

Acting Shakespeare: An Advanced Performance Study

(THE 6905)
Fall 2024

MWF: 10:40-12:35pm

Constans T G013

Instructor: Kaitlin Henderson (she/her)

Phone: 508-294-3667 (text only)

Email: kaitlinhenderson@ufl.edu

Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday 12:45-2pm (or by appointment)

“Hear my soul speak!”

--The Tempest

“Thou canst not speak of that thou dost not feel”

--Romeo and Juliet

“Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say”

--King Lear

“o'erstep not the modesty of nature: for any thing so overdone is from the purpose of playing, whose end, both at the first and now, was and is, to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature, scorn her own image, and the very age and body of time his form and pressure.”

--Hamlet

Course Description:

This course is designed as an exploration of Shakespeare's text in performance. Actor's will gain tools to find their own personal connection to the text, to breakdown and speak the language in a way that can be understood (by both self and audience), and to prepare students for a professional industry that continues to keep Shakespeare as the most produced playwright in the country (by far). We will incorporate elements of the Linklater Voice work, the rehearsal techniques created by Tina Packer and Kristin Linklater, Trish Arnold's movement work, and Neil Freeman's text and verse study work.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

- Students will practice moving Shakespeare out of the land of literary analysis and into the land of action and play, as it was intended.
- Students will learn how to utilize their voices, and speech structures to enhance the text.

- Students will develop the tools to breakdown the meaning in Shakespeare's text in a deeply specific way.
- Students will learn about the Shakespeare industry in the US and what to expect when approaching those companies professionally.
- Students will become adept at using non-judgmental language and naming their own experiences as they relate to performance and viewing (in the audience).

INSTRUCTOR PERSONAL STATEMENT:

I am still learning. I renew my commitment each day to hearing the voices of those around me from communities other than my own, and am intentionally working to create an equitable, kind, affirming place for all students and colleagues. I commit to being responsive to conversations, and accountable for my actions in the spaces that I hold for students in the SOTD.

ON CONTENT:

Performing Shakespeare is rigorous. It requires the actor to be a master of language and text structure. It requires masterful breath, voice, and speech work. It requires a free and supple body. But perhaps most importantly (and most challengingly) it requires the actor to be vulnerable and to be SEEN. It can be (and often is) emotionally and intellectually exhausting.

In contemporary plays (and even in more modern classics), subtext is Queen. And in modern life, we rarely speak what we feel and what we mean directly. Shakespeare's characters say what they feel, they exclaim their love, they spew their jealousy, they explode their rage, they embody their sorrow. Perhaps this is part of the reason why Shakespeare is still (by far) the most produced playwright in the country (more on this throughout the term)... Perhaps there is something therapeutic about seeing our deepest loves and fears and joys and heartbreaks so blatantly exposed on stage.

Additionally, we cannot ignore that Shakespeare is an old dead white man. We all know this. There has been a lot of conversation in training programs and professional theatres about why we are still teaching and producing Shakespeare as such a furious rate. This is a valuable question for which I do not have a clear answer.

We will be reading and responding to various articles and op-eds throughout the term surrounding this question, and I hope we can address it with honesty and thoughtfulness.

There is no right or wrong in Shakespeare. There is only what we experience and bring alive in the space both as actors and observers. As more truthful work is exposed, this can lead to discomfort. Please embrace the discomfort. Push against it. Roll around in it. Live in it.

However, there is a difference between experiencing discomfort and being unsafe. **Please be judicious in learning the difference for yourself.** You are the owner of your educational experience, your own emotional experience, and your own physical safety. If at any point you are *unsafe*, please notify the instructor and take care of yourself.

As actors, our job is to “hold the mirror up to nature” (Hamlet), and to be students and communicators of the human experience in all of its complexities. This often means confronting topics that are controversial, challenging, ugly, and frightening. Let us all approach those conversations with equal parts tenacity and grace!

ASSIGNMENTS:

Rehearsal Logs/Journals:

Each student will be required to do (at least) 2 30 minute rehearsals/explorations outside of class each week. Once we begin scene work, you’ll be working with your partner (obviously). When we are working on monologues you can work solo and journal about your discoveries, or work with another person (or few people). I recommend the latter, as it’s very useful to have an audience to speak to and communicate with.

Journal entries can/should include:

What (if any) discoveries or observations did you make?

What surprised or delighted you?

What roadblocks did you hit?

The entry should also include:

*Time of rehearsal

*Date

*Who you worked with

*Where you worked

Journal Entries/Logs will be due on Mondays by 10am for the previous week. If you have your sessions done before the deadline please send them early. Please type and print them and put each entry in a designated folder when you turn them in.

Monologue 1: “Basics”

In class workshoping of a monologue of your choosing. The work on this piece is about process. You will not be graded on the final outcome of this piece. I’ll be very interested to read your journals regarding this work. This will introduce some basic ideas regarding working with Shakespeare text that I’d like you to carry into scene work.

