understanding of yourself and the world.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

- Halpern, Charna, Del Close, and Kim Johnson. *Truth in Comedy*. Colorado Springs: Meriwether Press, 1994.
- Johnstone, Keith. *Improv*. New York: Routledge, 1987.
- Kozlowski, Rob. *The Art of Chicago Improv*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2002.
- Napier, Mick. *Improvise: Scene from the inside out*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2004.
- Leep, Jeanne. *Theatrical Improvisation*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008.

RECOMMENDED TEXTS:

Art by Committee, by Charna Halpern.
Improvisation for the Theatre, 3rd Edition, by Viola Spolin.
Improv for Storytellers, by Keith Johnstone.

ASSIGNMENTS

- Short Form performance
 - The Short Form performance will consist of each team performing a twenty-three minute *Whose Line* type performance consisting of a series of games. Teams may perform games already played in class, but must also play at least two games from outside of the classroom. Students will have to emcee the performance and games, and interact with the audience (at least one game must be participatory).
- Long Form performance
 - The Long Form performance will consist of each team performing a Harold. Teams will have twenty-three minutes to execute the foundational structure of long form improv.
- Group Choice performance
 - The Group Choice performance is your final performance. You will be put into teams near the end of the semester, and as a team you must develop an hour long performance. You can use any performance style that you'd like or develop your own. These performances will be for the public.
- Comedy Wars & MU Improv Performance Critique
 - You will be required to attend 1 Comedy Wars performance (they perform every Weds night) and 1 MU Improv performance (they perform the first Monday of every month). For one of the shows you will write a 2-3pg critique. I want you to write from the standpoint of an improviser. How do they structure their performance? And how are they utilizing or executing their structure? What techniques are they using? What is making particular scenes/games successful or unsuccessful (e.g. maybe the person who got the laugh didn't actually set it up)? Are there any players that stand out to you? If so, why? What improv techniques are apparent in the performers (yes and, blocking, waffling, denying, agreement, etc.)?
- Reflection Papers
 - You will be writing three reflection papers: one after each performance. They are 2-3 pages in length, and should focus on your experience with the actual performance. What were you expecting? What happened? What worked? What didn't? These are not meant to be "bitch sessions," rather I want you to think about the performance from an improviser's point of view. What techniques did you and/or your teammates use? What can you take from the performance to improve? Remember, we can improve upon success and failure.
- Final Paper
 - You will be writing a 7-10 page critical/analytical paper on a particular aspect of improvisational theatre. Topics can include histories of important theatres, movements and groups; comparison of various philosophies (e.g. "support your partner" vs. "take care of yourself"); types of improvisation not covered in class (e.g. improv on TV; Theatre of the Oppressed; etc.); and any other topic students feel will help broaden and deepen their understanding of improvisational theatre. Topics must be presented and approved by the instructor by Week 6.

Breakdown of points:

Performance #1: Short Form	50 points	Semester Grade A 651-700 A- 630-650 B+ 609-629 B 581-608 B- 560-580 C+ 539-559 C 511-538 C- 490-510 D+ 469-489 D 441-468 D- 420-440 F below 419
Performance #2: Long Form	50 points	
Performance #3: Group Choice	50 points	
Reading Quizzes (3)	25 points each	
Final	100 points	
Performance Critique	50 points	
Reflection papers (3)	25 points each	
Final Paper	50 points	
Class Participation	100 points	
Attendance	100 points	
TOTAL POINTS POSSIBLE:	700 points	

Class Calendar

WEEK 1**What is Improv Anyway**

In Class Watch *Trust Us, This is All Made Up*
Watch *Second to None*

Readings: Kozlowski – Ch 1-2
Halpern – Ch 1
Leep – Ch 1 (BB)
Watch “Follow the Fear” and “Del Close 1986 Interview” (BB)

WEEK 2**I Think I Can**

In Class: The Three Rules (and appendices)
The Three Sins (and appendices)
History & Theory
The Freeze Sequence
Games: Yes And, Yes Let’s, Cars, Box Game, Word Association,
What are you doing?, One Word Story/Conducted Story, Sound-
Ball, 3 Line Scenes, Patterns, Hot Spot, Ad Game, Freeze

