

## **Senior Project Guidelines**

### **OVERVIEW**

A student may satisfy the senior obligation in drama in one of three ways: a production thesis in directing, design 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.

No more than two weeks following the completion of the thesis production, the student director/actors/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.

In the spring of their junior year all drama majors are required to submit a written proposal outlining their plans for the Senior Project. Students should meet with each faculty member to discuss the proposal prior to submitting it. Proposals are to be presented at the end of fall semester Junior year.

The proposal will identify the type of project planned—directing, design, performance, dramaturgical, playwriting, theoretical, critical or historical. 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. It will also include a synopsis of the project. All second semester juniors will meet the week following spring break to discuss their proposals with the faculty and each other. Decisions regarding scheduling, space, and the order of the department season will be discussed at that meeting.

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

### **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.

### **Guidelines for a Directing Thesis**

A student should be in constant dialogue with the faculty and the Technical Director. One month before Prof's Night, the director will meet with the faculty and Technical Director to discuss:

1. The status of the rehearsal process
2. Set, lighting, and costume designs, including a ground plan
3. A report from the dialogue between the director and the Technical Director

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

Seniors who choose to use the stage in Tawes should understand that they might have no more than one or two days on stage prior to production week. Pre-production plans regarding set and lights should take this limitation into account.

Two weeks following the production, a final analysis is due. This will include 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 to post-mortem. These are just suggestions and students are strongly encouraged to reflect on, and evaluate, any part of the process that resonates strongly with them in some particular way.

One possible chapter structure might be:

#### **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 – the dramatic "meaning" of the play realized through research into the play, the playwright, the period in which the play was written, the period it deals with; and through 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 scene: the director breaks 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 on the stage.

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**

How are you going to reveal what you have identified as the essence 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?

### **Chapter Five: Conclusion: The Post-Production Assessment**

The Director's response to the production, including assessment of the production concept, directorial method, design, and staging. What worked and why? What didn't and why?

### **Guidelines for a Design Thesis**

The senior design project consists of the following requirements:

- 1) 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 on a ground plan with the understanding that more than one ground plan may have to be drafted.
- 2) 1/2" elevation of all walls, masking, wagons, platforms, stairs, and any design elements that need detailed visual clarification.
- 3) 1/2" section or sections.
- 4) Painter's elevations.
- 5) 1/2" or 1/4" colored model or mechanical perspective color sketch of the set.
- 6) Documented research: books, magazines, photographs, clippings, drawings.
- 7) The designer is also responsible for compiling a preliminary properties and furniture list that will be given to the director and stage manager.
- 8) Because the designer is responsible for the overall look of the production, he or she is therefore responsible for coordinating with the director, stage manager, and properties person the properties and furniture and any special scenic effects, including set changes.
- 9) A written thesis in which the designer discusses his or her visual representation of the meaning of the play, how it was achieved in collaboration with the director and dramaturg, and how it was researched. The thesis should also include a discussion of the design process touching on such topics as use of color, line, harmony, rhythm, texture; time, place, mood, and atmosphere; how the set promotes movement by actors; scene changes; masking; the choice of the specific performing space and its relationship to the spectators; and how the set was executed. The latter should not be a day-to-day-journal, nor should it be an harangue against the vicissitudes of time, space, and co-workers. Rather, it should be an investigation of challenges and how they were met.
- 10) Finally an analysis of the effectiveness of the set design.

#### ***Design Schedule:***

- a. 4-6 weeks before the first rehearsal, the designer will present thumbnails to the faculty advisor and director.
- b. 5 weeks before the first rehearsal, the designer will present color roughs and rough ground plan to the advisor and director.

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- c. 4 weeks before the first rehearsal, the designer will present rough ground plan, elevations and section of the set and audience space to the advisor and director.
- d. 1 week before the first rehearsal, the designer will present a finished ground plan, elevations, and painter's elevation to the advisor and director.
- e. Within 3 weeks of the last performance, the designer will have completed the color mechanical perspective sketch or model and finished sections.

## **Guidelines for 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 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
- Director's breakdown of play, including scene list, prop list, costume list (including an proposed quick-change plan if necessary), cross-over list and entrance/exit list

### **For Auditioning, the Stage Manager should create and maintain:**

- Audition log with room for notes
- Audition forms and process for distribution, collection and circulation
- Agenda for audition process

### **For Rehearsals, the Stage Manager should create and maintain:**

- Cast/production contact sheet, with phone/email, and distribution to all
- Rehearsal schedule, which includes scene breakdown (with page numbers, etc.), actor calls and, if applicable, goals of each rehearsal
- 1/8" ground plan for recording blocking

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- In consultation with director, a schedule for design, publicity, construction, load-in, tech and distribute to cast/production
- Props master cue sheet
- Costumes master cue sheet
- Rehearsal report and distribution (daily)

**For Dress/Tech Rehearsals, the Stage Manager should create and maintain:**

- Document for recording precise timing for opening sequence
- Description of all scene changes
- List of crew assignments and off-stage position of crew
- Entrance location for all actors
- Scene and act timing
- Curtain sequences
- Curtain call
- Report and distribute
- Agenda for work post-run and post-Professor's Night along with notes from all

**For Performance, the Stage Manager should create and maintain:**

- House manager report to distribute, collect and circulate nightly
- Performance report to distribute nightly
- Agenda for strike to distribute, collect and circulate

### **Guidelines for a Performance Thesis**

Drama majors wishing to choose a performance thesis option must have done the following by the end of the fall semester of their junior year.

