

Course Proposal for General Education:
THA 2140G Introduction to the Theatre

1. Catalog Description

THA 2140G. Introduction to the Theatre. (3-0-3) F, S. INTRO THEATRE

A general introduction to all aspects of theatre as a live performance and visual art. Outside viewing required. No prerequisites. Writing active. Cultural Diversity.

2. Student learning objectives

a. Student learning objectives of the general education program:

- ❑ Ability to write and speak effectively:
 - ❑ Since the course is writing active, students will be encouraged to improve their writing skills. In terms of speaking, this course is a discussion-centered class, wherein students are encouraged to exchange ideas and voice informed opinions. Some instructors may wish to include oral presentations as a project option.
- ❑ Ability to think critically:
 - ❑ Most of the written assignments are traditional “analysis papers” that focus on a selected narrow topic that students are asked to explore. For example, once terminology and concepts have been presented in readings and in discussions, students will be asked to apply terminology/concepts to an actual live production and analyze how terminology/concepts were employed in the production. In all cases, students will be asked to evaluate and analyze, based on materials presented in class or in readings.
- ❑ Function as responsible citizens:
 - ❑ The course will incorporate plays written in various periods and nations. As a result, students will be exposed to widely divergent cultures and viewpoints. Frequently, productions viewed center around an ethical or moral question—or treat a “life issue”. Being exposed to plays that treat larger issues will certainly make student more “aware” global citizens.

b. Additional student learning objectives

- ❑ As a result of taking this course, students should be able to
 - 1) Understand and use terminology and concepts associated with dramatic literature (e.g., plot, character, dramatic action, rising action, climax, etc.)
 - 2) Understand and use terminology and concepts associated with the live theatre (e.g., proscenium, thrust, and arena staging; such theatrical conventions as blackouts, curtains, and the “fourth wall”; “power areas” of the stage; etc.)
 - 3) Appreciate the steps necessary for taking a play from “page to stage”
 - 4) Recognize and discuss the role/contributions of such artists as scenic, costume, and lighting designers; actors and directors; and the playwright—as seen in one or more actual live productions;
 - 5) Make informed decisions concerning quality in theatrical presentations
 - 6) Become more informed, in general, on issues concerning the arts.

3. Course outline

The following topics in this sample course outline will be covered in 15 weeks of 45 fifty-minute class periods. (Topics may not appear in the order given below; they may be shuffled around to make

maximum use of the Theatre Department's production schedule in a given semester. However, topics indicated below are traditionally a part of an introduction to theatre course.)

Week One

- ❑ Orientation, syllabus, requirements
- ❑ What is live theatre? How does it differ from motion pictures and television?
- ❑ It ain't real, it's HAND-MADE: How theatre differs from *real life*.
- ❑ The dramatic/theatrical in real life.

Week Two

- ❑ Lies like the truth—How theatre achieves some of its effects: Theatrical Conventions (e.g., stage, auditorium, curtain, scenery, lights, costumes, makeup, actors, technicians, etc.
- ❑ What does “theatrical” mean? What constitutes the “dramatic”?
- ❑ Overview of how to read a play: envisioning words on the page.

Weeks Three and Four

- ❑ Where it all starts: The Playwright.
 - ❑ Role of the playwright in the past and the present
 - ❑ Shaping the raw material of life into drama on the page
 - ❑ Terminology: Plot, character, action, thought. Dramatic structure, major dramatic question, inciting incident, rising action (complications), climax, denouement. Protagonist, antagonist. Theme.
 - ❑ Mistakes commonly made by new playwrights
 - ❑ Ways playwriting differs from screenwriting
- ❑ Play #1 Reading it backwards—i.e., Taking apart what the playwright put together (Techniques of play analysis—applied to the study play—using terminology presented above in analyzing the study play.)

Week Five

- ❑ The playwright as social critic: Read/discuss a historical play (e.g., Moliere's *Tartuffe*) that contains a strong social message.
- ❑ Why social messages in the theatre?
- ❑ Can entertainment and social commentary co-exist? (Student writing.)
- ❑ Why is this play still performed?
- ❑ Written assignment on the topic above.

