

Senior Capstone Experience / Thesis Project Guidelines

Overview

A student may satisfy the senior obligation in Drama in one of three ways:

- a production thesis in directing, design, stage management, or performance;
- a playwriting thesis in which the student writes a play that is presented in either a staged (rehearsed) reading or in full production; or
- a traditional research thesis in the areas of theatrical criticism, theory, or history.

The department believes that the production option is the more appropriate way to fulfill the obligation, since it synthesizes the critical/theoretical and practical/performance aspects of the study of drama. A research thesis may be elected only in cases where the student has demonstrated an unusual enthusiasm for and distinction in critical, theoretical, or historical inquiry.

Proposal Timeline

Students at the **end of their sophomore year** should meet with the faculty to discuss their preliminary thoughts on the type of thesis they hope to undertake.

At the end of fall semester in the junior year, proposals are formally presented to the faculty. The proposal will identify the type of project planned—directing, design, stage management, performance, dramaturgical, playwriting, theoretical, critical, or historical—along with a synopsis of the project itself. The student will also provide an etiology for the choice and discuss why, and how, this topic is appropriate to the student’s interests and capabilities. Students will present their proposal orally to the full Drama faculty while also turning in a written version that day.

All drama majors are required to take DRA494 (Junior Seminar) **in the spring semester of their junior year**. During this class, students will further develop their project plans, and decisions will be made regarding scheduling, space, and the order of the department season. **At the end of this class, and** after consulting with the full departmental faculty, students will submit to the Junior Seminar instructor a revised and expanded version of their project proposal. (This document takes different forms for different types of projects. See specific disciplinary guidelines for more details.)

In the fall of the senior year, each drama major will be assigned a faculty “reader” or advisor, who will supervise their thesis project and read all written materials, and determine a final grade of pass or fail.

No more than **two weeks following the completion of the thesis project**, the student director/actor/designer/stage manager will meet with members of the faculty for an oral post-mortem of the production. At this meeting, the student will assess the success and failure of all aspects of production, from casting to strike. Students are expected to provide refreshments for

this meeting. Two weeks following this meeting, the student will turn in a first draft of the written thesis.

Honors

Honors will be conferred on those projects that, in the critical view of the department faculty, achieve an exceptional level of creative, artistic, and scholarly conception and realization.

The Directing/Producing Thesis

For this option, the student shall helm a fully-realized production. This includes but is not limited to:

- choosing a play (in consultation with the faculty);
- requesting performance rights;
- developing a production concept (aka “big idea”);
- recruiting a production team, including designers, stage manager(s), and backstage crew (as needed);
- casting;
- running rehearsals;
- building/acquiring/executing all production elements
- loading all elements in and out of the theatre;
- a written analysis of the production and process.

Prerequisites (beginning with Class of 2016)

To be eligible for the directing/producing thesis option, a student must have completed the following courses before their senior year:

- DRA211 – Acting I
- DRA221 – Directing I
- Introduction to Theatrical Design
- DRA231 – Theater Technology I

Special Notes

All senior projects are limited to a total budget of \$300 beyond the cost of royalties.

Seniors who choose to use Tawes Theatre should understand that they might have no more than one or two days onstage prior to production week. Plans regarding production elements (particularly scenic, lighting, and projection) should take this limitation into account.

During the production process, student directors should be in constant dialogue with the faculty and technical director.

Requirements

In addition to a successfully staged production, the directing thesis includes a comprehensive written analysis of the project and its process. The following is a sample chapter structure:

Chapter One: Introduction: The Why

Personal sensory/intuitive response to the play

Why did you choose this play and why is it an appropriate thesis for you?

Chapter Two: Analysis: The What

Part One: A dramaturgical analysis of the play and characters, including the dramatic "meaning" of the play as discovered through research on the play, the playwright, the period in which the play was written, the period it deals with; and a thorough analysis of the play's dramaturgical components, including structure, substructures and patterns, themes, and ideas.

Part Two: The essential theatrical requirements of the play – categories might be schematized and defined as follows:

Length of scenes: break down a play into units convenient to handle (e.g. "French" scenes, action beats, rhythm, etc.); be aware of the length of each unit in relation to the whole; note the number of pages or lines in each unit.

Characters: (a) note the names of characters in each unit, together with indication of entrances and exits and relative importance and dramatic and theatrical value in the unit; (b) note expression or illustration of character traits and attitudes for each character in each unit.

Plot: note the surface (or actual) action of each unit and, eventually, of the whole play; what happens onstage.

Place: note the location requirements of the unit.

