Senior Capstone Experience Project Guidelines

Overview

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

- a production thesis in directing, design, dramaturgy, 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 options are the most appropriate way to fulfill the obligation, since they synthesize the critical/theoretical and practical/performance aspects of the study of theatre. 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.

During the fall semester of the junior year, students will discuss preliminary SCE ideas individually with each member of the Theatre faculty. These are not formal presentations, but rather brainstorming sessions, during which students can get suggestions and advice and faculty members can get a sense of where each student is heading.

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 (of both project type and specific play) and discuss why, and how, this topic is appropriate to the student’s interests and capabilities. These presentations typically are (but not always) scheduled for Reading Day. Students may be asked to suggest two projects.

All Theatre majors are required to take THE 381 (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 Theatre major will be assigned a faculty “reader.” This faculty member will be the primary reader of the written SCE paper; all Theatre faculty members will remain closely involved in the supervision and mentoring of the overall project.

No more than two weeks following the completion of the thesis project, the student director/actor/designer/stage manager/dramaturg/playwright 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 auditions 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 directorial approach;
- recruiting a production team, including designers, stage manager(s), and crew;
- casting actors;
- 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

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

- THE 211 – Introduction to Acting
- THE 221 – Introduction to Directing
- THE 231 – Theater Technology
- THE 241 – Introduction to Theatrical Design

Special Notes

All senior projects are limited to a total budget of $300 beyond the cost of royalties. No additional monies (from self, family, or others) are to be used.

Seniors who request to use Decker Theatre (or any other unconventional space) 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 its dramatic impact and significance, as discovered through research of 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, 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 directorial 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 detail about how the process unfolded—from scheduling auditions to your load-in and performances. 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.
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).

(More detailed production timelines are available from the technical director and/or production manager.)

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
- the design/build schedule.

1-3 weeks before Opening Night, the director will invite the faculty to an early run-through. One faculty member will attend this rehearsal, and will be available to answer questions and/or provide feedback.

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 feedback.

One week after the performance, the director and faculty will have a Post-Mortem discussion about the production. Students must provide refreshments for this meeting.

Two weeks following the post-mortem discussion, 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 no later than the last day of classes of the spring semester of the senior year, regardless of the production’s performance dates.
The Design Thesis

Students may complete the senior thesis requirement through the design of scenery (with or without projections), costumes, lighting, or sound for a 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:

- THE 241 – Introduction to Theatrical Design
- one Advanced Design class (THE 341/2/3/4)
- THE 231 – Theater Technology

Special Notes

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

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

(Notes: This 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 their 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 / transitions
- lighting and sound positions
- any special scenic effects, including projections.

Requirements

- ¼” 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.)

- ¼” 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 concept or approach.

**Upon the completion of Junior Seminar**, the designer must submit to the Theatre faculty 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.

One week after the performance, the designer and faculty with have a Post-Mortem
discussion about the production. Students must provide refreshments for this meeting.

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

No later the last day of classes of the spring semester of the senior year, the final draft of the
written analysis must be submitted and approved by the Theatre department faculty, 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-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:

- THE 221 – Introduction to Directing
- THE 231 – Theater Technology I or THE 241 – Introduction to Theatrical Design
- THE 271 – Stage Management or THE 285 – Advanced Practicum: Stage Management

Special Notes

Throughout the process, the student stage manager 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 specific 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 all design (set, lights, costumes, sound, props) and dramaturgy meetings;
- agenda and notes for/from all production meetings;
- agenda and notes for/from all publicity meetings;
- agenda and notes for/from all meetings 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-Profs’ Night, with notes from all.

For Performances:
- house management 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 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

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:

- THE 211 – Introduction to Acting
- THE 311 – Advanced Acting

The performer must also have played significant roles in at least two departmental productions by the end of the fall semester of their Junior year.

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

360° 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

Scoring of Scenes
The student must “score” two separate scenes (each scene being a minimum of 3 pages) from the play. This scoring must include—with the script—clear and specific notation of potential actions, needs, and objectives. It should also include highlighting of operative words, scansion (if written in iambic pentameter), and other notations mutually determined by the student and advisor. (For clarity’s sake, the student must write out each scene with enough room for the aforementioned scoring to be easily read.)

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. In addition, they will present an updated resume and an audition of four contrasting monologues to the faculty.

Two weeks following the production, a second draft of the complete written analysis is due. This document should include a discussion of how the actor’s plans, ideas, and vision evolved and changed through the rehearsal and production process. It should also include how the character’s needs, actions, and goals evolved over the rehearsal period, whether through consultations with the director, the student’s fellow cast members, and/or the actor’s private journey. 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 no later than 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 Theatre department, and, as such, requires the student to actively engage in both the production process and independent research. Students can choose to work on an extant play or a new play.

Prerequisites

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:

- THE 101 – Drama, Stage, & Society I
- THE 102 – Drama, Stage, & Society II
- THE 358 – Dramaturgy
- two additional courses in theatre history/theory

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

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 the 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 the stage management, designers, or 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 that 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 dramaturgy presentation to the dramaturgy professor and the cast/crew of the production.

During the run of the production, students must facilitate a post-performance 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 no later than the last day of classes of the spring semester of the senior year, regardless of the production’s performance dates.
The Playwriting Thesis

Students may complete the SCE requirement by writing a play that is presented in either a staged (rehearsed) reading or in full production.

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

Prerequisites

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

- THE 101 – Drama, Stage, & Society I
- THE 102 – Drama, Stage, & Society II
- THE 351 – Introduction to Playwriting
- THE 451 – Advanced Playwriting

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

**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 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

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:

- THE 101 – Drama, Stage, & Society I
- THE 102 – Drama, Stage, & Society II
- THE 358 – Dramaturgy
- two additional 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.