

LOYOLA UNIVERSITY of CHICAGO, John Felice Rome Center      Fall 2019

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## Beginning Acting

### THTR 261

**Course Description:** This course is an introduction to classical as well as contemporary acting theories and techniques. It is designed for students who are interested in study of the performing arts, but who are not majoring or minoring in the Department of Theatre. Through lectures, discussions, readings, and play attendance, students will study current theory and basic techniques of creating characters for the stage and communicating with live audiences, and apply these techniques to practice through a combination of in-class exercises, and monologue and scene presentations. Students will develop skills in observation, concentration and imagination, as well as skills in script analysis. Methods of acting technique may be applied to evaluate performance in various artistic media and life circumstances, enhance appreciation of other art forms, and provide skills to increase focus and reduce anxiety for student's future real life "performance" and public presentation circumstances.

A special feature of the Rome version of this course will be an emphasis on classical and Italian "commedia dell'arte"-related acting ideas and practices. Students will thus be able to develop an active, back-and-forth link between their studies and exercises in the course with their actual experience of living in Italy.

### Learning Objectives and Outcomes for Artistic Knowledge and Experience Area

- Study, create, or participate in performance as a means of exploring human experience and understanding the creative process.

Through readings, lecture-discussions, and in-class exercises students will be presented with the basic concepts of the actor's process. These concepts will be related to the historical development of acting forms and styles, especially from the Italian Renaissance to the twentieth century. Students will apply theory to practical application through in-class improvisational exercises and monologue and scene presentation.

- Acquire the critical and technical vocabulary used to describe and analyze, and to formulate an argument about, artistic productions.

Through the material covered in assigned readings and class discussions, as well as through application of theory in performance, students will be enabled to analyze, and to articulate interpretations of theatrical productions. This vocabulary will allow you to formulate intelligent critical arguments regarding performances observed in the theatre

and in class, and facilitate improvement in your own performance and its capacity to communicate meaning to an audience.

- Assess how formal qualities of artistic expression are intrinsically tied to an audience

Acting in the theatre is a living art, depending on the presence and attention of a live audience. All acting technique is inherently linked to its purpose of communicating thoughts and feelings to spectators who share specific time- and space-coordinates with the actors. You will attend, discuss, and critique at least two fully realized productions over the course of the semester. In doing so, you will evaluate the application of acting technique as demonstrated in the performance, using terms and ideas derived from prior readings and discussions. Additionally, students will perform in the context of the class itself, using classmates as a live audience: you will thus alternate between being performers and audience members. Through moderated discussion and critique, you will learn how adjustments to acting techniques can communicate meaning more effectively to an audience.

- Examine multiple interpretive possibilities of any artistic production, and know that such interpretations both reflect the culture that produced them and change over time and
- Evaluate works of art in light of aesthetic and historic precedents

Through lectures, reading and demonstrations, contemporary acting theories will be placed in historical context. Study of current acting techniques based in modern psychology, contrasted with performance modes linked to ancient through medieval religious and philosophical structures, will enable students to appreciate how styles of acting reflect contemporary cultural consciousness, and change accordingly over time. For example, we will get to know the “four humors and four elements” physical-emotional schema that informed both the Italian “commedia” and Shakespeare’s drama, and compare it to post-Freudian notions of the individual psyche that have been applied to the “building” of characters in the theatre of the past hundred years or more.

- Recognize and participate in the artistic-cultural life of their communities.

Students will develop vocabulary to evaluate performance in other circumstances, including film, television, and real life “performance” circumstances such as formal presentation and public speaking. This learning outcome will enhance your appreciation for the use of performance craft and processes in these communal contexts.

## Learning Objectives and Outcomes for Communication Skills Area

This course addresses several of the Communication Skills and Competencies outlined for Core Requirements. Through participation in the course, students will develop the following skills:

- Evaluate and edit multiple versions of texts in order to compose an effective interpretation

In scene and monologue presentations students will develop skills in analysis of written scripts and standardized means embedded in the written form into effective performance of characters in live performance. You will thus learn and apply methods for transporting precise meanings from the “page to the stage.”

- Create effective messages via verbal and nonverbal systems of communication, including print media, electronic media, visual arts, music, live performances, and personal interactions.

Through in-class exercises and presentation of monologues and scenes, students will engage in conveying messages though classical as well as contemporary acting techniques. You will learn essential techniques of breathing, diction, movement, and improvisation. As part of our study of the “commedia dell’arte” and its impact on later acting traditions, we will also work with “maschere,” which are both actual masks and types of character. You also will be able to apply your on-site viewing and study of Renaissance and Baroque art to the development of a character and/or of a particular group scenario. The efficacy of your individual interpretive choices and success in application of theory to meaningful communication with an audience will be graded in standardized terms and critique in class discussion moderated by the instructor.