Time: note the time the unit takes (i.e. the relative amount of time allotted to each unit within the whole play).

Design: note particular or special needs in setting, costume, lighting, props, sound, and music.

Chapter Three: Concept/Vision: The Plan

What do you see as the spine of the play?

How are you going to reveal what you have identified as the spine of this play?

What is your approach to the play and how do you plan to realize it?

Chapter Four: Process: The How/Implementation

What did you do to achieve your concept or vision? In this chapter, you should go into some detail about how the process unfolded, from scheduling auditions to your load-in and performance. This chapter is an opportunity for you to closely examine the choices you made before rehearsals and how they were or were not realized.

Chapter Five: Conclusion: The Post-Production Assessment

Articulate your response to the production, including an assessment of the production concept, directorial method, design, and staging.

Here, you should examine with candor and self-reflection your own strengths and weaknesses as a director. Would you choose to do this again? Why or why not?

Timeline

Directing projects are proposed as noted in the Overview section above.

Upon the completion of Junior Seminar, the directing student must submit a **first draft** of the written pre-production analysis (Chapters 1-3 as outlined above.)

(A detailed production timeline is available from the technical director.)

One month before Opening Night, the student director will meet with the faculty and technical director to discuss:

- the status of the rehearsal process;
- set, lighting, and costume designs, including a scale ground plan; and
- update on design builds/schedule.

On the Monday before Opening Night, the director will host the faculty for “**Profs’ Night**”—a dress run-through of the entire production in its current state. Immediately following the rehearsal, the director will meet with the faculty for creative feedback.

Two weeks following the production, a **second draft** of the complete written analysis is due. This document includes the post-production assessment: a discussion of how the director’s plans, ideas, and vision evolved and changed through the production process. All of the questions discussed in the pre-production analysis should be reconsidered in light of the actual production. What worked and why? What didn’t and why? What was the effect of the audience on the production? What if anything would you do differently? This part of the thesis should also include discussions of casting and collaboration with actors, designers, technicians etc. from pre-production through post-mortem. These are just suggestions; students are strongly encouraged to reflect on and evaluate any part of the process that resonates strongly with them in a particular way.

The **final draft** of the written analysis is due by **the last day of classes** of the spring semester of the senior year, regardless of the production’s performance dates.

The Design Thesis

In rare cases, a student may complete the senior thesis requirement through the design of scenery (with or without projections), costumes, lighting, or sound for a major departmental production.

Prerequisites (beginning with Class of 2016)

To be eligible for the design thesis option, a student must have completed the following courses before their senior year:

- DRA221 – Directing I
- Introduction to Theatrical Design
- two additional design classes (such as DRA241 – Scenic Design)
- DRA231 – Theater Technology I

Special Notes

A design thesis must be approved by both the faculty and the production's director.

Throughout the process, the student designer reports dually to their thesis advisor and the production's director.

(The following section provides an example of the design thesis requirements for a scenic design project. In the case of a costume, lighting, or sound project, the student and his/her advisor will compile equivalent requirements and an appropriate timeline.)

Scenery

Additional Notes

Because the scenic designer is responsible for the overall look of the stage, he or she must coordinate with the director, stage manager, designers, and other staff regarding:

- properties (including furniture, set dressing, and hand props)
- scene changes
- lighting and sound positions
- any special scenic effects, including projections.

Requirements

- 1/4" ground plan (If more than one setting is required for the performance, then the student and his or her advisor will discuss the most appropriate way to display multiple sets, with the understanding that more than one ground plan may have to be drafted.)
- 1/4" section drawing(s), including lineset schedule, masking, audience seating, and lighting/sound positions.

- ¼” full-stage elevation drawing
- ½” elevation drawings of all walls, masking, wagons, platforms, stairs, and any other design elements that require detailed visual clarification.
- Painter's elevations of any and all treated surfaces.
- ½” or ¼” full-color model
- Visual research: books, magazines, photographs, clippings, drawings
- Process materials: notes, sketches, meeting notes, preliminary props list and/or shift plot
- Comprehensive properties list, including furniture and set dressing.
- A written analysis of the design and production process, including discussion of:
 - the play (its plot, setting, structure, themes, style, and dramaturgy);
 - design concept (of the scenic design and the broader production);
 - research process;
 - evolution of the design from early meetings to opening night
 - design goals: place, time, mood, rhythm, style, etc.;
 - use of design elements: color, line, composition, texture, masking, etc.;
 - choice of performance space, including its relationship to the audience;
 - execution of design, from the drafting phase through final notes;
 - technical rehearsals, including staging of scene changes;
 - collaborative processes with director, designers, stage managers, technical director, actors, and crew (as applicable);
 - the overall effectiveness of the scenic design.

