

Course Syllabus

Course Information

THEA 1310.001 Understanding Theatre Fall 2025

Instructor: Shahrzad Hamzeh

Class Hours: 4:00 - 6:45 PM Every Monday

Location: PHY 1.202

Professor Contact Information

Office: JO 5.410D

Email Address: shahrzad.hamzeh@utdallas.edu

Office Hours: available by appointment.

Prerequisite: None!

Course Description

The various aspects of theater are surveyed. Topics include plays, playwrights, directing, acting, theaters, artists, and technicians. Students will explore theatre through the lenses of culture, performance, voice of the artist, and creative participation. Students will also read and analyze plays and performances during our discussions and projects.

Student Learning Objectives/Outcomes

Students will be given a broad and general background in theatre including production elements, history and criticism. Students will attend live performances and/or view videos of plays.

Critical Thinking (CT) – To include creative thinking, innovation, inquiry, and analysis, Evaluation and synthesis of information

Communication (COM) – To include effective development, interpretation, and Expression of ideas through written, oral, and visual communication.

Teamwork (TW) - To include the ability to consider different points of view and to work effectively with others to support a shared purpose or goal.

Social Responsibility (SR) – To include intercultural competence, knowledge of civic responsibility, and the ability to engage effectively in regional, national, and global communities.

Students will be able to:

(1) Demonstrate the ability to identify, discuss, and apply the nature of theatre, performance, style, and drama;

(2) Demonstrate the ability to give and identify examples of a range of cultures and periods of theatre in relationship to society; and

(3) To use the vocabularies, approaches, and analytic tools covered during this course to create, appreciate, and write about theatre.

Required Textbooks and Materials

[*Theatre: A Very Short Introduction* — Marvin Carlson](#) (Full book)

[*The Empty Space* — Peter Brook](#) (Ch. 1 + 2)

[*Theatre of the Oppressed* — Augusto Boal](#) (Forward + Ch. 4)

[*At the Threshold* — Rana Esfandiary](#) (Ch. 1)

[*Impro' Improvisation and the Theatre* — Keith Johnstone](#) (Ch. 3)

Two plays for performance/study: [*A Raisin in the Sun* \(Lorraine Hansberry\)](#) and [*Constellations* \(Nick Payne\)](#)

Pens and Pencils/A notebook

Assignments & Academic Calendar

Date	Topic	Notes
8/25/2025	Introductions / The Syllabus/ What is Theatre?	Reading: Carlson, A Very Short Introduction, Ch.1.
9/1/2025	What is Performance Art?/ Origins of Performance, Theatre as Ritual	Guest Lecturer: Dr Irene Gesarah Reading: Carlson, A Very Short Introduction, Ch.2. Ancient Greek Theatre Origin and history of theater Thespis
9/8/2025	Theatre Traditions	Reading: Carlson, A Very Short Introduction, Ch.3. Watch The World of Commedia dell'Arte

9/15/2025	The Differences Between a Play and a Novel/ Actor's Tools	Guest Lecturer: Local Author Rose Johnson Reading: Brook, The Empty Space, Ch,2. Actor's Tools
9/22/2025	Playwriting	Terence Martin International Education Advisor will come in to talk about Study Abroad Opportunities Reading: Esfandiary, At The Threshold, Ch,1. The Art of Playwriting: A Guide What Makes Playwriting Different Than Other Types of Writing
9/29/2025	Directing / Musical Theatre	Reading: Brook, The Empty Space, Ch, 1. Blocking 101 Director Watch Understanding the Role of the Director What does a director actually do? A Brief History of Musical Theater
10/6/2025	Auditions and Pitches/ Dramaturgy	Writers will pitch for the Directors Actors will audition for Directors Designers join teams Reading: Carlson, Theatre a very short introduction, Ch,5. WHAT IS DRAMATURGY?
10/13/2025	Design Foundations	Reading: What does a Lighting Designer do? What does a Costume Designer do? Set Designer What is a sound designer for theatre? types of theatre stages Types of Stage Layouts
10/20/2025	Play discussion and Analysis	Reading: A Raisin in the Sun by Lorraine Hansberry Background and Criticism of A Raisin in the Sun The Black Ambition of A Raisin in the Sun
10/27/2025	Halloween Fashion Show	Writers add story/monologue snippets. Designers create costumes. Directors stage and coordinate flow. Actors perform on "runway" with mini-scenes.

