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THA 3344-001: Scene & Character Study

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Theatre Arts 3344: Scene & Character Study

fall 2018 / Section 001 / 3.00 Credits

Dr. Chris Wixson



"The creation of character is more about the adverbs than the adjectives."
—Peter Mendelsund, *What We See When We Read*

syllabus

course philosophy

THA 3344 provides the opportunity to develop, diversify, sharpen, and deepen the **craft** of the actor through contemporary realistic scene and character study. The focus of the course will be the ways in which research, script analysis, and technique inform on-your-feet rehearsal work. In that sense, THA 3344 (like, I would argue, theatre itself) is a *process-oriented* much more than *product-oriented* course. The goal is extended development of the actor's responsibility for in-rehearsal active contribution and out-of-rehearsal, self-directed exploration.

Learning Outcomes

Students completing this course will:

1. Understand and implement the use of playing an action.
2. Demonstrate a working knowledge with various acting techniques.
3. Read and analyze several contemporary plays.
4. Determine best practices for their own art.
5. Cultivate growth in craft, work ethic, and self-assessment.

course texts

A Practical Handbook for the Actor by Bruder, Cohn, Olnek, Pollack, Previto, and Zigler

Excerpts from: *Acting: Onstage and Off* by Robert Barton

Actions: The Actors' Thesaurus by Marina Caidarone and Maggie Lloyd-Williams

course grade breakdown

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

Written Assignments	300 points
Rehearsal and Performance	350 points
Active, Engaged Class Participation	350 points

contact information

Dr. Chris Wixson

cmwixson@eiu.edu

Coleman Hall 3771/DFAC 1351

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

****By maintaining your enrollment in this course, you agree to adhere to the following policies:**

attendance

Mandatory.

Class sessions will involve a mixture of workshop and rehearsal, modeling a process of characterization and analysis, so that company members should be prepared to be productive in *both* directed and self-directed modes, that is to say for *both* social and individual work. This course is understood as a lab — so expect to use the time for experimentation and the content to be *both* useful and used. As such, exercises, discussions, and scene work cannot be made up. If you miss classes, you are missing the course.

I expect you to be arrive on time for class ***awake and prepared*** every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon.

Class begins on time, meaning personal items are put away and students are on their feet by 12:30 PM. Students will be responsible for signing in at the beginning of every class meeting. Failure to sign in will result in an absence. You are allowed **two** unexcused absences before your grade is negatively affected. After that, each unexcused absence will reduce your final grade by four points. Missing a class in which you are scheduled to perform is unacceptable and will further reduce your grade. *Any* unexcused absence will seriously undermine your success in this course.

Habitual lateness will also adversely affect your course performance. Students are granted a five-minute grace period from the scheduled class start time to be considered “on time.” After five minutes, students are considered late and will receive only half the participation points designated for that day. **Students more than 15 minutes late will be counted absent. Any assignment due that day cannot be made up without documentation.** Three late entrances will equal one unexcused absence and reduce your grade accordingly.

Please notify me by email if there is unexpected illness or an emergency that causes you to miss class. Excused absences are accompanied by appropriate legal or medical documentation. 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.

class participation

THA 3344 is a reading-, writing-, and thinking-intensive course with a schedule that requires time and attention devoted to our work together; meaningful **PRESENCE** is essential to the success of our collaborative endeavor and your individual growth. Your daily participation is 35% of your grade. Full participation means being rehearsed and prepared for class, working well with others, making unstructured class time *productive*, and creating a positive atmosphere in which to work. Complaints about the workload or other negativity about the class or your classmates will reduce your participation grade.

Students are expected to participate in all performance projects as well as be *supportive and respectful* audience members for their peers. Noncompliance will result in being asked to leave and being counted absent for that day.

Appropriate attire for class consists of comfortable, non-restricting clothes you can move around in. Coming to class in movement-restrictive attire, except for use in character work, will result in a loss of participation points. In addition, footwear must be sneakers, dance shoes, or bare feet. No sandals, heels, unwieldy boots, etc..

No gum or food/beverages, but please do bring water!

Please do not wander in and out of the classroom during class. We will take a break in the middle of this class. If you have an emergency and need to leave the room for any reason, let me know.

Given the nature of the course, hands-on exercises are necessary (breath awareness, alignment, stretches, etc.). Purpose and acknowledgement will always be addressed prior to the exercise, and students should report any discomfort or concern directly to the professor. The instructor should be made aware of any physical ailments prior to the exercise.