Readings: Kozlowski – Ch 3-4
Halpern – Ch 2-4

WEEK 3**Basic Scenes**

In Class: Bids
Basic Scenes

Agreement Scenes
Games: Bid Game, Goalie, Three Line Scenes

Readings: Johnstone – Ch Status
Halpern – Ch 5-6
Napier – Ch 3 (BB)

Assignments: READING QUIZ #1

WEEK 4 Building & Editing

In Class: Building Blocks
Editing
Games: Back to Back, Patterns, Solo Character Switches, One Actor-Two Characters, Too Many Scenes Make the Baby Go Blind, Basic Scenes

Reading: Halpern – Ch 7
Johnstone – Ch Spontaneity

WEEK 5 Plot & Character

In Class: Putting together a story
Character Development
Status
Games: A & B, Four Square, Fortunately/Unfortunately, Old Timey-Small Town, Genres, Status Swap, Status Party, Point of View, Documentary

Readings: Halpern – Ch 8
Johnstone – Ch Narrative Skills

WEEK 6 Verbal & Physical Games

In Class: Games: High Jumps, Run to Center, 12/6/4, Essential Action, Point of Concentration, It's A Beautiful Day, First Line Last Line, First Letter Last Letter, Countdown, Alphabet, Baby Ariel, Realtor, Touch to Talk, Create an Object Say a Line, Chain of Fools, Actions (two separate independent actions), Transaction (fully complete a transaction and use it to move your scene along), Basic Pantomime/Space Work

Readings: Find short form games for performance
Halpern – Ch 9
Halpern *Art by Committee* – Ch 8 (BB)

Assignments: READING QUIZ #2
PAPER TOPIC DUE

WEEK 7 **Short Form Performance**

In Class: SHORT FORM PERFORMANCE

Readings: Find short form games for performance

Assignments: Short form performance

WEEK 8 **Long Form**

In Class: Intro to long form (Harold Structure)
Patterns
Cocktail Party
Chain Scenes

Reading: Halpern – Ch 10
Kozlowski – Ch 5, 8
Napier – Ch 6 (BB)
Halpern *Art by Committee* – Ch 1 (BB)
Watch “The Reckoning Performs a Harold” (BB)

Assignments: SHORT FORM REFLECTION PAPER

WEEK 9 **Improvising Plays**

In Class: Scenario Plays
Time Dash Plays
Tag Out Plays

Reading: Watch *Waiting for Guffman*
Halpern *Art by Committee* – Ch 2

WEEK 10 **Characters & Monologues**

In Class: La Ronde
Armando Diaz
Spoon River

Reading: Kozlowski – Ch 7
Halpern *Art by Committee* – Ch 3
Watch “ASSSSCAT”

WEEK 11 **Storytelling & Deconstruction**

In Class: Beginning Middle End
Tell Me A Story
Deconstruction

Reading: Various Children's Stories to be provided

WEEK 12 Harold – The 1st Two Beats

In Class: Harold Structure
Patterns
The 1st Beat – Setting it up
The Second Beat - Giving Direction and Making Connections

Reading: Halpern – Ch 11-12

Assignments: READING QUIZ #3

WEEK 13 Harold – The 3rd Beat

In Class: Putting it all together

Reading: Napier – Ch 8 & 9

Assignments: COMEDY WARS/MU IMPROV CRITIQUE DUE BY WEEK 13

WEEK 15 Harold Performance

In Class: Harold Performance

Reading: Kozlowski – Ch 6

Assignments: Harold Performances

WEEK 16 (May 3) Final

In Class: Final Exam

Reading: Kozlowski – Ch 10

Assignments: HAROLD REFLECTION PAPER

FINALS WEEK - Group Choice Performance and Final Reflection Paper is due by Friday (5/13) at Noon. *Performance can be done after Week 13 depending on schedule and availability.

Beginning Playwriting Syllabus - Theatre 2920/English 2560

Instructor: Matt Fotis

COURSE DESCRIPTION: In this course we will be exploring the basic techniques of writing plays, and you will be working to discover your own creative process. In order to inspire your own writing, we will be reading and analyzing a vast array of plays from luminaries in the field such as Edward Albee to student written work that has been recognized by the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival. Through in class writing exercises, peer evaluation, public readings and instructor feedback, you will work to build a body of short plays – a ten minute play and a one-act play – as well as begin to fill your toolbox with the techniques and skills needed to become a successful playwright. Through our investigation of dramatic structure and dramatic literature, you will begin to build a foundation upon which to add your own work to the library of dramatic literature.