Timeline

During the spring semester of the junior year, the designer begins researching the play and its design and meeting with the production’s director to develop a production concept.

Upon the completion of Junior Seminar, the designer must submit to the Junior Seminar instructor, faculty advisor, and director an expanded project proposal, which includes a written concept statement, visual research, and preliminary design ideas.

Over the 2-4 months before the first rehearsal, the designer and director continue meeting to discuss the play, share research, and develop visual concepts.

6-8 weeks before the first rehearsal, the designer will present thumbnail sketches and ground plans to the director and other designers.

4-6 weeks before the first rehearsal, the designer will present rough scale color sketches and ground plans to the director and advisor and other designers.

2-3 weeks before the first rehearsal, the designer will provide a rough ground plan, section, and elevation of the set and audience space to the other designers, technical director, and advisor. The designer will also provide a rough properties list and shift plot to the stage manager and props master.

1-2 weeks before the first rehearsal, the designer will present a finished ground plan, section, and elevations to the director, other designers, technical director, stage manager, and advisor.

On the first day of rehearsal, the designer will present the color model and painter's elevations to the director, technical director, stage manager, advisor, and cast.

Within 4 weeks of the final performance, the designer will submit a **first draft** of the written analysis to their faculty advisor.

By **the last day of classes** of the spring semester of the senior year, the **final draft** of the written analysis must be submitted to the designer's faculty advisor, regardless of the production's performance dates.

The Stage Management Thesis

An overriding principle in stage management holds that if the stage manager should be unavoidably delayed, unable to call the show or continue with the rehearsal and/or run of the show, the prompt book should enable another to step in and immediately fill the stage manager's shoes. As such, the prompt book is the primary focus of the stage management thesis.

The stage management thesis may be executed in conjunction with a faculty- or student-directed production.

Prerequisites (beginning with Class of 2016)

To be eligible for the stage management thesis option, a student must have completed the following courses before their senior year:

- DRA221 – Directing I
- Introduction to Theatrical Design
- DRA231 – Theater Technology I
- Stage Management

Special Notes

Throughout the process, the student designer reports dually to their thesis advisor and the production's director.

Written Requirements

The crux of the thesis should be the complete documentation of the rehearsal and performance process of a given show. This includes, but is not limited to:

- **forms** (such as audition logs, rehearsal notes, performance notes, cue and prop sheets);
- **agendas** (for entire process as well as for production meetings); and
- **assessments** (from the initial conversation to the post-mortem) for all facets of the production: pre-production, auditions, rehearsal, dress and tech rehearsals and performances.

The **assessment** portion of the process may be in the form of a journal and it may be structured either as a daily journal or broken down into sections such as “Auditions,” “Design Meetings,” “Production Meetings,” etc. This portion should also be a thoughtful narrative of the process from beginning to end and include an analysis of the success or failure of the various aspects of the process.

For Pre-Production, the stage manager should create and maintain:

- agenda and notes for/from each design (set, lights, costumes, sound, props) and dramaturgy meeting;

- agenda and notes for/from each production meeting;
- agenda and notes for/from each publicity meeting;
- agenda and notes for/from each meeting with director, including an outline of goals for auditions, rehearsals, performance, and a brief outline of the expected duties/relationship; and
- director's breakdown of play, including scene list, prop list, costume list (including a proposed quick-change plan if necessary), cross-over list, and entrance/exit list.

For Auditioning:

- audition log with room for notes;
- audition forms and process for distribution, collection, and circulation; and
- agenda for audition process.

For Rehearsals:

- cast/production contact sheet, with phone/email (and distribution to all);
- rehearsal schedule, including scene breakdown (with page numbers, etc.), actor calls and, if applicable, goals of each rehearsal;
- 1/8" ground plan for recording blocking;
- schedule for design, publicity, construction, load-in, tech, and performances (and distribution to all) – created in consultation with director;
- props master cue sheet;
- costumes master cue sheet; and
- daily rehearsal reports (and distribution).

For Dress/Tech Rehearsals:

- document for recording precise timing for opening sequence;
- scene shift plot;
- crew assignments and off-stage crew positions;
- entrance locations for all actors;
- scene and act timings;
- curtain and fly sequences;
- curtain call sequence;
- rehearsal reports (and distributions); and
- agendas for work post-run and post-Professor's Night, with notes from all.

For Performances:

- house manager report (to distribute, collect, and circulate nightly);
- performance report (to distribute nightly); and
- agenda for strike (to distribute, collect, and circulate.)