Besides excellent preparation, class participation also means **responding constructively, respectfully, and energetically to what others in class share**, that you work actively to stretch yourself intellectually, artistically, and spiritually. In short, you are expected to work diligently to contribute to the course's overall movement and to strive to make the experience productive for the entire company.

scene projects

Outside-of-class rehearsals are required for all performance work. Neglecting entirely or not taking this preparation seriously will negatively affect your participation and performance grades. It is the responsibility of the student to report scene partners who neglect their responsibilities. The sooner this issue is reported to the professor, the easier it will be to resolve it. Scene partners who continually fail to meet with their partners will be reassigned lengthy solo work for projects and finals, and their maximum score will automatically be reduced by a letter grade.

I am available for **outside coaching** at the students' initiative. In addition, the syllabus has built in coaching sessions for scene study with me. If you do not have a coaching session scheduled during those designated class sessions, you are still required to sign in for class and are expected to use class time for scene rehearsal.

final performance project

The final project for this course will culminate in two public performances of a fully staged play in the Black Box on **December 6-7** at 7:30 PM. You are responsible for attending evening rehearsals on **December 4-5** from 6-11 PM. If you have a conflict for any of these dates, you must notify me immediately.

written assignments

- *Weekly journal entries that respond thoughtfully and substantively to your work as an actor
- *Preparation Analyses
- *Final Actor Self-Evaluation

late written assignments

These are no fun for me to keep track of and only put you further behind. For each day beyond the scheduled due date, assignments will be penalized a third of a letter grade. **After a week, I will no longer accept the assignment, and it becomes a "0."** Again, if you become ill or the victim of emergency circumstances, please email me as soon as possible and stay in touch.

cell phone use

You are expected to use cell phones in a responsible, respectful, and professional manner: **turn them off at the beginning of class (i.e. unable to send/receive calls or text messages, ring, vibrate, or play music.** 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. **EVEN DURING BREAKS, IT IS IMPERATIVE YOU REFRAIN FROM**

CHECKING YOUR PHONE IN ORDER TO MAINTAIN FOCUS ON THERE HERE AND NOW. The nature of our endeavor necessitates mutual respect and dedicated attention during the too short time we have to work together. Violating any of these policies will be asked to leave promptly and counted absent for that day.

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 let me know as soon as possible in order so we may discuss them.

tech support

If you need assistance with D2L, call D2L Support toll free at 1-877-325-7778. Support is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Email and Chat options are also available on the "My Home" page after logging in to D2L. Other D2L resources including a D2L Orientation course for students are available on the same page. For technical questions regarding other software, hardware, network issues, EIU NetID/password, or Panthermail, contact the ITS Helpdesk at 217-581-4357 during regular business hours or submit a help ticket at <https://techsupport.eiu.edu/>. If you have a question regarding course content, contact your instructor.



THA 3344: Scene & Character Study

Dr. Chris

Wixson

course calendar

** Reading and writing assignments appear below on the day they are due. Please bring the appropriate texts (*Practical Handbook*, hard copies of scenes, and scripts) to class.

- August 21 "The Job of the Actor" / Warm-up and Actioning
Read: *Practical* pp. 3-7 and 13-18 ;
Actions pp. xiii-xxi and xxx-xxxiii (D2L);
course syllabus/schedule (D2L)
****Bring *Practical Handbook* to class**
- 23 Review of Stanislavski / "Analyzing a Scene"
Read: *Practical* pp. 19-34;
Acting: Onstage and Off pp. 104-128 (D2L)
****Bring hard copy of assigned scene to class**
- 28 Read: *Practical* pp. 40-45; "The Truth of the Moment"
Rehearsal / Workshop assigned scene from Will Eno's *Middletown* (2010)
****Bring hard copy of assigned scene to class**
- 30 "Externals"
Scene memorized / Final preparation analysis due Friday 5:00 (D2L)
Read: *Practical* pp. 48-54
Rehearsal / Workshop of assigned scene
- September 4 Scene performances / Scene assigned
****Complete and Submit Casting Rubric Form by Wednesday 9/5 at noon**
- 6 Read: Patrick Marber's *Closer* (1997) or Jackie Sibblies Drury's *Really* (2016)
Rehearsal / Workshop of assigned scene
- 11 Rehearsal / Workshop of assigned scene
- 13 Scene memorized / Preparation analysis due Friday by 5:00 (D2L)
- 18 Scene performances
- 20 Read: Performance Project Play
Table Read Rehearsal
Submit Journal entries by 11:59 by Friday, September 21 (D2L)

	25	Table Read Rehearsal / Etiquette and Manners
	27	Table Read Rehearsal / Preparation analysis due by 12:30
October	2	Rehearsal / Act One
	4	Rehearsal / Act One / Act One "Creation and Re-creation" Due
	9	Rehearsal / Act One
	11	Rehearsal / Act One / "Given Circumstances" Research Pack Due
	16	Rehearsal / Off Book for Act One Scene One
	18	Rehearsal / Off Book for Act One Scene Two
	23	Rehearsal / Act Two
	25	Rehearsal / Act Two / Act Two "Creation and Re-creation" Due
	30	Rehearsal / Act Two
November	1	Rehearsal / Act Two
	6	Rehearsal / Off Book for Act Two Scene One
	8	Rehearsal / Off Book for Act Two Scene Two
	13	Rehearsal / Full Run
	15	Rehearsal / Full Run
		Second Journal Entry Batch due via D2L by 11:59 PM November 16 th

HAPPY THANKSGIVING BREAK!!!!