COURSE GOALS:

- To come to understand play(writing/wrighting) as a developmental process with production as a key element
- To develop the skills and discipline of writing through exercises, in-class writing and outside practice
- To read plays like a playwright, looking at how plays are structured (especially the one-act form)
- To learn and/or increase observation techniques to view the world as a playwright and a writer
- To write and revise a ten-minute play
- To write and revise a one-act play
- To gain insight into your personal creative process
- To build a body of short works ready for professional submission
- To gain insight into the playwright's profession

COURSE EXPECTATIONS

- Attend all classes, and attend them on time
- Arrive prepared to work
- Participate in class discussions and class readings with insight and enthusiasm
- Check course website on Blackboard on a weekly basis and participate in discussions and forums; post plays and drafts for peer response.
- Exchange constructive criticism in response to your peers' work
- Complete all assignments on time including:
 - Writing and revising one (1) 10-minute play
 - Writing and revising one (1) one-act play
 - Submit one of the original plays listed above to a theatre or a playwriting contest
 - Completing professional playwright project
 - Completing other in-class and at-home exercises
 - Maintaining a creative journal that documents your work throughout the class.
 - Completing assigned readings in a manner that allows you to fully participate in class discussion.
 - Providing sufficient copies of your work to facilitate class discussion

REQUIRED TEXTS:

- McLaughlin, Buzz. *The Playwright's Process*. New York: Backstage Books, 1997.
- Ball, David. *Backwards and Forwards*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1983.
- Boice, Robert. *How Writers Journey to Comfort and Fluency*. (will provide pdf).

PLAYS

- Wilson, August. *August Wilson: Three Plays*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991.
- Auburn, David. *Proof*. New York: Faber & Faber, 2001.
- Selected plays in the Course Reader
 - From *The Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival Presents*:
 - Kristen Wirsig: *The Story of Izanagi and Izanami*
 - Kristina Leach: *Supernova in Hamlet*
 - Brian Tanen: *The Man of Infinite Sadness*
 - From Gary Garrison's *A More Perfect Ten*:
 - Lindsay Walker – *Boy Marries Hill*
 - Julia Maldonado – *Real Life*
 - Gary Garrison – *Storm on Storm*
 - Michel Wallerstein – *Off Hand*
 - Jayme McGhan – *The Fisherman*
 - Albee, Edward: *Sandbox, FAM & YAM, At Home At the Zoo*
 - Pinter, Harold: *The Birthday Party* (recommended)
 - Sophocles: *Oedipus The King* (recommended)

REQUIRED THEATRICAL VIEWING:

- *Dog Sees God* — Feb 3-5/10-13 – Corner Playhouse
- *Fences* – February 24-26/March 3-6 – Rhynsburger Theatre
- *Proof* – March 17-20/22-24 – Corner Playhouse
- *Mizzou New Play -Series* – April 4-10 – Corner Playhouse
- *Pride and Prejudice* – April 21-23, April 28-May 1 – Rhynsburger Theatre

You must also attend Five (5) nights of the Missouri Playwrights Workshop.

Course attendance includes the Missouri Playwrights Workshop held 7:00-10:00 PM every Tuesday night in the North Ground Lounge of the Memorial Union. If you are not able to attend five Tuesday night workshops you need to drop the course. This is not negotiable. The Workshop is designed to help playwrights with their work. The participants volunteer to read the scripts designated for the evening. A discussion with the author of what worked well or what was confusing follows the reading. This is an exciting opportunity to critically engage in the writing process.

