

THEA 3415: Playwriting I: Devised Theatre

Spring, 2018

Tuesdays & Thursdays 5:30—6:45pm

Martha Munro Rm 105

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Office Hours: Mondays, Wednesdays 2:00—3:30pm, or by appointment
Tuesdays, Thursdays 11:00am—12:30pm & 2-5pm, or by appointment

Texts: *Strategies for Playbuilding: Helping Groups Translate Issues into Theatre.* Will Weigler
Your Handy Companion to Devising and Physical Theatre. Pilar Orti

Office Hours

I am available to address matters of concern during my office hours. If those hours are not convenient, please schedule an appointment. If you visit my office at other times, I may not be available because of other duties I must attend to. **If you have problems in the class, it is your responsibility to initiate contact with me. I cannot help you if you do not communicate with me.** Let me know of any problems early in the semester. I will not accept excuses for poor performance or missing assignments, especially late in the semester.

Course Description

Devised Theatre is an alternative approach to playwriting that emphasizes collaborative ensemble-building and a focus on movement based play-making. Devised theatre may also encompass community research and outreach, and social and political awareness. Utilizing improvisational techniques to create performance-based research, students will explore and make plays based on their communities, interests, and concerns.

Degree Learning Outcomes addressed in this course

- Students will demonstrate knowledge of selected plays, theatrical conventions, and theatrical movements important in the formation of the modern theatre.
- Students will demonstrate skills in analyzing plays, using theatre technology, and conducting research.
- Students will express through performance, writing, speaking and other modes of communication the results of research and critical judgment, indicated by a demonstrable ability to reach an audience effectively through at least one of the components of theatrical art.
- Students will illustrate awareness of the complex human condition acquired through aesthetic and intellectual perceptions as evidenced in various modes of theatrical production.
- Students will apply skills learned in courses to a variety of work and social environments.
- Students will function safely and effectively while using theatre technology.
- Students will demonstrate knowledge of the various means (acting, directing, designing, constructing, playwriting, etc.) through which a theatrical concept is realized.

Course Learning Outcomes

1. Students will demonstrate proficiency applying the techniques of devised theatre, including improvisational performance, collaborative writing, and non-textual play development.
2. Students will develop basic playwriting skills integral to both devised and traditional performances.
3. Students will express the results of their research and writing through showcase performance of their devised plays.

RESPONSIBILITIES:

- **Absence Policy/Professional Behavior:** Because this course is based largely on class participation in exercises, presentations, lecture discussions, etc., you will be allowed only one unexcused/excused absence (**NOT ON PRESENTATION DAYS**). There will be a five point deduction for any absence thereafter. **Be on time!** Class begins promptly at 3:30p.m. It is important that work is not interrupted by doors opening and closing, by people noisily walking into the room, etc. Two lates will count as one absence.
 - **Professional Behavior:** Professional behavior is defined as:
 - being prompt and ready to go at 5:30 sharp;
 - consistent attendance;
 - positive attitude;
 - the courage to be open to change;
 - a lack of defensiveness when receiving notes or constructive criticism;
 - giving constructive, helpful criticism that is not personal in nature;
 - focus;
 - self-motivation;
 - commitment to taking physical and emotional risks;
 - commitment to battle self-consciousness.
 - **Disruptive behavior:** Disruptive Behavior is not encouraged or expected and will result in the disruptive student's dismissal from that class meeting and will receive an absence and a five point deduction of his or her final grade. Disruptive behavior can be defined as belligerent, disrespectful and rude behavior. According to The Student Conduct Code, which is in Appendix A in the Student Handbook, disruptive behavior is defined as, "interfering with normal university sponsored activities, including, but not limited to, studying, teaching, research, university administration, disciplinary or public service activities, or fire, police or emergency services." Cell phone use, talking during a lecture, insulting the instructor(s) or students are all disruptive behavior. If you have any questions about this issue, please feel free to see me privately.
 - **Readings:** You will be assigned readings that we may discuss in class, so reading the chapters for the day they are assigned to discuss or work on is important. You will also be required to submit one to two page journal entries based on the readings. More about those below.
 - **Seven Interviews:** Create a short questionnaire/survey to give to seven random students, faculty or staff members that target questions about current events issues. Questionnaires/Surveys must be approved by the instructor before they are administered on **January 23**. Each student will administer the questionnaire/survey to seven **strangers. You must not know the people whom you ask to fill out the survey.** It's also important that these interviews happen in person; people communicate verbally and non-verbally. It's hard to see and translate the non-verbal communication if you only interview via email or text. **A summary of the seven interviews will be due via email on February 6.**
 - **Summary of interviews:** Rather than handing in the surveys, students will read them, analyze them and then write a written summary of how each person answered each question, highlighting the commonalities in each answer and the things that each answer didn't have in common. **Though you**

are summarizing, it's important not to generalize. Be as specific as possible. For example, if a person answers a question in one way, but the way they're carrying her/himself physically says something different, include this in the summary (perhaps someone answered a question without looking at you in the eye; interpret what s/he might be saying by not looking at you for that response).

