THEATRE ARTS DEPARTMENT
New Course Proposal for Theatre Arts Major

1. Catalog description

   a. Course number: THA 3756
   b. Title: Twentieth Century Theatre
   c. Meeting times and credit: 3-0-3
   d. Term to be offered: S
   e. Short title: 20th Cent Theatr
   f. Course description: Social, political, economic, philosophical, and artistic currents that shaped 20th century Western non-musical theatre, drama, and design. Attention given to defining moments and persons in the period. Writing intensive.
   g. Prerequisites: ENG 1001G, ENG 1002G, THA 3752G

2. Objectives of the Course

   a. To understand and appreciate how selected major figures (playwrights, directors, designers, producers, and theorists) shaped 20th century theatre.
   b. To understand and appreciate how major social, economic, and political upheavals influenced theatrical and dramatic developments in the period.
   c. To understand and appreciate how selected philosophical developments influenced theatre and drama in the period (e.g., existentialism and the theatre of the absurd).
   d. To distinguish among the plethora of "isms" in the period, so that students can define and distinguish among them-and recognize a particular "ism" through reading a play or viewing theatrical design elements.
   e. To draw correlations between movements in the visual arts and theatre/drama.
   f. To help students understand and appreciate the broad diversity of forces that are affecting the American theatre today (e.g., film and television, popular culture, and the theatre/drama of such groups as African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, women, gays and lesbians, etc.
   g. To propose reasons the theatre has survived, or ways it can survive, in an age of electronics and rising costs.
   h. This course is writing intensive. Over 35% of the grade is based on writing, and at least one assignment will be revised.

3. Outline of the Course

   The following topics will be covered in 15 weeks of 45 fifty-minute class periods.

   Week 1: Review of the turn of the century
   Orientation to the course, syllabus, requirements and expectations, exams and assignments, grading, etc.
   Review of late-nineteenth century theatre, drama, and theatrical practice; review of realism and naturalism; review of scenic, costuming, and acting conventions; review of the role of early directors.
   Review of seminal "thinkers" having a profound affect on theatre: Darwin, Marx, Wagner, Freud, Zola, etc.
   Reading: Brockett, chapters 1, 2, 3.
   If desirable, discuss a late 19th century play students have already read (e.g. an Ibsen, Chekhov, or Shaw) and note typical dramatic and theatrical devices found in the play-or how that play deviated from typical late 19th century practice.

   Week 2: Early revolts against realism and the commercial theatre
   Reasons for the revolt
Read Brockett, chapter 4
Visual and dramatic manifestations of nonrealism
Read one or more representative plays by August Strindberg, e.g. Ghost Sonata, Dream Play and/or others, depending on students' background (e.g., Alfred Jarry's Ubu Roi).

Week 3: Modernist trends in directing and design
Read Brockett, chapters 6 and 8.
Topics: Adolphe Appia, Edward Gordon Craig, Max Reinhardt, Vsevolod Meyerhold.
Study visuals pertaining to the above, note how their practices differed, and their influence on succeeding artists.

Weeks 4-5: Expressionism and Dadaism in theatre
Read Brockett, chapter 7.
Topics: World War I and its influence on society and the visual arts; how the latter trends affected theatre through Dadaism and expressionism. If time, show segment of The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari as an example of German expressionism.
Read one or more representative expressionistic plays and discuss how these manifest expressionism in content and theatrical expression (e.g., Georg Kaiser's From Morn to Midnight, Karel Capek's R.U.R., Elmer Rice's The Adding Machine, Eugene O'Neill's The Hairy Ape, etc.)
Influence of expressionism on later dramaturgy and design.

Week 6: The Unique Phenomenon of Luigi Pirandello
Read germane portions of Brockett, chapter 9 and introductions to the plays below.
Read and discuss Pirandello's Six Characters in Search of an Author and, if time and deemed desirable, Henry IV.
In conjunction with the above, discuss relativity in his plays and then-current theories on language.
Assess Pirandello's contributions to theatre and drama.

Weeks 7-8: Theory and Practice of Bertolt Brecht
Read Brockett, chapter 10.
Social, political, and theatrical context of Brecht
Read and discuss any two of Brecht's major works: Mother Courage and Her Children, Caucasian Chalk Circle, Good Person of Setzuan, Galileo, Three Penny Opera, etc.
Discuss Brecht's concept of epic theatre and how those theories and techniques appear in his plays.
Influences on Brecht; Brecht's enormous influence on subsequent theatre and drama.