A sold out performance is NOT an excuse for not attending a show. Tickets for ALL University Productions should be reserved *well* in advance. Tickets may NOT be purchased with student charge. You may sign up to usher at a performance and receive free admission to the play. The box office, located in the Rhynsburger Theatre lobby, opens a week prior to each show. Specific hours of operation will be announced in class. Box office number: (573) 882-PLAY

Breakdown of points:

Quizzes and In-Class Assignments	100 points
Journal #1	25 points
Journal #2	25 points
Journal #3	25 points
Professional Playwright Project	50 points
10 Minute Play	50 points
One-Act Play First Draft	25 points
One-Act Play Final Draft	50 points
Midterm	100 points
Missouri Playwrights Workshop	25 points (5pts each)
Play Attendance	25 points (5pts each)
Class Participation	100 points
Attendance	100 points
TOTAL POINTS POSSIBLE:	700 points

Semester Grade	
A	651-700
A-	630-650
B+	609-629
B	581-608
B-	560-580
C+	539-559
C	511-538
C-	490-510
D+	469-489
D	441-468
D-	420-440
F	below 419

Class Calendar

WEEK 1**Why Write a Play?**

In Class

Intro

Readings:

Wilson *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*

McLaughlin, Ch. 1, 8, 9

Boice, Ch 1 (BB - Recommended - Take your time to finish this)

"The Light in August" (Recommended)

"August Wilson on Playwriting" (Recommended)

"August Wilson's Blues Poetics" (Recommended)

Assignments:

-Why I Want to Write Plays - Journal

-Proper Play Format – turn in 2pgs of overheard dialogue, with title and character pages in proper play format. - Journal

-3 Play Ideas (Who is the Protagonist? What does he want? What is his obstacle? What is the resolution?) - Journal

WEEK 2**Aristotle & Structural Analysis**

In Class:

Aristotle – *The Poetics* and Aristotelian structure

Dramatic Structure – Do it Backwards

Joe Turner's Come and Gone Discussion and Structural Analysis

Storytelling Through Collage

Readings:

McLaughlin: Ch. 2 & 3

Ball: Part One (7-36)
Wirsig: *The Story of Izanagi and Izanami*
Leach: *Supernova in Hamlet*
Sophocles: *Oedipus* (Recommended)

Assignments: -Storytelling through collage: Make a collage of images (a composition) and then briefly explain your process; why did you pick certain images, why did you arrange them in this way, etc. – Class & Journal
-Marriage Proposal – Class & Journal

WEEK 3

The Play Idea Worksheet

In Class: The Play Idea Worksheet
Marriage Proposal Scenes
The Man of Infinite Sadness Structural Analysis

Reading: McLaughlin: Chapter 4
Tanen: *The Man of Infinite Sadness*
ACTF: *Painted Desert*
Ball: Part Two (37-78)

Assignments: -Play Idea Worksheets (10 min, One-Act, Full Length) – Due 2/2
-Read 3 plays from *A More Perfect 10* and complete PIW - Journal
-Wrighting Behavior – Journal & Class
-Select playwright for Professional Playwright Project
-READING QUIZ #1

WEEK 4

Character—Who Are You?

In Class: Your Credo
Always/Never
Wrighting Behavior Scenes
Creating a Character
Character Discussion in *Joe Turner & Ma Rainey's*

Reading: McLaughlin Ch. 5
Ball: Part Three (79-96)
Wilson: *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*

Assignments: -Your Credo – Class & Journal
-Always/Never List – Class & Journal
-Creating a Character – Class & Journal
-Character Exploration - Journal
 -Milestones
 -Timelines

-Short form biography
-*Dog Sees God* Production Reactions - Journal
-JOURNALS DUE – Round 1

WEEK 5

Character: The Choices We Make

In Class: Subtext, Subtext, Subtext
Examples from *Sideways* and *Annie Hall*
Stanley and McCann from Pinter's *The Birthday Party*
Returning a Mattress Exercise
It's a Beautiful Day Exercise

Reading: McLaughlin: Ch. 6
Albee: *Sandbox* and *FAM & YAM*
Pinter: *The Birthday Party* (Recommended)

Assignments: -Long form biographies - Journal
-It's a Beautiful Day – Class & Journal
-Mattress Scene – Class & Journal
-2-3pg subtext only scene – Journal
-2-3pgs only three words per line – Journal
-2-3pgs with no dialogue – Journal
-*Dog Sees God* reactions – Journal

WEEK 6

The First Draft

In Class: Discuss *Fences*
Feedback and How to Use It
How to Listen to Your Play
First Draft Readings

Reading: McLaughlin: Ch. 10
Rush: "Talking Back" (handout - BB)
Wilson: *Fences*

Assignments: -Read and respond to a colleague's play - Journal
-Backwards & Forwards of a colleague's play - Journal
-READING QUIZ #2
-TEN MINUTE PLAY DRAFT DUE
-MISSOURI PLAYWRIGHTS WORKSHOP