Weeks Six and Seven

- ❑ Who gets the play after it's finished: The Director as interpretive artist
 - ❑ Why have a director? (Historical overview of the rise of the director as a major force in modern theatre.)
 - ❑ What does a good director *do*?
 - ❑ What does a *bad* director do?
- ❑ View EIU Production #1
 - ❑ Discussion of dramatic techniques discussed above as seen in the live production
 - ❑ Discussion of director's choices in the production
 - ❑ If possible, director addresses the group for a Q&A session

Weeks Eight, Nine, and Ten

- ❑ Design in the modern theatre
 - ❑ Why *design* set, costumes, light?
 - ❑ Why is design necessary?
 - ❑ The role of visual art in achieving dramatic and theatrical effects

- Elements of visual art: line, form, shape, color, mass, texture
- Contributions of the production team
 - Chiseling out the space: The scenic designer
 - Presenting/delineating the character: The costume designer
 - Shaping/enhancing the mood and feel: The lighting designer
 - Ways these artists work together
 - Student writing: Choose a movie nearly everyone has seen and analyze how any *one* of these shaped the audience's perceptions of the environment or characters
- See EIU Production #2 and analyze the contributions of any two of the design elements above—using techniques mentioned above.

Weeks Eleven, Twelve, Thirteen

- Forms of drama: classical tragedy, modern tragedy, comedy, and mixed forms
- Classical tragedy (i.e., classical antiquity)
 - Who cares about classical tragedy?
 - What classical tragedy tells us about ancient societies
 - Earmarks of classical tragedy (Aristotle and others)
 - Read and discuss a classical tragedy (e.g., *Agamemnon*, *Oedipus Rex*, or similar) write upon a selected aspect of the play
 - Why is this play still performed? What does it say to people in the 21st Century? Anything? Nothing? Why or why not?
- Modern tragedy
 - Is modern tragedy a contradiction in terms?
 - Arthur Miller's statement on modern tragedy
 - How classical and modern tragedy might differ
 - Read and discuss a potential candidate for "Modern Tragedy" status (e.g., *Death of a Salesman*, *Streetcar Named Desire*, appropriate play by Eugene O'Neill, etc.) Write a paper presenting a case for the play's tragic stature—or not
 - Does it make any *difference* whether it's a tragedy or not?
- Comedy—ancient and modern
 - Comedy isn't necessarily "funny"
 - Earmarks of comedy: verbal humor, physical humor
 - Read a comedy, preferably one that would contain physical humor (e.g., *Lysistrata* or an appropriate play by Shakespeare), and envision how physical humor would enhance the comic effect
 - Uses of comedy (see below)
 - Comedy as social commentary or social "corrective"
 - Discuss contemporary films that use comedy as social commentary or "corrective"

Week Fourteen

- Putting it all together
 - Read an appropriate play (or a selection of 3-4 plays) and then have students *present* (possibly as a group) their ideas for staging, visuals, and what they want the audience to come away with. (The play *must* have some social commentary.)
- Week Fifteen
 - The art that everyone knows about: acting
 - What actors do and *don't* do

- ❑ Things very few people know about acting (e.g., training, discipline, skills required to become an actor)
- ❑ Some differences between film acting and theatre acting
- ❑ What makes a good actor good (student writing)
- ❑ The Media and Reality in the acting profession

4. Evaluation of student learning

a. Sample List of Assignments and Grading:

Quizzes	10%
Short-writes	25%
EIU Production papers	25%
Exams	<u>40%</u>
Total	100%

b. The course satisfies the criteria for “writing active” in that:

- ❑ The course includes frequent, brief writing. Quizzes are envisioned as information retrieval devices or checks of students’ understanding of concepts presented. Short-writes are envisioned either as students’ reactions or interpretations of concepts and information presented in class or brief analyses of selected, narrow aspects of plays or chapters.
- ❑ Production papers (usually 3-4 pages) ask students to analyze or comment upon theatrical techniques/concepts studied in class—and *seen* in actual live productions. Examinations will be a mixture of short essay and short answer questions.

5. Rationale

- a. This course will be placed in the Fine Arts segment of the general education program.
- b. THA 2140G is best taught at the freshman/sophomore level because it is a *basic introductory and appreciation* course—not an in-depth exploration of separate facets of theatre. There are no prerequisites.
- c. This course is not similar to any existing EIU courses.
- d. This course is not required in any major or minor, nor will any programs be affected by its adoption.

6. Implementation

- a. Any instructor in the Theatre Arts Department can teach this course.
- b. Texts: Robert Cohen, *Theatre*, 3rd (or current) edition, 1994; plus one of any number of drama anthologies currently in TRS.
- c. Students will be required to attend three EIU theatre productions. Ticket price will not exceed \$20.00.
- d. Fall 2000

7. Community College Transfer

A community college course may be judged equivalent to this course.

8. Date approved by the department: 4/3/00

9. Date approved by the college curriculum committee: 4/12/00

10. Date approved by CAA _____

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