11/3/2025	Story Telling & Improvisation	Reading: Carlson, A Very Short Introduction, Ch.4. Johnstone, Impro, Ch 3, Narrative Skills.
11/10/2025	Play discussion and Analysis	Reading: Constellations by Nick Payne Constellations: Theatre Review A Review of "Constellations" at American Players Theatre
11/17/2025	Theatre of the Oppressed	Reading: Boal, Theatre of the Oppressed, Forward + Ch 4. Image Theatre
11/24/2025	Thanksgiving Break!	No Class!
12/1/2025	Final Presentations	
12/8/2025	Final Presentations	

Grading Policy

Participation & Engagement 20

Group Collaborations 10

Journal Keeping 10

Halloween Fashion Show 20

Final Group Presentation 40

Play attendance 5 Extra Credit

WEIGHTED GRADE SCALE (%)

95 - 100 : A+

90 - 94 : A

82 - 89 : B+

80 - 81 : B

72- 79 : C+

70 - 71 : C

67 - 69 : D+

60 - 66 : D

0 – 59, Plagiarism, No work : F

Grade Breakdown

Participation & Engagement – 20 points

What counts:

- Attendance: Being present and on time for every class.
- Active involvement in discussions: Asking questions, sharing ideas, giving constructive feedback.
- Daily in-class tasks: Participating fully in improvisation exercises, mini-scenes, movement or dance exercises, and design/technical activities.
- Why it matters: Theatre is a practical, experiential art form — showing up and actively engaging is how you understand the craft.
- How it's measured: Points awarded weekly based on effort, focus, and collaboration.

Group Collaborations – 15 points

What counts:

- Working effectively in your assigned role: Writer, Director, Designer, or Actor.
- Contributing to group planning, problem-solving, and decision-making.
- Respecting team members and communicating clearly.
- Meeting deadlines for group tasks or exercises.
- Why it matters: Theatre is inherently collaborative — success depends on how well you can work with others to realize a shared vision.
- How it's measured: Points awarded after group milestones (e.g., auditions, design exercises, or midterm rehearsal) based on team contribution and professionalism.

Journal Keeping – 10 points

What counts:

- Using your notebook creatively: Writing/doodling/drawing/coloring/scraping/ collaging etc.
- Bringing your notebook to every class.
- using it to take notes of the lecture and activities
- Making it personal and unique to you.
- Why it matters: Theatre reflects everyday life. To understand theatre we need to observe ourselves – our thoughts, movements, and reactions, even in small, random moments like noting a photo in the newspaper.
- How it's measured: you do not need to share the content inside. I will check that you have your notebook each session. I will glance through it at the end of the semester to see it has been actively used.

Halloween Fashion Show – 20 points

What counts:

- Creativity: Original ideas for costumes, story snippets, mini-scenes.
- Execution: How well the group implements the plan on “runway day.”
- Integration of theatre concepts: Acting, design, storytelling, and collaboration should all come together.
- Teamwork: Everyone contributes according to their role.
- Why it matters: This is a hands-on project where students apply the theatre skills learned so far.
- How it’s measured: Rubric-based: 5 pts creativity, 5 pts execution, 5 pts integration, 5 pts teamwork.

Final Group Presentation – Student-Written Play – 40 points

What counts:

- Script/Story quality: Clear narrative, compelling characters, engaging dialogue.
- Performance/Acting: Convincing portrayal of characters, clear voice, and stage presence.
- Design Integration: Set, costume, lighting, and sound support the story effectively.
- Direction & Coordination: Smooth staging, pacing, and teamwork in presenting the play.
- Overall Impact / Creativity: Memorable performance, demonstrates understanding of theatre principles.
- Why it matters: This is the culminating project that demonstrates your knowledge, creativity, and ability to collaborate.
- How it’s measured: Rubric-based: 10 pts script/story, 10 pts acting, 10 pts design, 10pts directing/team coordination.