WEEK 7

Revising & Construction

In Class: Finish First Draft Readings
Discuss Act I of *Proof* (T)
Discuss Act II of *Proof* (R)

Reading: McLaughlin: Ch. 7
Auburn: *Proof* – Act I (T)
Auburn: *Proof* – Act II (R)

Assignments: -Peer Review of 10 minute play – Journal
-Cut it: Turn in a 3pg version of your play – Journal
-What happens in Act 2 of *Proof* (before you read it)- Journal

WEEK 8 The Play

In Class: Ten Minute Play Readings

Reading: None

Assignments: -TEN MINUTE PLAY
-*Fences* production reactions - Journal

WEEK 9 Professional Playwright Week

In Class: Professional Playwright Presentations

Reading: McLaughlin: Ch. 11

Assignments: -PROFESSIONAL PLAYWRIGHT PROJECT DUE

WEEK 10 Midterm

In Class: Midterm Review
Finish PPP (if necessary)

Reading: Study for Midterm

Assignments: -MIDTERM
-Play Idea Worksheet for one act play - Journal
-Backwards & Forwards analysis of your one act play - Journal
-*Proof* production reaction – Journal
-JOURNALS DUE – Round 2

WEEK 11 Plot Cards & Moving Beyond the Text

In Class: Plot Cards
Plot Treatment
The World of the Play Exercise
Other Voices Exercise
Albee's Characters

Reading: Albee: *At Home at the Zoo*
Moore (ACTF): *Daydrive*

Assignments: -One Act Plot Treatment – Journal
-The World of the Play Exercise – Class & Journal
-Other Voices Monologues – Class & Journal

WEEK 12 **Developing the Play Through Production**

In Class: Mock Rehearsals – The Playwright in Rehearsal
One Act First Draft Readings

Reading: McLaughlin: Ch. 12
Kahn & Breed: *Scriptwork* (handout)
Mizzou New Play Series Development Process (handout)

Assignments: -FIRST DRAFT OF ONE-ACT
-Read and respond to one of your colleagues play drafts- Journal
-Mizzou New Play Series reactions – Journal

WEEK 13 **Revise, Revise, Revise**

In Class: One Act Readings

Reading: None

Assignments: Revise, Revise, Revise
-MISSOURI PLAYWRIGHTS WORKSHOP

WEEK 14 **The Professional World**

In Class: How & Where to Submit a Play
Working with Directors, Actors, Dramaturg and Designers
MFA's
Mock Interviews

Reading: Jensen: "Making a Career Outside of New York" (handout)
Anderson: "The Dream Machine" (handout)

Assignments: -100 word program note for one act play – Journal
-100 word bio for program - Journal
-READING QUIZ #3

WEEK 15 **The Play – Part 2**

In Class: Wrap Up

Reading: None

Assignments: -ONE ACT FINAL DRAFT
-*Pride & Prejudice* production reaction – Journal
-JOURNAL #3 DUE

Syllabus – Acting - Theatre 1400

Instructor: Matt Fotis

COURSE DESCRIPTION: In this introductory course, we will explore the basic theoretical and practical ideas of acting. We will be investigating basic acting theory, focusing on the Stanislavsky system. Through analysis, exercises and performances, you will begin to construct your own creative process and come to a more complete understanding of the art of acting.

COURSE GOALS:

- To enhance the understanding of the craft of acting.
- To gain experience in performance.
- To develop skills in play analysis and critique.
- To develop critical thinking regarding theatrical performance.
- To broaden understanding of yourself and the world.

REQUIRED TEXT:

A Practical Handbook for the Actor, by Melissa Bruder et. al.

The Mineola Twins by Paula Vogel

There will also be selected reading assigned.

REQUIRED THEATRICAL VIEWING:

- *The Mineola Twins* – Feb 4-6/11-14 – Corner Playhouse
- *Brighton Beach Memoirs* — Feb 25-27, March 4-7 – Rhynsburger Theatre
- *Eurydice* – April 22-24, April 29-May 2 – Rhynsburger Theatre

You must also attend at least one of the below:

- *Evening of Improv*, March 4 – Wrench Auditorium
- *Saturday's Children* – March 18-21/23-25 – Corner Playhouse

You are required to write an acting critique of *Brighton Beach Memoirs*. In order to get your attendance points for *The Mineola Twins/Improv/Saturday's Children* you must turn in a program signed by the House Manager. We will be taking a test over *Eurydice*.