- Understand the nature, scope, and power of communication processes and the ways in which they create, perpetuate, and/or challenge social relationships, practices, institutions, and organizations.

Through reading, script analysis, and lecture demonstration, students will be introduced to the basics of representational theory, with emphasis on the historical relativity of performance modes, and the manner in which contemporary methods both reflect and sometimes challenge dominant social, institutional, and political structures and philosophies. This mixture of reflection and challenge, however, is not absolutely new: similar tensions and ambivalences have marked actors and their rapport with audiences, especially since the former started to become professional in Italy during the late 1500s.

- Discern what is necessary to be communicated at any given time and to construct and adapt messages appropriately for diverse audiences, contexts, and purposes.

As the majority of learning activities for the class occur in front of a live audience in the classroom, or out of your own experience as observers of live performance, you will both adapt material according to audience attention and responsiveness in live presentations of monologues and scenes, and evaluate your own experience as recipients of ideas

and energies on stage. Students will learn how to apply techniques for creating meaning in theatrical characterization to other live performance situations, such as seminar presentation and public speaking.

### **Assignments:**

Assignments and Learning Activities for THTR 261 include:

Lecture-Demonstrations

In-class exercises (Voice, Speech, Movement, Status Games, Improvisation, Masks, Script Analysis, Character Development, Ensemble Interaction)

In-class Critique/Discussion

Readings

Attendance of live theatre

Written Critiques

Monologue Presentation

Scene Presentation

Final Performances

The majority of these activities, including **lecture demonstrations, in-class exercises, discussion-critiques, and monologue/scene presentations**, are active demonstrations of theory. These activities provide a range of opportunities for application of theory in practice by the student, and for observation and critical discussion for further comprehension and continued growth in future performance applications. Content of lectures will also place contemporary theories in historical context.

These activities are linked to several of the **Knowledge-area and Communications skills** outlined above, and in most cases address several of each. These include the participation in the creative process of performance, acquisition of technical and critical vocabulary to analyze and describe artistic processes, and the communication and assessment of meaning in the context of a live audience

The majority of **Readings** are assigned from an introductory acting text suitable to a non-major. Assigned readings from the text will introduce students to the basic theories and techniques of contemporary actor training in the tradition of the Method, rooted in the “naturalistic” style, and supported by modern psychological approaches to understanding and representing a character on the stage. This text is *Audition: Everything an Actor Needs to Know to Get the Part*, by Michael Shurtleff, and will be available for students in the Loyola of Chicago program in Rome. Read in tandem with excerpts from books on the classical tradition, especially on Italian and Shakespearean acting, this contemporary American text provides useful insights into the creative theatrical process, technical vocabulary, and practical suggestion for application in language suited for non-theatre students taking this course to fulfill Artistic Knowledge and Communications Skills.

Students will **attend** and write **critiques** of performances, in both English and Italian, of at least two required plays. These critiques are linked to developing competencies of observing and analyzing creative performance processes, employing technical vocabulary, and assessing performances from the standpoint of an audience member. These activities will ask you to evaluate acting choices in the light of contemporary theory, and to participate as an audience member in the cultural life of your community.

### **Other Readings**

Along with the book and excerpts mentioned above, students will read, discuss, and actively interpret several plays, especially Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*. This play will be studied and discussed as a model text for understanding the problems of acting and staging a theatrical script, and will help you prepare for a group performance of other scenes at the end of the semester, for the entire LUC in Rome community.

### **Quizzes**

Two quizzes will be given over the course of the term. These will cover material presented in reading and lecture demonstration. Quizzes will test for comprehension of basic acting theories and techniques. The format will mainly consist of short answer.

### **Attendance of Live Theatre**

Students will attend at least one professional live performances in Rome (or another European city), during the semester. You will then write a critique(s) of the performance(s), as described below.

### **Written Critiques**

Students will write at least one 2-3-page critique of the performance(s) attended, using standardized critique guidelines. Sample topics will include observation of the acting theories and techniques applied by the actors in the performance, and critique of the efficacy of the communication of character, using vocabulary developed in class.

### **Monologue Presentation and Scenes Presentation**

Students will present one monologue and one scene over the course of the semester. Scripted monologues and partnered scenes will be assigned by the instructor. Students will be introduced to the basic techniques of script analysis, and will workshop the scenes in class. Monologues and Scene Presentations will be evaluated using a standardized template, noting areas of technique covered in lecture demonstration and reading.