Extra Credit

Throughout the semester you will have the opportunity to earn extra credit. I understand that life happens! If you are concerned about your progress and keeping up with course materials, please do not hesitate and contact me. I will only be able to make arrangements and accommodate you if you are in communication with me.

Everyone starts with an A. Your grades can only go down by not doing the work, not showing up, and not participating in class.

***DEADLINES:** All works need to be received before or by the deadline.

***INCOMPLETES:** Incompletes works will not be accepted.

***LATES:** The maximum possible grade for late works will be automatically down-scaled per letter-grade every week until submission is received or no points are available.

***PLAGIARISM:** Result in automatic failure for the entire semester.

HELP? Email is the best way to contact me to set up individual meetings: I will be available for feedback, studio visits, brainstorm sessions, rehearsals, guided research—happy to help clarify, advise, or problem-solve with you.

For more information please visit <https://studentsuccess.utdallas.edu/programs/writing-center/>
Withdrawal from Class:

The administration of this institution has set deadlines for withdrawal of any college level courses. These dates and times are published in that semester's course catalog. Administration procedures must be followed. It is the student's responsibility to handle withdrawal requirements from any class. In other words, the instructor cannot drop or withdraw any student. The students must do the proper paperwork to ensure that they will not receive a final grade of "F" in a course if they choose not to attend the class once you are enrolled.

Student Grievance Procedures

Procedures for student grievances are found in Title V, Rules on Student Services and Activities, of the university's Handbook of Operating Procedures. In attempting to resolve any student grievance regarding grades, evaluations, or other fulfillments of academic responsibility, it is the obligation of the student first to make a serious effort to resolve the matter with the instructor, supervisor, administrator, or committee with whom the grievance originates (here after called "the respondent"). Individual faculty members retain primary responsibility for assigning grades and evaluations. If the matter cannot be resolved at that level, the grievance must be submitted in writing to the respondent with a copy to the respondent's School Dean. If the matter is not resolved by the written response provided by the respondent, the student may submit a written appeal to the School Dean. If the grievance is not resolved by the School Dean's decision, the student may make a written appeal to the Dean of Graduate or Undergraduate Education, and the dean will appoint and convene an Academic Appeals Panel. The decision of the Academic Appeals Panel is final. The results of the academic appeals process will be distributed to all involved parties. Copies of these rules and regulations are available to students in the Office of the Dean of Students, where staff members are available to assist students in interpreting the rules and regulations.

Incomplete Grade Policy

As per university policy, incomplete grades will be granted only for work unavoidably missed at the semester's end and only if 70% of the course work has been completed. An incomplete grade must be resolved within eight (8) weeks from the first day of the subsequent long semester. If the required work to complete the course and to remove the incomplete grade is not submitted by the specified deadline, the incomplete grade is changed automatically to a grade of F.

Disability Services

The goal of Disability Services is to provide students with disabilities educational opportunities equal to those of their non-disabled peers. Disability Services is located in AD 2. 224. Hours are Monday-Friday 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM. For more information please visit

<https://studentaccess.utdallas.edu/>

Religious Holy Days

The University of Texas at Dallas will excuse a student from class or other required activities for the travel to and observance of a religious holy day for a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property tax under Section 11.20, Tax Code, Texas Code Annotated. The student is encouraged to notify the instructor or activity sponsor as soon as possible regarding the absence, preferably in advance of the assignment. The student, so excused, will be allowed to take the exam or complete the assignment within a reasonable time after the absence: a period equal to the length of the absence, up to a maximum of one week. A student who notifies the instructor and completes any missed exam or assignment may not be penalized for the absence. A student who fails to complete the exam or assignment within the prescribed period may receive a failing grade for that exam or assignment. However, since I drop the five lowest quiz grades, no make-up quizzes will be allowed. If a student or an instructor disagrees about the nature of the absence [i.e., for the purpose of observing a religious holy day] or if there is similar disagreement about whether the student has been given a reasonable time to complete any missed assignments or examinations, either the student or the instructor may request a ruling from the chief executive officer of the institution, or his or her designee. The chief executive officer or designee must take into account the legislative intent of TEC 51.911(b), and the student and instructor will abide by the decision of the chief executive officer or designee.

