

DRAMATIC THEORY & CRITICISM

Spring 2015
THEA 4363.01 (CRN 21826)
MWF 1:00-1:50 pm
PAC 240

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Sign-up for Appointments on Office Door

Catalogue Description

A study of the principles of various styles and periods of dramaturgy, involving a history of criticism from Aristotle to the present. Representative plays will be analyzed for theme, structure, characterization and dialogue with a view to their influences on contemporary theatre. Emphasis is placed on written student criticism and evaluation of plays. Writing Enhanced. Credit 3.

Course Description

This is a lecture-discussion course on dramatic theory and criticism. While we will read and discuss numerous play excerpts, our primary focus is not, nor needs to be, text analysis but, rather, *theory* (why theatre is the way it is—its conventions of writing and production) and *criticism* (how we perceive, understand, and judge theatre). Our study of criticism will be based on the critical perspectives surveyed in Lois Tyson's book, *Critical Theory Today*. On Mondays, we will explore many different forms of criticism. On Wednesdays, we will focus on theoretical issues, particularly those most relevant to current theatre practice. Fridays will be dedicated to special interest topics as well as providing time for students to share the best of their projects.

Course Objectives

- To understand how and why current conventions of playwriting and theatre production exist.
- To understand a variety of critical perspectives and apply them in analyzing and evaluating scripts and productions.
- To understand and appreciate how subjective the perception and evaluation of theatre, as well as all art, is and how these subjective differences, be they individual or cultural, past or present, enrich our art and allow it to evolve continuously.
- To understand current theoretical and practical issues facing American theatre.

Textbook (Optional)

Lois Tyson, *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*, 2nd Edition. The first edition also is acceptable.

Graded Components

5 individual projects, each worth 20% of your final course grade. (See attached "Projects Overview.")

- Project #1: due Friday, February 5, to share in class that day
- Project #2: due Friday, February 26, to share in class that day
- Project #3: due Friday, March 18, to share in class that day
- Project #4: due Friday, April 8, to share in class that day
- Project #5: due Friday, April 29, at the end of the day (midnight)

UTC Productions

You are asked to see all three of the UTC season productions this semester. Your attendance will enrich you and cover any days that I may have to miss due to professional or personal reasons.

Final Exam

This course is project-based: there are no exams. There is no exam nor meeting during the final exam period.

Attendance

By university policy for classes that meet three times each week (MWF classes), you may not be penalized for up to 3 absences, nor for any absence due to pre-approved religious observance; beyond that depends on the instructor's discretion.

After 3 absences, you will be penalized -3 points from your final course grade for each excess absence, unless there is written intervention from the Office of the Dean of Students (located in the LSC).

For each day of class that you arrive on time, you will be rewarded with 1/13th of a point (a "tasty treat") to be added to your final course grade. Don't scoff, 39 of these treats will raise your final grade +3 points!

Late Work

Any project submitted late will be penalized one letter grade (-10 points) for each week overdue.

Students attending KCACTF, USITT, and other approved trips and university obligations should plan to submit their projects before rather than after the approved event.

Classroom Conduct

Food and candy are not permitted in the classroom. Beverages are permitted, if they are in spill-proof containers. Unless otherwise instructed, laptops and tablets are not permitted. Cell phones and electronic devices must be turned off and stored out of sight.

Academic Dishonesty

Any incident of academic dishonesty, most notably submitting someone else's work with your name on it, will result in a grade of zero for the project as well as a report to the department chair. Any subsequent incident will result in automatic course failure and a report to the Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences and the Dean of Students. Please know in advance that some of your writing assignments will be accepted only through TurnItIn on Blackboard.

Final Course Grade

The grades on Blackboard will be posted as numerical scores accompanied by letter grade equivalents:
90-100 = A, 80-89 = B, 70-79 = C, 60-69 = D, 0-59 = F

Office

I will have a sign-up sheet on my office door for appointments (for class and/or advising). If you have questions or concerns, please come talk with me; that's what office hours are for. If you want to talk about projects or need advising, just sign-up for an office appointment.

Please note: when I arrive in the classroom, I need that time to set up for class; that is not the time to have discussions with you. A simple, quick question is fine, though.

PROJECTS OVERVIEW (TENTATIVE)

Project #1: Materials (Genres)

What is being produced in professional theatre now?

Categories: 1) Broadway, 2) Off-Broadway, 3) Regional/LORT, 4) Regional/Non-Lort, 5) Tours or Summer Stock

For each of the above categories, create a list that includes play titles and genres for the current season. Then submit an appr. 500-word essay written in your own words that summarizes and synthesizes your findings.

Format: Composite List (50%) plus TurnItIn Paper (50%). Due and share in class on Friday, February 5.

