Theater and Performance Studies

The master's program in Theater and Performance Studies introduces students to cutting-edge scholarship in the dynamic field of theater and performance studies, preparing them to pursue academic careers as scholar-practitioners. Offering a broad-based approach to the study of performance, this two-year program expands a traditional focus on aesthetic practice to include cultural performances such as gender performativity, Civil Rights activism, early modern surgery, slave auctions, and begging. Under this broad umbrella, students are invited to explore the mutual engagement of aesthetic and cultural performance practices across history, around the globe, and between disciplines, drawing on a variety of theoretical approaches to illuminate the complex meanings generated by and through performance.

Because theater offers an occasion to reflect upon those meanings, stage performance is at the core of this program's course of study. Accordingly, students are offered a broad range of courses in theater history, ranging from the classical theater of Ancient Greece and Rome to contemporary multimedia performance, with attention to the performance practices of cultures beyond the borders of the United States. Building on this foundation, students may design a personalized course of study in a specific historical, cultural or theoretical field, according to their interests. We boast an expert faculty both from within the Performing Arts Department, including Dance, and from other units across campus, such as Anthropology; Classics; English and non-Anglophone languages and literatures; Music; Film and Media Studies; Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies; and the Sam Fox School of Design and Visual Arts. The annual endowed Helen Clanton Morrin lecture allows us to host leading scholars and artists in performance research.

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Associate Professors
Mary-Jean Cowell
PhD, Columbia University
Modern Dance Technique, Theory and Composition, Dance History and Ethnology
Jeffrey Q. McCune, Jr.
PhD, Northwestern University
Performance Theory, Black Performance, Ethnographic Adaptation
Julia Walker
PhD, Duke University
Theatrical Modernism, Performance Theory, History of Acting

Assistant Professors
Pannill Camp
PhD, Brown University
18th-Century French Theater, Dramatic Theory, Theater Architecture
Paige McGinley
PhD, Brown University
20th-Century Theater and Performance, Race, Ethnicity, and Performance, American Studies

Professors of the Practice
Christine Knoblauch-O'Neal
PhD, Texas Women's University
Ballet, Applied Anatomy, Musical Theater, Performance Studies
Bonnie Kruger
MFA, University of Illinois
Costume Design, History and Construction, Rendering, Baroque Opera
David Marchant
MFA, University of Iowa
Acting Design, History and Construction, Rendering, Baroque Opera
Jeffery Matthews
MFA, Virginia Commonwealth University
Acting, Directing, Voice and Speech
Annamaria Pileggi
MFA, Brandeis University
Acting, Movement, Musical Theater, Robotics and Expressive Simulation, Theatre for Social Change
Cecil Slaughter
MFA, University of Iowa
Dance
William Whitaker
MFA, Florida Atlantic University
Acting, Directing

Professors
Robert Henke
PhD, University of California, Berkeley
Ancient and Renaissance Theater and Performance, Comparative Literature, Dramatic Theory

Henry I. Schvey
PhD, Indiana University
Modern American and European Drama, Shakespeare in Production, Expressionism and the Arts, Tennessee Williams
Artist-in-Residence

Ron Himes
Henry E. Hampton, Jr. Artist-in-Residence
BA, Washington University
African-American Theater

Senior Lecturers

Robert Mark Morgan
MFA, San Diego State University
Scenic Design

Sean Savoie
MFA, University of Cincinnati - College Conservatory of Music
Lighting Design, Production Management

Andrea Urice
MFA, University of Virginia
Directing, Acting, Creative Studies

Playwright-in-Residence

Carter W. Lewis
MA, University of Oklahoma
Playwriting, Dramaturgy, A.E. Hotchner Playwriting Festival

Degree Requirements

Degree Requirements: 36 units (12 courses)

I. Required courses: 15 units (5 courses)

1. Drama 5101, Introduction to Graduate Study. A general introduction to advanced scholarship in theater and performance studies, this course is designed to familiarize first-year graduate students with expectations for advanced research and professional writing. It is also intended to provide an overview of theater and performances studies, focusing on the relationship between these two scholarly domains, major works of scholarship that have defined the field, and current debates redrawing its contours.

2. Drama 449, Seminar in Dramatic Theory. An in-depth exploration of core works of dramatic theory from the ancient world to the present, this course focuses on texts that enunciate what theater is, has been, and should be. Readings address theater’s role in society, the anti-theatrical prejudice; the aesthetic pleasures of drama and theater, theater as a means of educating the citizen, and the relationship between dramatic form and social and political revolution. Moving chronologically, the course begins with Aristotle’s Poetics, Bharata’s Natyasastra, and Horace’s Ars Poetica, and then progresses through the Middle Ages, the Neoclassical and Romantic eras, the explosion of fin de siècle avant-gardes, and contemporary debates about interculturalism, and the post-dramatic theater. With a global focus, the course examines key texts from beyond the European tradition, including works of dramatic theory written in medieval Japan and postcolonial Nigeria.

3. Drama 497, Performance Theory. This course introduces students to contemporary theories of performance, with "performance" understood as both metaphor and event. From a multidisciplinary perspective, students will consider how cultures produce meanings — and, indeed, perform those meanings — to create and/or disrupt their own social coherence. Theories studied include: Philosopher J.L. Austin's speech-act theory and its engagement by John Searle and Jacques Derrida; anthropologist Victor Turner's analysis of ritual as social process and Richard Schechner's use of it to transform "theater studies" into "performance studies"; sociologist Erving Goffman’s sociology of the self and its relation to a post-structuralist model of subjectivity; art historian Michael Fried's screed against minimalist art and its relation to Happenings, Body Art, Fluxus, and other mid- to late-20th century examples of "performance art"; and philosopher Judith Butler's influential revision of Austin's performative in her theory of queer "performativity."

4. Theater/Performance History. One 400- or 500-level historically-based seminar from a list of approved courses taught within the Performing Arts Department. (Topics vary by semester.) Students are encouraged to meet this requirement with L15 Drama 507, Problems in Contemporary Theoretical Research.

5. Theater Practice. At least one (but no more than three) 400- or 500-level course(s) in theater practice: dramaturgy, directing, playwriting, or design. Students are encouraged to meet this requirement with L15 Drama 506, Problems in Contemporary Arts Practice Research.

II. Electives: 21 units (7 courses)

Students are invited to develop a broad-based or a specialized curriculum in theater and performance studies, choosing courses from within the Performing Arts Department, including Dance, or as many as four courses (12 units) from without. The program works closely with Faculty Affiliates in other departments, including Anthropology; Classics; English and non-Anglophone languages and literatures; Film and Media Studies; Music; Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies; and the Sam Fox School of Design and Visual Art.

III. AM Exam

The AM exam is based on a seminar paper written during the student's first three semesters in the program, which, under the guidance of a faculty adviser, is extensively revised and expanded into an essay of publishable length (typically 25 double-spaced pages) and publishable quality. After the revised seminar paper has been submitted to and approved by the DGS, the student will meet with a committee of three faculty members (the adviser, the DGS, and a third faculty member, one of whom may be from another department) for an oral exam.