Class Materials

The instructor may provide class materials that will be made available to all students registered for this class as they are intended to supplement the classroom experience. These materials may be downloaded during the course; however, these materials are for registered students' use only. Classroom materials may not be reproduced or shared with those not in classes, or uploaded to other online environments except to implement an approved Office of Student Accessibility

accommodation. Failure to comply with these University requirements is a violation of the Student Code of Conduct.

Class Participation

Regular class participation is expected. Students who fail to participate in class regularly are inviting scholastic difficulty. A portion of the grade for this course is directly tied to your participation in this class. It also includes engaging in group or other activities during class that solicit your feedback on homework assignments, readings, or materials covered in the lectures (and/or labs). Class participation is documented by faculty. Successful participation is defined as consistently adhering to University requirements, as presented in this syllabus. Failure to comply with these University requirements is a violation of the Student Code of Conduct.

CLASSROOM PROTOCOL

Students should not be disruptive during the lecture. They will be asked to leave the class and will be marked absent for the day. If the students are caught engaging in any of the following activities:

- Talking. Talking is not allowed during lectures as it interferes with other students' ability to hear.
- Using cell phones for any reason. Yes, ANY reason. (If the students are responsible for another person's care, please let the instructor know and an accommodation will be made.)
- Using your laptop for anything other than taking notes. (It is STRONGLY encouraged to take handwritten notes.)

There will be no initial warning for any of the above behavior; consider this your warning for the semester.

ATTENDANCE

Attendance is mandatory. Students have to show up to get a passing grade. Students are permitted 1 unexcused absence. The students' final grade will be lowered by 10 points for each unexcused absence. Excused absences include serious illness or legitimate family emergencies. "I didn't feel good", is not an excused absence. If the student is absent for a pop quiz or A group presentation, they will not be able to make up the grade without a doctor's note.

EXCUSED ABSENCES

These include religious holidays sanctioned campus activities (athletics, ROTC), Job/internship interviews, family emergencies, and illness. If the students have a question about what constitutes an excused absence, please consult the instructor. Please clear all excused absences (that aren't emergencies) with the instructor beforehand. The students will need to provide documentation for all absences except religious holidays.

Note: Documentation will NOT be accepted after the final day of classes. If the students miss a Lecture, it's their responsibility to find out what they have missed. The instructor will provide students with reasonable accommodations for completing missed quizzes and the like.

NOTE TAKING

- The students may take handwritten notes.
- The students may take notes on their laptops.

Class Recordings

Students are expected to follow appropriate University policies and maintain the security of passwords used to access recorded lectures. Unless the Office of Student Access Ability has approved the student to record the instruction, students are expressly prohibited from recording any part of this course. Recordings may not be published, reproduced, or shared with those not in the class, or uploaded to other online environments except to implement an approved Office of Student Access Ability accommodation. Failure to comply with these University requirements is a violation of the Student Code of Conduct.

Comet Creed

This creed was voted on by the UT Dallas student body in 2014. It is a standard that Comets choose to live by and encourage others to do the same:

“As a Comet, I pledge honesty, integrity, and service in all that I do.”

Academic Support Resources

The information contained in the following link lists the University's academic support resources for all students. Please see <http://go.utdallas.edu/academic-support-resources>.

UT Dallas Syllabus Policies and Procedures

The information contained in the following link constitutes the University's policies and procedures segment of the course syllabus. Please review the catalog sections regarding the credit/no creditor pass/fail grading option and withdrawal from class. Please go to <http://go.utdallas.edu/syllabus-policies> for these policies.

The descriptions and timelines contained in this syllabus are subject to change at the discretion of the Professor.