Weeks 9-10: Existentialism and the Theatre of the Absurd
Read Brockett, chapter 12.
World War II and the following decade as central to the development of the Absurd
Discuss existentialism and read Jean-Paul Sartre's No Exit as an example of an existentialist (but not absurdist) play.
Discuss: "earmarks" of absurdist plays; how absurdist plays differ from existential but non-absurdist plays; how absurdist plays incorporate elements of existentialism; visuals in absurdist plays.
Read and discuss two absurdist plays by two different authors: e.g., Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot or Endgame; Eugene Ionesco's The
Bald Soprano or Rhinoceros or comparable; Edward Albee's The American Dream; etc.
The aim of the absurdists; their accomplishments and influence on subsequent theatre and drama.

Weeks 11-12: Redefining the boundaries of theatre in the 1960s
Social and political context of the era.
Read Brockett, chapters 13 and 14.
Discuss Antonin Artaud's influence on the period
Focus on a few representative groups/persons, e.g. The Living Theatre, the Open Theatre, Jerzy Grotowski, Richard Schechner, Peter Brook, etc.
Where available, show videos of the groups' works, as few produced "usual" drama that can be understood through reading a play text.
The aims of the 1960s practitioners, including philosophical orientation (e.g., the Living Theatre's "strident pacifism").
Their influence on subsequent theatre and drama.

Weeks 13-15: Theatre in the Postmodern World
Read Brockett, chapter 15
Decentralization of the theatre in America; comparison of the role of theatre here and abroad.
Diversity of voices in the American theatre as evidence of growing awareness of diversity both here and abroad.
Read and discuss two plays to be selected by the class (or availability in anthology); these plays should reflect the diversity of the contemporary theatrical scene. Examples:
  any of August Wilson's plays as reflections of the African-American experience;
  any of Luis Valdez's plays, as reflections of the Hispanic-American experience;
  any of David Henry Hwang's plays, as reflections of the Asian-American experience;
  any plays written by the following women: Marsha Norman, Beth Henley, or Wendy Wasserstein.
Also in this category are plays by Athol Fugard, the South African playwright whose works made Westerners aware of Apartheid. Many of these are commonly available in current anthologies, as is Tony Kushner's Angels in America, which deals with problems faced by the gay community in the United States.

Three days are allowed during the semester above for test or in-class writing days.

Assignments and grading:
  Written quizzes----------10%
  Essay midterm exam------30%
  Essay final exam---------30%
  Research/critical paper--30%

4. Implementation

a) Faculty members: J. Eisenhour, J. Oertling, D. Wolski, J. Wolski

b) Additional costs:
  Purchase of a study guide, no more than $4.
  Possible purchase of additional play texts, unless anthology offers sufficient selection. No more than $15.

d) Term first offered: Spring 2003

5. Rationale

a) Purpose and need:
1) Background: For years, the Department has attempted to get all of theatre history-from prehistoric beginnings to the contemporary theatre-into two three-hour courses; and for years, students and faculty have recognized the futility of this. Thus, this course attempts to address the problem by removing the twentieth century from the other two courses and placing it in a course by itself. (The other two courses have been reconfigured to allow greater "breathing room" therein.)
2) The need is obvious: There is too much material to cover in only two courses. This means faculty rush to get everything in, give short shrift to important material, or simply neglect important material.
3) The purpose, then, is to give greater attention to the more recent developments in theatre history.

b) Justification for the level and prerequisites:
1) Given the amount of reading and the expected sophistication of the writing assignments, the 3000 level is appropriate.
2) The prerequisites of ENG 1001G and ENG 1002G are appropriate because of the number and the sophistication of the writing assignments; THA 3752G is an appropriate prerequisite because it immediately precedes this course; without an understanding of the immediate antecedents, students might find the new course difficult to comprehend.

c) Similarity to exiting courses:
Students in ENG 3606 (Modern Drama) read some of the same plays and may (or may not) receive some of the same theoretical information. But the focus of ENG 3606 is on the plays as literature; the proposed course uses the plays as exemplars of movements and trends in theatre history and practice, not necessarily as literary objects. Thus, the focus of the two courses is different.

d) This course will serve as an elective in the revised Theatre Arts program.

6. Community College Transfer
A community college course will not be judged equivalent to this course.

7. Date approved by the department: April 9, 2001

8. Date approved by the College curriculum committee: April 30, 2001

9. Date approved by CAA: July 19, 2001