### **Final Performances**

As a final exam for the class, students will develop an original piece for presentation based on improvisational exercises and script analysis and interpretation. Guidelines for these finals will be provided by instructor, as approved by the chair or supervising full-time faculty. These performances will be prepared and rehearsed in the final weeks of the course, and presented as a public performance open to the entire Loyola University of Chicago in Rome community, during the final week of the program.

### **Required texts:**

- 1) *Audition: Everything an Actor Needs to Know to Get the Part*, by Michael Shurtleff
- 2) *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, by William Shakespeare, edited by Peter Holland

**Attendance Policy** (please note that course attendance is based on prompt class attendance, preparation and active participation in class discussions)

In accordance with the JFRC mission to promote a higher level of academic rigor, all courses adhere to the following absence policy. Prompt attendance, preparation and active participation in course discussions are expected from every student.

- For all classes meeting once a week, students cannot incur more than one unexcused absence.
- For all classes meeting twice a week, students cannot incur more than two unexcused absences.
- For all classes meeting three times a week, students cannot incur more than two unexcused absences.

This course meets once a week, thus a total of one unexcused absence will be permitted. Unexcused absences beyond these will result in a lowering of your final grade: for every absence incurred beyond the permitted

excused absence, there will be a 1% lowering of your final grade. This is in keeping with the published policy of the Loyola University of Chicago John Felice Rome Center, for all courses.

### **Evaluation**

- Participation and attendance 20 %
- Midterm Exam (written, and oral – monologue(s)) 30 %
- Play review(s) 15 %
- Presentation (see final exam) --%
- Final Exam (includes presentation) 35 %

### **Grading**

94-100: A  
90-93: A-  
87-89: B+  
84-86: B  
80-83: B-  
77-79: C+  
74-76: C  
70-73: C-  
67-69: D+  
60-66: D  
59 or lower: F

### **Academic Honesty**

Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty are unacceptable at the JFRC and will be dealt with in accordance with Loyola University Chicago's guidelines. Please familiarize yourself with Loyola's standards here: [http://www.luc.edu/academics/catalog/undergrad/reg\\_academicintegrity.shtml](http://www.luc.edu/academics/catalog/undergrad/reg_academicintegrity.shtml). You are responsible to comply with the LUC Student Handbook.

### **Late or Missed Assignments**

Late or missed assignments will not be accepted for grading without the authorization of the instructor.

**Accessibility Accommodations** Students registered with the Student Accessibility Center requiring academic accommodations should contact the Office of the Dean at the John Felice Rome Center, the first week of classes.

**COURSE CALENDAR (class meetings take place on Wednesdays, 2:00-5:00 pm, including a break, in the Sala Teatro)**

- Week 1 (4 Sept.) Introduction to Course: a brief history of acting theories, approaches, and practices, illustrated by slides and video excerpts
- Week 2 (11 Sept.) Lecture and Discussion: Objectives, Actions, and Inter-Actions  
Required reading: from Shurtleff, *Audition*: Prologue and Chapter 1 (pages 1-22)  
In-Class Acting Exercises (Breathing, Voice, Classical Text)
- Week 3 (20 Sept.) Required reading: from *Audition*, Guideposts 1 - 4  
**\* THIS IS a** In-Class Acting Exercises (Movement, Status Games, Verse
- SPECIAL FRIDAY MEETING!** Analysis and Speaking)
- Week 4 (25 Sept.) Required reading: Guideposts 5 – 10  
Continued In-Class Acting Exercises  
(with Mask work, Improvisation techniques)
- Week 5 (2 Oct.) Required reading: Guideposts 11 -12  
• **Quiz #1 \*** Prepare Monologues
- Week 6 (9 Oct.) Final Rehearsal of Monologues; Present monologues

**Fall Break (11-20 October): Enjoy!**

- Week 7 (23 October) Critique Monologues; begin preparation of scenes performance
- Week 8 (30 October) Discuss and Prepare Scripted Scenes
- Week 9 (6 November) Prepare and Rehearse Scripted Scenes

**\* Critique #1 Due \***



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Week 10 (13 Nov.) Rehearse Scripted Scenes

Week 11 (20 Nov.) Rehearse Scripted Scenes

Week 12 (27 Nov.) Rehearse Scripted Scenes

Week 13 (4 December) Tech./Dress Rehearsal of Scripted Scenes

- **Quiz #2 (take-home) \***

Week 13 (**Friday 6 Dec.**) Probable date of Final Dress Rehearsal and **Performance!**

**\* Critique #2 Due \* (recommended)**