- **Three Journal Essays: Based on the assigned readings,** these journal entries are to be one to two pages, double spaced, one inch margins. Your name and the title of your journal essay should be the only writing other than your narrative (this means that you don't have to put my name or the course name on the paper). **Please don't just summarize the chapters; instead, talk about the purposes of the exercises, how they translate from reading to doing, identify exercises that speak directly to you, and those that you don't comprehend. This is how you should approach writing these essays, please.**
- **Episodes Performance Response:** Respond to the production in terms of devising. That is, determine where it is in its process—is it a polished piece, or is it raw? In what style is it? How do you respond to its style? How were the actors, design elements used in the production? What was its message? Was it clear? These are just some examples of what to cover. Be sure to utilize the class reading assignments to support your arguments. Be specific; use specific scenes or moments to support your arguments as well. The paper should be a minimum of 3 pages and a maximum of 4 pages. It should be double spaced with one inch margins. Your name and the phrase Episodes 2017 Performance Response should be the only labels before your narrative starts.
- **Research Performance Project:** Depending on the size of the class, we'll create groups of 4-6 and each group will select a current event topic that is not limited to campus. That is, each group will select a topic that's in the news today and that is a national or international issue (some example topics are: mass shootings in the U.S., Russian hacking into Brexit elections in the UK and in the presidential election in the US, women's reproductive rights, sexual harassment...). This "performance" will be a work-in-progress, but will need to be ready to be shown.
 - Upon selecting a topic, each group will be responsible for making an 8-10 minute play about that topic.
 - The play must have a point of view;
 - Each member of the group must read four different articles about the topic and include them in the group's portfolio that will be handed in on the day of the Research Performance. Articles may not be duplicated by two or more group members.
 - The portfolio will be composed of two sections:
 - Traditional Research: this will include each group members' articles along with a written paragraph on each article describing how the information was used in the devising of the play.
 - Performance Research: this will include a list of exercises that the group used to make the play, along with a paragraph on how each exercise contributed to the making of the play. **Do no include ensemble building exercises, unless they in some way contributed to actual material used in the play. You may include material building exercises, even if the material that came out an exercise ended up not being used.** Discuss how scenes were created and evolved.
 - There should also be a cover page for the portfolio that includes the tentative name of the play, the names of the members of the group, and perhaps a short introduction of the play.

- **A note about sources for the required articles:**
 - Wikipedia is **not** a proper source for any articles about your topic.
 - In the Traditional Research section of your portfolio, you should also identify what type of source each article is from.
 - For example, papers like The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Chicago Tribune, The LA Times should all be labeled as Mainstream Press.
 - Websites such as Breitbart, InfoWars should be labeled as White Nationalist.
 - Websites such as The Raw Story, Occupy Democrats should be labeled as Liberal.
 - Fox News, MSNBC should be labeled according to the ideology they espouse (Fox News is conservative, MSNBC is progressive).
 - If you're unsure what is considered mainstream and what is not, try googling it. You may also ask me to assist you in figuring this out.
 - What's important is to understand the difference between fake news, balanced news, and news that might have a particular bias in its reporting.
- **Final Performance Project:** This project may be a continuation of what was presented for the Research Performance Project. We will put both groups from the preview project together along with your plays. You'll work together to find a way to put both plays together with some sort of framework or device that will connect them. **The entire play should last a minimum of 20 minutes.** On the performance date the group will submit one portfolio that includes:
 - A 2-3 page paper from each deviser that describes in detail the individual's experience in the group; were you the leader, or add ideas but let others take over the organization? Did you feel that your voice was heard? How did the two groups combine—did the small group dynamic or vibe continue, or was it lost? After working in a small group and then graduating so a bigger one, what are your insights on collaboration? Please feel free to add more insights as they come up.
 - A rehearsal schedule that includes rehearsals that took place during class time and those that took place outside of class time. It should also include the agenda and location of each rehearsal.
 - An scene by scene of the play.
 - A cover sheet with the title of the play and each deviser's name listed.
- **Solo Project:** Each student will research and make a 2-4 minute solo piece that is based on a current event or issue in the news. This piece may be about the subject matter that her/his group is focused on in the above projects, or it may be on something totally different. There are no parameters to creating this piece other than the 2-4 minute time limitation and that it be about a current event or issue. Any piece that is shorter in length than two minutes will have points deducted. Any piece longer than four minutes will also result in a points deduction. If the piece calls for props or set pieces, it is the student's responsibility to find, obtain, and bring to the space the piece(s) needed. It is also the student's responsibility to strike the props or set pieces once the presentation is over. You will submit the original article from which you devised the solo piece with a paragraph from you discussing what about the article inspired you to make theatre.

