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THA 3800-001: Dramaturgy

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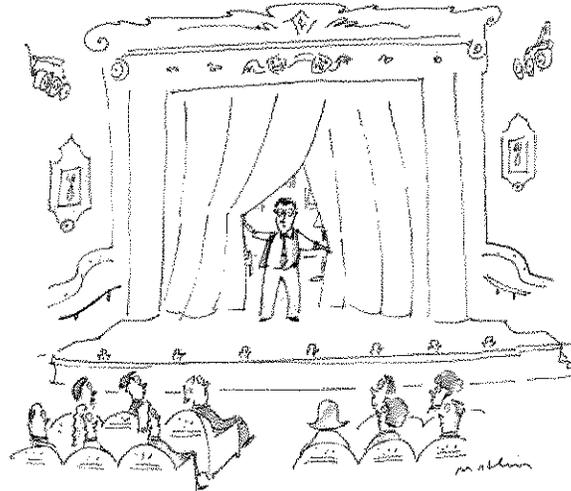
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Theatre Arts 3800: Dramaturgy

spring 2018 / Section 001

Dr. Chris Wixson



"Is there a doctor of literature in the house?"

syllabus

course philosophy

This "hands-on" course focuses on an area that often seems mysterious, even to those with a lot of experience in theatre arts. "Dramaturgy" is a broad umbrella term that covers a lot of different kinds of work in relation to a story told onstage. Dramaturgs are creative theatre artists who help to shape a production at every step of the process, collaborating with directors, playwrights, designers, actors, and audiences to deepen the experience of a particular play in performance. THA 3800 is an introduction to the craft of the dramaturg and an opportunity to cultivate skills of reading, research, communication, and presentation in the service of the practice of theatre. There are collaborative projects (including one with this semester's production of Friel's *Dancing at Lughnasa*) as well as individual assignments, including role-playing and various kinds of research and writing.

The conceit of the course is that you have all just been hired by the Dramaturgy department of the Wixson American Repertory Theatre; as WART's 2018-19 season has just been announced, you will be working individually and in teams to prepare a dramaturgical apparatus for each of the plays that will be produced. Before turning to the new season, however, our first assignment proceeds from the final production of the 2017-18 season, Brian Friel's *Dancing Lughnasa*. The director, Jean Wolski, has asked us to produce a lobby display so we will work in teams to devise and create it for the performances in mid-February. Then, everyone will select a contemporary and a historical play as the focus for the rest of the course.

Learning Outcomes

1. To provide opportunities for reading and meaningfully responding to complex and challenging plays.
2. To introduce each member of the class to the practice of dramaturgy in Theatre Arts through reading, research, writing, and collaborative interaction.
3. To assist in the development and practicing of skills of critical thinking, interpretive analysis, research, and various dramaturgical writing.

course texts

The Process of Dramaturgy: A Handbook, Scott Irelan, Anne Fletcher, Julie Felise Dubiner

Placebo, Melissa James Gibson

The Verge, Susan Glaspell

The Wolves, Sarah DeLappe

Dancing at Lughnasa, Brian Friel

Bad Jews, Joshua Harmon

Jen Silverman's *The Moors*

The Mountaintop, Katori Hall

Secondary Texts: *Ghost Light: An Introductory Handbook for Dramaturgy* (Michael Mark Chemers), *Dramaturgy in American Theater: A Sourcebook* (eds. Susan Jonas, Geoff Proehi, Michael Lupu), and *Script Analysis for Actors, Directors, and Designers* (James Thomas).

contact information

Dr. Chris Wixson

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Coleman Hall 3771

Office Hours: TR 8:30-10:30 AM and by appointment

assignments

*Lobby Display for *Dancing at Lughnasa*

*Dramaturgical Materials for *The Moors* or *The Mountaintop* (Historical Plays)

*Dramaturgical Materials for *Placebo*, *The Wolves*, or *Bad Jews* (Contemporary Plays)

*Active, Engaged Class/Group Participation --- defined as INTERACTING productively and ethically.

final grades

Your final grade in the course will be determined by your performance on the following assignments:

<i>Lughnasa</i> Lobby Display	15%
Contemporary Play / Production Book	20%
Contemporary Play / Letter to the Director	10%
Contemporary Play / Programme Notes and Lobby Display Proposal	10%
Historical Play / Production Book	25%
Historical Play / Letter to the Director	10%
Final Exam / Programme Notes and Lobby Display Proposal	10%
In-class role-playing Activities/Active class and Group Participation	10%

attendance

Mandatory.