Breakdown of points:

Performance #1: Monologue	50 points
Performance #2: Duet	75 points
Performance #3: Final	75 points
Reading Quizzes (3)	25 points each
Performance Quiz	25 points
<i>Brighton Beach Memiors</i> Critique	100 points
<i>Eurydice</i> Test	100 points
Play Attendance	25 points
Reflection papers (3)	25 points each
Class Participation	150 points
Attendance	100 points
TOTAL POINTS POSSIBLE:	850 points

Semester Grade

A	790-850
A-	765-789
B+	739-764
B	705-738
B-	680-704
C+	654-703
C	620-653
C-	595-619
D+	569-594
D	535-568
D-	510-534
F	below 510

Class Calendar - Theatre 1400-04

Date	Topic	Reading (due on the date listed)
W Jan 20	Welcome	
F Jan 22	Introduction	Syllabus
M Jan 25	History & Theory	Intro, pgs 3-10
W Jan 27	Action	Pgs 13-18
F Jan 29	Collaboration	Reading Quiz #1
M Feb 1	Analyzing a Scene	Pgs 19-39, <i>The Mineola Twins</i>
W Feb 3	Analyzing a Scene	
F Feb 5	Blocking & Architecture	Pg 40-47– Monologue Selection Due
M Feb 8	Character Analysis	Pgs 48-54
W Feb 10	Physicality & Externals	
F Feb 12	Moment to Moment	Pgs 55-58
M Feb 15	Monologue Rehearsal	Pgs 59-66 – Reading Quiz #2

W	Feb 17	Monologue Rehearsal	
F	Feb 19	Monologue Rehearsal	
M	Feb 22	Monologue Performance	
W	Feb 24	Monologue Performance	
F	Feb 26	Monologue Performance	
M	Mar 1	Trust	
W	Mar 3	Working with Others	Monologue Reflection Paper Due
F	Mar 5	Relationships	Duet Scene Partners
M	Mar 8	Status	
W	Mar 10	Status	BBM Play Critique Due
F	Mar 12	Creating Environments	Duet Scene Selection Due
M	Mar 15	Environments	
W	Mar 17	Listening	
F	Mar 19	Scene Analysis	
M	Mar 22	Character Analysis	
W	Mar 24	Duet Rehearsal	
F	Mar 26	Duet Rehearsal	
M	Apr 5	Duet Rehearsal	
W	Apr 7	Duet Performances	
F	Apr 9	Duet Performances	

M	Apr 12	Picking a Script	
W	Apr 14	Working with the Artistic Team	Duet Reflection Paper Due
F	Apr 16	Read Through	
M	Apr 19	Table Work – Play Analysis	
W	Apr 21	Table Work – Character Analysis	
F	Apr 23	Blocking	
M	Apr 26	Blocking	Quiz #3
W	Apr 28	Rehearsal	
F	Apr 30	Rehearsal	
M	May 3	Rehearsal	<i>Eurydice</i> Test (on BB)
W	May 5	Rehearsal	
Final		10 Minute Play Performance	

Sample Exercises, Projects, Assignments

It's a Beautiful Day Exercise

Students are put into pairs and given the following dialogue:

- A) It's a beautiful day.
- B) Not for some of us.
- A) Stop, just stop.
- B) I wish I could.

They are then given five minutes to come up with a three to five minute scene that covers all of the elements of basic dramatic structure (beginning stasis, inciting incident, major complication, major crisis, structural and emotional climax). The exercise forces students to develop scenes that are built around action and the world of the play. Students then each perform their scenes for the class. At the end we then discuss how six-eight different groups came up with completely different scenes even though they all had the exact same dialogue. Students learn the value of action, silence, subtext and setting among other things. The class then quickly comes up with six lines of set dialogue, and each student composes a new scene in their journal following the same principles.