Grading:

- **Participation** **10pts**
- **Seven Interviews Summary** **20pts**
- **Three Journal Entries (10 pts each)** **30pts**
- **Episodes Performance Response** **15pts**
- **Research Project Performance & Portfolio** **30pts**
- **Final Performance Project & Portfolio** **35pts**
- **Solo Project** **15pts**

138-155pts	A
123-137pts	B
108-122pts	C
93-107pts	D
Below 93pts	F

Other Important Information:

- Wear clothes in which you can easily move.
- The exercises we participate in during class are not just for fun; they are the basis for your development as a deviser. It is my hope that you don't just forget them, but take what you believe to be helpful and incorporate them into your process of making theatre.
- **Do not make the mistake of thinking that the spontaneity needed for this course means that no outside work and preparation will be needed. On the contrary, the best improvisers are those actors who are the most prepared in terms of research and skill. It often takes devisers over a year to make a full-length play; this doesn't occur when those involved are not prepared.**
- **All Theatre Majors are required to attend all strikes and load-ins.**
 - All strikes and load-ins are listed on the production calendar, so there is plenty of time for students to get off from their other jobs. **All load-ins will last from 9:00 am until 6:00 pm with a break for lunch.**
 - All theatre majors need to be involved in some way with all shows.
 - You should have no commitments (i.e., work) that will interfere with the load-in or strike of each show.
 - **Consequences to missing the above calls will be:**
 1. **With at least a two week advanced notice :**
Fill in equivalent hours in another work call or in the shops (if another work call is offered--and labor is needed--that semester) or reassignment to another crew position (if available)
 2. **Potential loss of points in any theatre course you are currently enrolled in.**
- **This syllabus is subject to change. It is your responsibility to get any changes made to it.**

Course Schedule

WEEK 1

January	T9	Introduction, What does it mean to make theatre? Syllabus Exercises
	TH11	Ensemble building exercises Read Weigler, pp 1-29

WEEK 2

T16 How to interview
Ensemble building exercises

TH18 Ensemble building Exercises

WEEK 3

T23 Ensemble building Exercises
Read: Weigler, pp 31-50
Due: Questions for interview survey

TH25 Exercises

WEEK 4

T30 Material/Ensemble building exercises
Read: Weigler, pp 51-74

February

TH1 Administer questionnaires/surveys to seven random
students/faculty/staff
Exercises
Read: Orti, pp 1—31

WEEK 5

T6 TBA
Due via email: Survey Summary

TH8 1st Meeting of Small Group for Research Project (on your own)

WEEK 6

T13 **Solo Pieces Presentation to group (not for grade; peer evaluation)**
Material building Exercises
Read: Orti, pp 33-50

TH15 **Solo Pieces Presentation to be graded**
Due: Journal Essay #1 (covering Weigler, pp 1-74; Orti, pp 1-50)

WEEK 7: *Speech & Debate* performs in the TCPA Dangle Theatre February 21—February 24 at 7:30pm
and February 25 at 2:30pm

T20 Exercises
Read: Orti, pp 51--69

TH22 Work with group on Research Project

WEEK 8:

T27 Exercises
Read: Weigler, pp 75-84

March

TH1 Work with group on Research Project (on your own)

(February 28 is the last day to withdraw with a grade 'W')

WEEK 9: Episodes in Sexuality 2018 performs Wednesday, March 7—Saturday, March 10 at 7:30pm in the Dangle Theatre

T6 Exercises Working with Masks
Read: Orti, pp 71--88

TH8 Exercises TBA
Due: Journal Essay #2 (Weigler, pp 75-84; Orti, pp 51—88)

WEEK 10:

T13 Exercises Working with Masks

T15 **Research Project Performance for class (peer review)**

WEEK 11: Spring Break March 19—25

WEEK 12:

T27 Exercises TBA
Due: Episodes Performance Response

TH30 Exercises TBA
Read: Weigler, pp 85-101

WEEK 13

April T3 **Research Project Performance**

TH5 Exercises TBA

WEEK 14: *Mother Hicks* performs in the Carrollton Cultural Arts Center April 11—14 at 7:30pm and April 15 at 2:30pm

T10 Exercises TBA
Due: Journal Essay #3 (Weigler, pp 85-101)

TH12 Work on final project

WEEK 15:

T17 Exercises TBA

TH19 Work on Final Project

Week 16

T24 Exercises TBA
Student Evaluations

TH26 **Final Project Due**

Federal, State and University Policies Regarding Course Work

This is very important for your to read! You may also find this information at

https://www.westga.edu/administration/vpaa/assets/docs/faculty-resources/common_language_for_course_syllabi_v2.pdf

ACADEMIC SUPPORT

Accessibility Services: Students with a documented disability may work with UWG Accessibility Services to receive essential services specific to their disability. All entitlements to accommodations are based on documentation and USG Board of Regents standards. If a student needs course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability or chronic illness, or if he/she needs to make special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, the student should notify his/her instructor in writing and provide a copy of his/her Student Accommodations Report (SAR), which is available only from Accessibility Services. Faculty cannot offer accommodations without timely receipt of the SAR; further, no retroactive accommodations will be given. For more information, please contact Accessibility Services

Center for Academic Success: The Center for Academic Success provides services, programs, and opportunities to help all undergraduate students succeed academically. For more information, contact them: 678-839-6280 or cas@westga.edu

University Writing Center: The University Writing Center assists students with all areas of the writing process. For more information, contact them: 678-839-6513 or writing@westga.edu

ONLINE COURSES

UWG takes students' privacy concerns seriously: technology-enhanced and partially and fully online courses use sites and entities beyond UWG and students have the right to know the privacy policies of these entities. For more information on privacy and accessibility for the most commonly used sites, as well as technology requirements visit the UWG Online site.

Students enrolled in online courses can find answers to many of their questions in the Online/Off-Campus Student Guide.

If a student is experiencing distress and needs help, please see the resources available at the UWG Cares site. Online counseling is also available for online students.

HONOR CODE

At the University of West Georgia, we believe that academic and personal integrity are based upon honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility. Students at West Georgia assume responsibility for upholding the honor code. West Georgia students pledge to refrain from engaging in acts that do not maintain academic and personal integrity. These include, but are not limited to, plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, aid of academic dishonesty, lying, bribery or threats, and stealing.

The University of West Georgia maintains and monitors a confidential Academic Dishonesty Tracking System. This database collects and reports patterns of repeated student violations across all the Colleges, the Ingram Library, and the School of Nursing. Each incidence of academic dishonesty is subject to review and consideration by the instructor, and is subject to a range of academic penalties including, but not limited to, failing the assignment and/or failing the course. Student conduct sanctions range from verbal warning to suspension or expulsion depending on the magnitude of the offense and/or number of offenses. The incident becomes part of the student's conduct record at UWG.

Additionally, the student is responsible for safeguarding his/her computer account. The student's account and network connection are for his/her individual use. A computer account is to be used only by the person to whom it has been issued. The student is responsible for all actions originating through his/her account or network connection. Students must not impersonate others or misrepresent or conceal their identities in electronic messages and actions. For more information on the University of West Georgia Honor Code, please see the Student Handbook.

UWG EMAIL POLICY

University of West Georgia students are provided a MyUWG e-mail account. The University considers this account to be an official means of communication between the University and the student. The purpose of the official use of the student e-mail account is to provide an effective means of communicating important university related information to UWG students in a timely manner. It is the student's responsibility to check his or her email.

CREDIT HOUR POLICY

The University of West Georgia grants one semester hour of credit for work equivalent to a minimum of one hour (50 minutes) of in-class or other direct faculty instruction AND two hours of student work outside of class per week for approximately fifteen weeks. For each course, the course syllabus will document the amount of in-class (or other direct faculty instruction) and out-of-class work required to earn the credit hour(s) assigned to the course. Out-of-class work will include all forms of credit-bearing activity, including but not limited to assignments, readings, observations, and musical practice. Where available, the university grants academic credit for students who verify via competency-based testing, that they have accomplished the learning outcomes associated with a course that would normally meet the requirements outlined above (e.g. AP credit, CLEP, and departmental exams).

HB 280 (Campus Carry)

- UWG follows University System of Georgia (USG) guidance:
http://www.usg.edu/hb280/additional_information#
- You may also visit our website for help with USG Guidance:
<https://www.westga.edu/police/campus-carry.php>