- 1) Have taken Acting 1, 2, & 3.
- 2) Have had significant roles in at least one faculty-directed production and one student directed production.
- 3) Have submitted an acting resume and headshots.
- 4) Presented an audition of at least two contrasting monologues for the faculty.
- 5) Submitted a proposal that identifies the reasons a performance thesis is appropriate to this student and includes an endorsement from one faculty member.

The thesis will consist of two major roles in department productions. The productions can be anytime after you have completed the first semester of your junior year; but at least one should be during your senior year.

The student will write about one of the roles. The written part of the thesis should include:

1. A concise description of (a) the play's story line/plot, (b) the play's focus, and (c) the play's subject, (d) the play's structure, and (e) the play's arc or trajectory
2. A concise description of the principal characters and their connection to the elements in #1
3. A description of the actor's particular character's structural and thematic relationship to the principal characters (If the character is one of the principal characters, then a description of her/his relationships to the other principals.)
4. Answers to the following questions: (a) how does your character serve the play (i.e. what is your character's contribution to the play's meaning, tone, rhythm, structure, plot, arc, dynamic); what is your character's attitude/point-of-view toward each other character in each scene in which your character appears; what is the attitude/point-of-view of each of the other characters toward your character in the same scenes; why is your character in each of these scenes; what is your character doing, in relationship to other characters, in each of these scenes (literally and metaphorically, textually and sub-textually)
5. A description of the character's arc of consistency from beginning to end of the play, and a like description of the character's arc of inconsistency from beginning to end of the play
6. A description of the distinguishing characteristics (e.g. diction, rhythm, tone, attitude(s), focus, mannerisms, physicality, emotion) that the playwright has assigned to the character

## **Guidelines for Dramaturgy, Criticism, Theory or History Thesis**

A student may satisfy the senior obligation in drama in two ways *other* than the production thesis. These two options are defined as:

- 1) the production dramaturgy thesis
- 2) the traditional research thesis (which includes criticism, theory, history, genre-study, etc.)

As with the case of all other senior obligation in drama requirements, students considering either of the above thesis obligations must:

- 1) By March 1 of their junior year submit a written proposal outlining their plans for the senior obligation. This proposal should include:
  - a. The type of project planned
  - b. An etiology for the choice, including how this topic is appropriate to the student's interests and capabilities
  - c. A synopsis, timeline and outline of the project
- 2) Meet with each faculty member prior to submitting it

### ***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.

Students interested in working on a Production Dramaturgy Thesis are required to have completed "Dramaturgy" prior to the spring of their junior year and are encouraged to have taken either at least two history/theory courses. Students are also required to consult with the Dramaturgy professor for approval.

The Production Dramaturgy Thesis is to be conducted in partnership with a department production and a senior thesis production.

The Thesis should be compiled in the following order:

#### **Section 1. 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.

#### **Section 2. 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.

### Section 3. 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.

### Section 4. 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, character development

*Area F: Images and Sounds*

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

As is the case with the Directing Thesis, students must turn in the first draft of their Production Dramaturgy Thesis two weeks after the play closes.

***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.

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 work load evenly throughout the department, however, a student may not always get his/her first choice.

Students will work with their advisor on the establishment of their central argument, outline a research process and a draft/check-in schedule. Theses should be a minimum of fifty (50) pages and should follow the following three principals:

1. **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
2. **Analysis:** The work should show evidence of interpretive skills: ability to make generalizations from specific examples, draw conclusions, integrate the topic into a broader historical and theatrical context
3. **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

### **Guidelines for a Playwriting Thesis**

Students interested in writing a play to fulfill their senior obligation by writing a play are strongly encouraged to take Playwriting I by the end of their sophomore year. It is suggested that students also take Playwriting II.

In the early fall of their junior year, the student will submit a substantial writing sample as well as a proposal (see above) for the play they intend to write. By Thanksgiving, the student will need to present a draft of the play for reading/production consideration.

The student will, following the close of the production or the end of the reading, will turn in the finished draft of the play, as well as a narrative of the process. This narrative should contain the following sections:

4. The Development of the Script – inspirations, exercises, character lists, plot outlines, etc.
5. Pre-production – the search for a director and other collaborative artists, auditions, casting and setting a rehearsal protocol
6. The rehearsal process – rewrites, insights, etc.
7. The production – audience response, prof's night, etc.
8. Final assessment – more rewrites, lessons learned

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