	27	Rehearsal / Full Run
	29	Rehearsal / Full Run
December	4	Individual Conferences / Troubleshooting
	6	Individual Conferences / Troubleshooting

Final Project tech rehearsals and run-throughs: 6 PM-11 PM on 12/4 & 12/5

Black Box Performances: Call time 6 PM; 7:30 curtain on 12/6 & 12/7

**Final self-evaluation / Third journal entry batch due by 11:59 PM December 12th (D2L)

PROMPTS FOR MAJOR ASSIGNMENTS

Weekly journal entries:

Each should respond thoughtfully and substantively to your work as an actor and should contain *at least*:

1. a page responding to your work and the work of your classmates.
2. a page responding to readings – the textbooks, plays, etc. I want to see that you are absorbing and thinking about theatrical texts and concepts.

**All entries must be dated, use Times New Roman 12 font, double spacing, and 1 inch margins all around. The heading for each entry need contain *only* your name and the date.

**Entries will be collected three times during the semester; each bundle is worth ten points each to make thirty points total.

Preparation Analysis:

- 1) Complete Stanislavski's "4Ws and an H" Character Questionnaire
(using the script as the *only* guide)
- 2) Break the scene/act down into beats/units and objectives
- 3) Action each beat and identify the through-line

**Analyses will be collected three times during the semester; each bundle is worth ten points each to make thirty points total.

Creation and Re-creation:

- 1) Understand to the story of your character (different than the story of the play as a whole). No judgment. No pre-conceived ideas. No assumptions. Give the story a title. Tell the story in the third person, in your own words. First, a single sentence. Then, a paragraph. Then, a page. Then three pages. Then five pages. Develop revealing details — turning points and inner life. Give each a new title. No repetition of words and phrasing.
- 2) Divide the longest version into several parts, each with a title.
- 3) Return to the script and try to find a single word/phrase it contains to indicate every part, a word that, for you, best embodies that part. Try to visualize the journey that leads from one word/phrase to another.
- 4) Re-tell the story of that journey in the first person. (50 points for each)

"Given Circumstances" Research Pack:

A character's Given Circumstances consist not only of their prior formative experiences but also the conditions of the world they inhabit. Often, these are beyond the personal experience of the actor so require extensive preparation in the form of research. To supplement the context resources, gather relevant resources (images, video, audio, and texts) that facilitate deeper understanding of your character and enable "filling in" of their inner and outer lives. Compose a bibliography of resources (containing print

and web sources); for each entry, write at least five or six sentences *specifically* identifying how they were useful to the development of your character. Further specifics will be covered in class. (70 points)

Final Self-evaluation

In 4-5 pages, chronicle and assess your own work and development as an actor during the semester and share goals for future development as an actor (70 points). Please use 1-inch margins all around, double spacing throughout, and Times New Roman 12 font. **Due December 12th via D2L dropbox by 11:59 PM.**

Partnered Scenes:

Students will prepare two scenes (approx. four to five minutes) from a contemporary play from the Approved Play List (see below). Scenes must be fully memorized, rehearsed, and staged. **Scenes chosen should NOT have been previously used in any performance, audition, or class setting. To do so is a violation of the Student Standards Code.** (75 points each)

****Students are responsible for securing copies of plays on the Approved Play List chosen for writing/scene assignments. *Closer* should have come with your TRS books while the other plays can be accessed via D2L. Please produce a hard copy of scenes for annotation and in-class work. No extensions will be offered.**

FIRST SCENE (8/21-9/4):

Scenes 3, 5, and 11 (1M-1F) / scenes 4 and 12 (2F) from Melissa James Gibson, *Placebo* (2015)

Scenes 1.5, 1.8, and 2.6 (1M-1F) from Will Eno, *Middletown* (2010)

SECOND SCENE (9/4-9/18):

Scenes 2 and 11 (1M-1F) from Jackie Sibblies Drury, *Really* (2016)

Excerpt any of the M-F scenes / pp. 88-93 (2F) from Patrick Marber, *Closer* (1997)

****Don't worry about the British accents.**

Final Performance Project

Students are required to be fully participating ensemble members in the final project. Grade will depend on rehearsal, preparation, and role research throughout the semester as well as on the two tech rehearsals and two performances. (200 points)