Timeline

Upon approval of a stage management thesis, an appropriate timeline is to be developed by the student and their advisor, in consultation with the production's director. This timeline shall include a list of materials to be included in the preliminary written submission, which is due upon the completion of Junior Seminar.

The Performance Thesis

The performance thesis—approved only under exceptional circumstances—consists of two major roles in department productions. The productions can be anytime after the first semester of the junior year, but at least one should be during the senior year.

Prerequisites (beginning with Class of 2016)

To be eligible for the performance thesis option, a student must have completed the following courses by the end of the fall semester of their junior year:

- DRA211 – Acting I
- DRA311 – Acting II
- DRA411 – Acting III

The performer must also have:

- played significant roles in at least one faculty-directed production and one student-directed production;
- submitted an acting resume and headshots to faculty;
- presented an audition of at least two contrasting monologues for the faculty; submitted a proposal which identifies the reasons a performance thesis is appropriate to this student and includes an endorsement from at least one faculty member.;

Special Notes

Written Requirements

The student will write about one of the two roles. This written analysis should include description and analysis of:

The Play

- storyline/plot;
- focus;
- subject;
- structure; and
- arc or trajectory.

Principal Characters

- each principle character, and
- his/her connection to the play's various elements.

Character Relationships

- the structural and thematic relationships between the actor's character and the principal characters the principal characters;

- the character's attitude/point-of-view toward each other character in each scene in which he/she character appears;
- the attitude/point-of-view of each of the other characters toward the actor's character in the same scenes;

Significance of Actor's Character

- how the actor's character serves the play (his/her contribution to the play's meaning, tone, rhythm, structure, plot, arc, dynamic);
- why the actor's character in each scene; and
- what that character is doing in relationship to other characters in each scene (literally and metaphorically, textually and sub-textually).

Character Arc

- the character's arc of consistency from beginning to end of the play; and
- the character's arc of *inconsistency* from beginning to end of the play.

Character Traits

- distinguishing characteristics (e.g. diction, rhythm, tone, attitude[s], focus, mannerisms, physicality, emotion) that the playwright has assigned to the actor's character

360⁰ Project for Character

- compilation of imagery, music, and other research that inform the actor's character
- pulled from various time periods, cultures, styles, etc.
- collected and curated to chart the above aspects (relationships, significance, arc, traits of the actor's character

Timeline

Upon the completion of Junior Seminar, the performance student must submit a **first draft** of the written analysis (outlined above) to the Junior Seminar instructor, faculty advisor, and production's director.

Two weeks following the production, a **second draft** of the complete written analysis is due. This document includes a discussion of how the actor's plans, ideas, and vision evolved and changed through the rehearsal and production process. All of the questions discussed in the pre-production analysis should be reconsidered in light of the actual production.

The **final draft** of the written analysis is due by **the last day of classes** of the spring semester of the senior year, regardless of the production's performance dates.

The Production Dramaturgy Thesis

The Production Dramaturgy Thesis straddles the production and theory areas of the drama department, and, as such, requires the student to actively engage in both the production process and independent research.

Prerequisites (beginning with Class of 2016)

To be eligible for the production dramaturgy thesis option, a student must have completed the following courses before the spring semester of their junior year:

- DRA458 – Dramaturgy
- two courses in theatre history/theory

Students are also required to consult with the dramaturgy professor for approval before submitting a proposal.

Special Notes

Written Requirements

The production dramaturgy thesis should be compiled in the following order:

Chapter One: The Play

Students should include in the front of their thesis a copy of the play that they have used throughout the rehearsal process. Notes, comments, questions should all be left included in the script. Students should also include in this section their initial response forms to the play, using the format from dramaturgy class.

Chapter Two: Production

Students should include a complete set of rehearsal schedules, reports, tech notes, and any other pertinent information that has come from stage management, various designers, and the technical director. Students should also include the program and marketing materials (articles, press releases, etc.) in this section.

Chapter Three: Collaboration

Students should include all communication with the director and/or playwright in this section, including notes from auditions, rehearsals, previews/dress rehearsals, and performances. This section should also include the reasons for collaboration on this particular project, the shared questions and concerns of the production (could include textual, casting, technical, and budgetary questions/concerns), the perceived and realized audience involvement, and a summary and assessment of the goals of the collaboration.