I expect you to be in class *and in your group meetings* awake and prepared every Tuesday and Thursday morning. In other words, arrive on time with your reading/writing assignment completed, prepared to participate. Because so much in this course relies upon in-class work, absences and habitual lateness will adversely influence your course performance. Attendance will be taken at each session – you are allowed **two** unexcused absences before your grade is negatively affected. After that, each unexcused absence will lower your participation grade by half a letter. **Six unexcused absences will result in a "0" for participation. More than seven unexcused absences will result in a grade**

of no credit for the course. Habitual lateness (beyond once) will also affect your grade negatively since it is disruptive and disrespectful. Please notify me by email if there is unexpected illness or an emergency that causes you to miss class. Do **not** get in touch asking "for the assignment" or a "rundown of what you missed." My responsibilities as an instructor lie with the students who do come to class. Excused absences are accompanied by appropriate legal or medical documentation. *Any* unexcused absence will seriously undermine your success in this course.

class preparation and group participation

YES, there is a lot of group work in this course. *But* theatre is a uniquely collaborative art (as is dramaturgy). Enhancing your skills as a theatre practitioner includes practice at working as a member of a creative team, an experience that presents both challenges and rewards. There will be accountability in the short reflective papers due with each major assignment, but consider it one of the tasks in front of you this semester to work to sustain ethical and meaningful company work.

Participation in an advanced college-level course means careful, full preparation of the reading, actively contributing to discussions, taking risks in writing and thinking, and engaging respectfully, constructively, and supportively with one another.

Coming to class/group and saying you are "frustrated" with the tasks at hand and thus have nothing to contribute is intellectually lazy and irresponsible. Obviously, not showing up at all is the same. These projects and plays are indeed demanding; while there will be frustration with their complexity at times, this course understands that complexity as part of the challenge to which we aspire to rise during the semester.

cell phone and computer use

You may bring your computer to class with you, assuming that you use it in a scholarly and responsible fashion. This means that you will only have applications and windows related to the current discussion open. **You may not check** social media, surf the web, play games, or otherwise distract yourself and those around you from the class conversation with technological devices. You are likewise expected to use cell phones in a responsible, respectful, and professional manner: **turn them off when you come in to class**. If you have an emergency for which you must be available, you must discuss it with me beforehand and keep your phone on vibrate. **Under no conditions are you allowed to** text message, take pictures or video (illegal in class), play games, or use the cell phone in any other manner during class. The nature of our endeavor together necessitates mutual respect and dedicated attention during the too short time we have to discuss these texts. Violating any of these policies will result in your participation grade being lowered by a full letter grade for each violation.

academic integrity

Any paper with your name on it signifies that you are the author—that the wording and major ideas are yours, with exceptions indicated by either quotation marks and/or citations. Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use (appropriation and/or imitation) of others' materials (words and ideas). Evidence of plagiarism will result in one or more of the following: a failing grade for the assignment, an F in the course, and a report filed with the Student Standards Office.

student success center

Students who are having difficulty achieving their academic goals are encouraged to contact the Student Success Center (www.eiu.edu/~success) for assistance with time management, test taking, note taking, avoiding procrastination, setting goals, and other skills to support academic achievement. The Student Success Center provides individualized consultations. To make an appointment, call 217-581-6696, or go to 9th Street Hall, Room 1302.

special needs and situations

If you have a *documented* disability and are in need of academic accommodations, please contact me as soon as possible in order to discuss arrangements.

- 30 Meeting with the Director / *Process of Dramaturgy* pp. 35-53
 Crum's "Towards a Dramaturgical Sensibility" pp. 76-7
 (D2L under *Dramaturgy in American Theater*)
- February 1 **Actualized Lobby display due** / *Process of Dramaturgy* pp. 57-66
 Drafting Workshop: Letter to the Director
- 6 Preparing to Meet with the Director
- 8 **Letter to the Director Due** / Director Meeting Preparation

****Gruesome Playground Injuries** plays this weekend

- 13 Meeting with the Director
 15 Meeting with the Director

- 20 Meeting with the Director

****Dancing at Lughnasa** plays this weekend

- 22 Meeting with the Director

- 27 The Dramaturg in Rehearsal / *Process of Dramaturgy* pp. 65-75

- March 1 Programme Notes / *Process of Dramaturgy* pp. 99-101

- 6 Audiences and Publicity / *Process of Dramaturgy* pp. 95-109

- 8 **Dramaturgical Materials for Contemporary Play Due**

HAPPY SPRING BREAK!!

- 20 Read *The Verge* and your chosen historical play

Project #2 Assigned / Research Teams formed

- 22 "Hunting and Gathering" for *The Verge*

- 27 Group Meetings with Wixson and Research

- 29 Group Meetings and Research

- April 3 Review of the Letter to the Director

- 5 **Letter to the Director Due**

- 10 Meeting with the Director

- 12 Meeting with the Director

17 TBA

****Brighton Beach Memoirs** plays this weekend

19 Review of all pre-production materials

24 Final Exam Workshop

26 **Final Draft of Dramaturgical Materials for Historical Play Due**

****Final exam date: Tuesday, May 1, 2:45-4:45 PM**