Professional Playwright Project

Aside from writing projects and assignments, students are also required to complete a Professional Playwright Project. Each student must select a playwright writing in English and published within the last ten years (earlier publication is fine, but the idea is that they are currently writing). Students then must do the following:

- 1) Read three plays by the playwright, including their most famous work. For instance if your playwright won the Pulitzer Prize, it would be a good idea to make sure that you read the play that won them the award.
 - a. Complete a basic structural analysis of one of the plays.
 - b. Complete a Backwards & Forwards plot analysis of one of the plays.
 - c. Complete a 2 page Play Analysis of one of the plays.
- 2) Research the playwright and give an oral report about their work, critical reception, influence and style.

The project allows students to research and become more intimately familiar with any playwright of their choosing. It also exposes students to fifteen new playwrights and nearly fifty new plays (assuming a class of 15). Since most students have not read very many plays and are not familiar with very many playwrights, this project exposes students to new plays and playwrights without having to spend the entire semester reading plays and affords them the opportunity to explore new plays and playwrights that interest them. Grades are a combination of the written work (75%) turned in and the oral presentation (25%).

The World of the Play Assignment

In order to get students to think about their plays and playwriting in new and interesting ways, one assignment that I require is The World of the Play. After turning in play idea worksheets and completing plot cards while students are still in the early stages of actually writing their final play for the semester, students are required to bring in the following items for a show and tell about their play:

- A hand drawn image that represents the play;
- Two images taken from another source (magazine, internet, etc) that represent the play in a literal way;
- Two images taken that represent the play in an abstract or thematic way;
- A scent that represents the play or one of the characters in the play;
- A fabric or texture that represents the play or one of the characters in the play;
- A piece of music that represents the play or one of the characters in the play;
- A 1-2 page piece describing the world of the play: what does it look like, feel like, smell like? What is the tone, mood and rhythm? Who lives there and why? What are the rules?

The assignment is geared at getting students to think about their plays beyond dialogue to help focus the plays and make them as specific as possible so that the dialogue just writes itself. The assignment also builds a vocabulary for students and gives them practice in working with theatrical collaborators, so that they can talk to a costume, scenic, sound or lighting designer and have ideas and examples. I want to give them as many ways to approach their play and as many ways to describe their play.

This assignment is also applicable to acting courses, and I often have students complete the assignment for the scenes that they are working on.

Hybridization

This exercise is designed for playwrights looking to expand their work beyond realism. It also helps playwrights explore not only the story they are telling, but how and why they are telling it (and why it needs to be told on the stage).

- 1) Write a monologue about a topic you consider yourself an expert in. Take about 5 minutes.
- 2) On a new page, write a scene between two characters. The first line of dialogue is “Did you bring it?” Neither character can name “it.” Keep this thematically different from the monologue. Take about 5 minutes.
- 3) Combine the two pieces into one piece. Interpose the monologue into the dialogue. Let the monologue comment on and influence the dialogue. See what patterns, connections and themes emerge. How does the monologue change the meaning and/or presentation of the dialogue? Remember, it’s okay if it doesn’t work – it’s an exercise.
- 4) We then read some of the scenes to see what people have come up with.
- 5) Now, go back to the original “Did you bring it scene?” or if you are excited by your hybrid scene you can work with that. We are going to distort the scene. Change the rhythm and pace, play with repetition and revision of dialogue, change the time frame or the concept of time, distort the characters or split the characters. Distort one or more aspects of the scene and see what you come up with.
- 6) We then read some of the scenes to see what people have come up with.
- 7) At the end of class, I then hand each student an envelope containing some found items: a picture, a song lyric or quote, and a news story. For the next class students must write a scene or ten-minute play using and combining these elements.

Student Evaluations

While student evaluations are only one way to measure teaching effectiveness, they are an important component in evaluating my effectiveness as a teacher and for making future modifications to my courses. I have provided overall averages by course and my total average in the top chart, and a breakdown by course in the bottom chart.