Chapter Four: Research

This section should be broken down into the following areas:

Area A: Worlds of the Play

Concerns the setting in which the action takes place. The setting includes specific information about the environment, what has happened before the play begins, and the attitudes of characters toward the world of the play. When doing research on the world of the play, look for information about:

Economic Environment: class, wealth and poverty

Political Environment: the relationship of the characters to the form of government under which they live

Social Environment: the mores and social institutions under which the characters live

Cultural Environment: the arts, architecture, sports, fashion, popular culture

Historical Environment: events in history

Area B: The Author and His/Her Worlds

These are the subjective elements which have affected the values the playwright wrote into the text. When doing research on the playwright and his/her world, look for information about the playwright's influences (other versions, translations, and early drafts might be included in this section), life experiences, dominant themes (social, political, philosophical) and moral attitudes of the day.

Area C: Our World and the Worlds of the Play

This area includes interaction among the worlds of the play, the author, and the audience. When doing research about the world of the audience, look for information about the general character of society

Area D: Production History

Includes original and subsequent productions. Useful information might include overall critical reception, theatrical innovations, director's approach, casting, and staging.

Area E: Drama Criticism

Analysis of play's contribution to literature with an emphasis on ideas, language and style, and character development.

Area F: Images and Sounds

These include video clips, music, photographs, and images (representational, metaphorical, and abstract).

Timeline

Upon the completion of Junior Seminar, students must submit a **first draft** of the Research portion of the written thesis to both the Junior Seminar instructor and faculty advisor.

On the first day of rehearsal, students must give a First Day Dramaturgy Presentation to the Dramaturgy professor as well as to the cast/crew of the production.

During the run of the production, students must facilitate a Post-play discussion.

Students must turn in the **first draft** of their complete production dramaturgy thesis within **two weeks of the play's final performance**.

The **final draft** of the written thesis is due by **the last day of classes** of the spring semester of the senior year, regardless of the production's performance dates.

The Playwriting Thesis

Prerequisites (beginning with Class of 2016)

To be eligible for the playwriting thesis option, a student is required to have completed the following courses before their junior year:

- DRA351 – Playwriting I
- DRA451 – Playwriting II

Special Notes

Written Requirements

The student will submit the finished draft of the play, as well as a narrative of the process. This narrative should contain the following sections:

The Development of the Script

- inspirations, exercises, character lists, plot outlines, etc.

Pre-Production

- the search for a director and other collaborative artists;
- auditions, casting and setting a rehearsal protocol

The Rehearsal Process

- rewrites, insights, etc.

The Production

- audience response, Profs' night, etc.

Final Assessment

- more rewrites, lessons learned

Timeline

**The proposal process for the playwriting thesis differs slightly from the generic timeline listed in the Overview section. Please read carefully.*

In the early fall of their junior year, the playwright must submit a substantial writing sample as well as a preliminary proposal for the play they intend to write.

By Thanksgiving of the junior year, the student must present a **first draft** of the play for reading/production consideration.

Upon completion of Junior Seminar, the playwright must submit to the Junior Seminar instructor and faculty reader a **revised script** and **first draft** of the Development portion of the written narrative (outlined above.)

On the first day of rehearsal, playwright should also submit a current version of the script.

Within **two weeks of the final performance or reading**, a **final script and narrative** are due to the faculty reader.

The Critical/Theoretical/Historical Thesis

Students interested in writing a traditional research thesis to fulfill their senior obligation are permitted to do so when they have expressed a particular interest, an unusual enthusiasm for, and distinction in critical, theoretical, or historical inquiry.

Prerequisites (beginning with Class of 2016)

To be eligible for the critical/theoretical/historical thesis option, a student must have completed the following courses before the spring semester of their junior year:

- DRA458 – Dramaturgy
- Three courses in theatre history/theory

Special Notes

Students are asked to choose the advisor with whom they wish to work. Every effort is made to match students with the advisors they choose. In order to distribute workload evenly throughout the department, however, a student may not always get his/her first choice.

Written Requirements

Theses should be a minimum of fifty (50) pages and should follow the following three principals:

Research

Both secondary sources and primary sources should be employed, the latter not necessarily in large number. The thesis must show the student's ability to make a successful search for appropriate materials.

Analysis

The work should show evidence of interpretive skills: the ability to make generalizations from specific examples, draw conclusions, integrate the topic into a broader historical and theatrical context.

Mechanics

The thesis must be properly organized and well-written. Prose should be grammatically correct, clear, and coherent. Organization of ideas must flow smoothly. Use of quotations, footnotes, and bibliographical form should all be in correct MLA format.

Timeline

Upon approval for a written thesis, the student will work with his/her advisor to establish their central argument, outline a research process, and create a draft/check-in schedule.