Project #2: Methods (New To Me)

What recent productions, conventions, technologies, and/or philosophies are being produced, used or developed that seem new, innovative, different, unconventional, etc.?

You will create a Prezi, Powerpoint, or blog that presents images and information covering at least five (5) different phenomenon. Original writing should be appr. 500 words total.

Format: Digital presentation: visuals and formatting (50%) and descriptive writing (50%). Due and share in class on Friday, February 26.

Project #3: My Future (After Sam)

What are my options and opportunities after graduating?

You will build a (new) website or blog with pages (or posts) covering the following: 1) professional theatre, 2) grad school or additional training, 3) teacher certification.

Format: Online website or blog. Formatting (50%) and content/writing (50%). Due and share in class on Friday, March 18.

Project #4: Issues & The Future of Theatre

What current issues are having the most effect on theatre and its future?

Topics: 1) non-traditional casting, 2) funding, 3) education and training, 4) unions, 5) competition with other media, 6) censorship, etc.

Format: TBA but probably another digital presentation: visuals and formatting (50%) and descriptive writing (50%). Due and share in class on Friday, April 8.

Project #5: Production Criticism

*Use everything you've learned this semester to write a theatre review of *Damn Yankees*.*

Your 800-1000 word review should follow the guidelines established by *Theatre Journal* or Dave's handout.

Format: TurnItIn Paper (100%). Due on Friday, April 29, by the end of the day (midnight).

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Academic Honesty

All students are expected to engage in all academic pursuits in a manner that is above reproach. Students are expected to maintain complete honesty and integrity in the academic experiences both in and out of the classroom. Any student found guilty of dishonesty in any phase of academic work will be subject to disciplinary action. The University and its official representatives may initiate disciplinary proceedings against a student accused of any form of academic dishonesty including, but not limited to, cheating on an examination or other academic work which is to be submitted, plagiarism, collusion and the abuse of resource materials. Any students found cheating on exams, or plagiarizing papers will FAIL the course.

Classroom Environment

Students are expected to assist in maintaining a classroom environment that is conducive to learning. Students are to treat faculty and peers with respect and dignity. Section 5.2.22 in the Code of Student Conduct and Discipline defines classroom disturbances as any activity which proves distracting to the learning environment including but not limited to the use of cell phones or text messaging; the reading of materials (newspapers, magazines, texts) not assigned to the class; the use of profanity or abusive behavior toward the instructor or other students; having off-topic conversations which disturb or disrupt the learning environment; the use of computers and/or other electronic devices (iPods, MP3 players, etc.) during classroom instruction, therefore, as a result, under no circumstances are cell phones or any other electronic devices to be used or seen during classroom instruction or examination. Even the visible presence of such a device during an examination will result in a zero on that examination. All such devices should be turned off or put in a silent mode and not be taken out during class. Violations of the code of conduct will not be tolerated. Failure to comply with this policy will result in expulsion from the classroom and may at the instructor's discretion result in the student(s) being referred for disciplinary action to the Dean of Students. Any assignments missed because of disciplinary action cannot be submitted for a grade.

Students with Disabilities Policy

It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely by reason of their disability, from participation in any academic program of the university. Further, they shall not be denied the benefits of these programs nor shall they be subjected to discrimination. Students with disabilities that might affect their academic performance should register with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Lee Drain Annex (telephone 936-294-3512, TDD 936-294-3786, and e-mail disability@shsu.edu). They should then make arrangements with their individual instructors so that appropriate strategies can be considered and helpful procedures can be developed to ensure that participation and achievement opportunities are not impaired.

SHSU adheres to all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and guidelines with respect to providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. If you have a disability that may affect adversely your work in this class, then I encourage you to register with the SHSU Services for Students with Disabilities and to talk with me about how I can best help you. All disclosures of disabilities will be kept strictly confidential. NOTE: No accommodation can be made until you register with the Services for Students with Disabilities. For a complete listing of the university policy, see:

<http://www.shsu.edu/dept/academic-affairs/documents/aps/students/811006.pdf>

Religious Holy Days

Section 51.911(b) of the Texas Education Code requires that an institution of higher education excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. A student whose absence is excused under this subsection may not be penalized for that absence and shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable time after the absence. "Religious holy day" means a holy day observed by a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property taxation under Section 11.20, Tax Code.

Visitors in the Classroom

Unannounced visitors to class must present a current, official SHSU identification card to be permitted into the classroom. They must not present a disruption to the class by their attendance. If the visitor is not a registered student, it is at the instructor's discretion whether or not the visitor will be allowed to remain in the classroom. This policy is not intended to discourage the occasional visiting of classes by responsible persons. Obviously, however, the visiting of a particular class should be occasional and not regular, and it should in no way constitute interference with registered members of the class or the educational process.