TOTAL AVERAGES BY COURSE		
	Course as a Whole (out of 5.0 scale)	Overall Teaching Effectiveness (out of 4.0 scale)
Playwriting	4.9	3.9
Acting	4.6	3.9
Improv	4.9	3.9
Screenwriting	4.9	3.8
TOTAL AVG	4.7	3.9

EVALUATIONS BY COURSE			
Time	Course Title	Course as a Whole (out of 5.0 scale)	Overall Teaching Effectiveness (out of 4.0 scale)
Fall '11	Screenwriting	4.9	3.8
Fall '11	Acting	4.7	3.9
Spring '11	Playwriting	5.0	3.9
Spring '11	Improv	4.9	3.9
Fall '10	Acting	4.8	3.9
Fall '10	Acting	4.5	3.9
Summer '10	Acting	4.9	3.9
Spring '10	Acting	4.9	4.0
Spring '10	Playwriting	4.8	3.9
Fall '09	Acting	4.0	3.6
Fall '09	Acting	4.8	3.8
Spring '09	Acting	4.9	4.0
Spring '09	Playwriting	4.9	4.0
Fall '08	Acting	4.1	3.5

Student Comments

Acting

- “He helped many of us break out and do more than we thought we could do.”
- “I really liked that Matt was interested in each individual student’s progress. One of my favorite professors.”
- “The class became very close because of the environment that Matt created which allowed us to work together better. Mr. Fotis is one of the best professors I’ve had.”
- “He was really interested in student learning.”
- “I really learned how to open up.”
- “It was my favorite class by far.”
- “I feel that this class was very refreshing and interesting. It was educational, productive, and fun all at the same time. It was my favorite class.”
- “I loved this class! I feel that I made a big effort to get out of my comfort zone.”
- “Everything! I wanted to get up and come to this class because everything was so interesting and fun to do.”
- “I thought Matt created an open atmosphere that allowed the students to express themselves freely.”
- “Matt was really open to new ideas and student learning.”
- “Everything was excellent! The games added to the fun learning environment. The way we learned was exceptional!”
- “He is incredibly enthusiastic!”
- “The acting games made me feel a lot more confident and helped my verbal skills both inside and outside the classroom. Matt, you did a great job of encouraging everyone and making the class extremely fun to participate in.”
- “I have gained a lot of confidence thanks to Matt’s encouragement and guidance.”
- “MATT FOTIS!”

Improv

- “The instructor knowledge was amazing, the interaction was fun and knowledgable.”
- “This class helped me come into my own and open up.”
- “Honestly my favorite class at Mizzou. It was fantastic. Plenty of time to try out new techniques – great instructor feedback!”
- “Phenomenal – I took so much away from this class.”

Playwriting/Screenwriting

- “Matt was really interested in his students learning and always made class fun. I never felt lectured at but always a part of the creative process. He encouraged his students to write their very best without directing their creativity. You can tell Matt loves what he does and it makes a huge difference in class.”
- “Matt did a great job. I feel like I’ve learned so much about character study through the course.”

- “Matt has so much relevant info that not only helped in this class but will most definitely help in the future. If I could take a class with him every semester I would. His hilarious sense of humor combined with wit and knowledge made this my favorite class.”
- “The atmosphere and exercises made me want to sit down and just write and create. This was an inspiring class.”
- “I enjoyed the different and creative ways Matt allowed us to learn how to become diverse writers and think outside of the box.”
- “The learning environment he created for us was incredibly comfortable and laid back and encouraged open communication and constructive criticism.”
- “This is the best class I have ever taken.”
- “This class changed my life.”

Student Awards

While evaluations are an important tool in measuring teaching, so too are the accomplishments of my students (and having talented students doesn't hurt). Below are a selection of the awards, honors and recognitions that my students have achieved.

- KC/ACTF Student Playwrights
 - 10 Minute Plays
 - 1 Regional Selection
 - 3 Regional Honorable Mentions
 - One Act Plays
 - 1 National Semi-Finalist
 - 2 Regional One-Act Finalists
 - 1 Regional Honorable Mention

- University of Missouri Undergraduate Research & Creative Arts Forum
 - 2 Winners in the Creative Arts Forum for work done in my playwriting course.

- Mizzou New Play Series
 - 2010 Festival – Four student plays selected (out of 13 total selections)
 - 2011 Festival – Three student plays selected (out of 12 total selections)
 - 2012 Festival – Ten student plays selected (out of 20 total selections)

- MU Improv selected for the Regional competition in the National College Improv Tournament, 2011.

- Two MU Improv teams selected for the Regional competition in the National College Improv Tournament, 2012.

- MU Film Production Valentine's Day Film Festival
 - 2012 Festival – Five student screenplays selected (out of 11 total selections)
 - Winner Best Screenplay
 - Winner Best Film