Scene 1

Partners and scenes will be assigned by instructor. Scenes will be workshoped in class (2 sessions for each group) and rehearsed out of class. There will be a final sharing.

Scene 2/Midterm

We will workshop these scenes in class but each group will only get 1 session but the final product will be shared at the midterm.

There will be a written portion to the midterm. Students will write a short paper that includes dictionary/dramaturgical discoveries and self-evaluation.

The Shakespeare Audition/Final

Students will prepare 2 contrasting monologues of their choosing. We will workshop these in class once and students will work on them independently and prepare them for the final. Self Evaluation Paper will be due.

Critical Responses:

A few times throughout the term, I will assign an article for you to read and respond to. Your responses will be due in class on a day specified by me. On that day, please be prepared to discuss the article. I'll ask that each response gives a brief summary of the article (1 paragraph) and bullet point 3 quotes from the article. After each quote, you will write your opinion on the bullet point (if it is in agreement, please expound, if it is in opposition to, please expound). I will be choosing bullet points in class and asking students to discuss them. You should be prepared to converse on every response point that you list, as well as engage in the larger discussion of the class.

COURSE CALENDAR (subject to change):

August 23-28th: Ensemble building and voice

August 30th-Sept 15^h: Monologue 1 (Basics)

Sept 18th: Scene 1 assignments will be given/Dictionary Discovery Day

Sept 20th-Oct 2nd: Scene 1 Workshop

Oct 4th: Scene 1 Sharing

Oct 9th: Scene 2 assignments will be given/Dictionary Discovery Day

Oct 9nd-Oct 23rd: Scene 2 workshopping

Oct. 25th: Midterm/Scene 2 Sharing

Oct 27th-End of Term: The Shakespeare Audition unit

CLASS POLICIES

Covid:

If you are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms please stay home, get tested and follow guidance from the Center for Disease Control! Course materials will be provided to you with an excused absence, and you will be given a reasonable amount of time to make up work.

Attendance:

Barring the above circumstances, students are expected to be in attendance daily and to be on time. Students are allowed one “unexcused” absence that does not require documentation and does not conform to the UF “acceptable reasons for absence.”.

Any other “unexcused” absence will result in a penalty of a full letter grade (10%) from the final grade per “unexcused” absence. To be considered “excused” an absence must be accompanied by appropriate official documentation. Religious observances do not require documentation.

Any absence from class for the following reasons must be supported by official acceptable documentation to avoid a grade penalty:

- Illness—doctors note must be on official letterhead with address and phone number, noting the date and time of visit and diagnosis verifying that an absence from class is warranted, doctor name and signature
- Serious family emergencies
- Special curricular requirements (e.g., judging trips, field trips, professional conferences)
- Military obligation
- Severe weather conditions
- Participation in official university activities such as music performances, athletic competition, or debate
- Court-imposed legal obligations (e.g., jury duty or subpoena)

*To help organize accommodations, students should inform the instructor by the end of the second week of classes of religious observances of their faith that will conflict with class attendance this semester.

Any student that acquires 3 absences (either excused or unexcused) will be required to meet with this course’s instructor and/or area faculty to discuss the student’s continued participation in the course.

For Majors: Failure to attend this meeting will result in Artistic Probation.

Tardiness:

Tardiness is disruptive to a class of this nature and will not be tolerated. Any tardiness will be recorded along with attendance. Attendance will be taken promptly at the start of class. If you enter the room after the roll-call has been completed, you will be considered tardy. If you enter the room anytime after 20 minutes of the official start of the class you will be marked absent for that class day.

That being said, I am a reasonable human being who has my own set of access needs. As such, please communicate with me if something comes up.

2 tardies = 1 absence

Clothing/Dress:

Please wear clothes you can move in without adjustment. Practice this at home and see if you have the impulse to pull at or adjust your clothes.

Be prepared to be barefoot or wear rehearsal/movement shoes.

No Hats

No necklaces, bracelets, or dangly earrings

No Jean

No Logos or big patterns

Please keep your colors as neutral as possible (you will not be penalized for colors, but if you have an option between a black t-shirt and a neon green t-shirt, go with black).

*You may dress for your scene if you so desire!

UNIVERSITY POLICIES:

Academic Honesty

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code.” On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Conduct Code specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Honor Code: <https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/process/student-conduct-code/>

If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor

*Plagiarism is an act of Academic Misconduct. Any act of plagiarism may result in failing the course.

Disabilities

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the Disability Resource Center. It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with the instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester <https://disability.ufl.edu/get-started/>

Campus Resources

Health and Wellness

- U Matter, We Care: If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu, 352-392-1575, or visit U Matter, We Care website (<https://umatter.ufl.edu/>) to refer or report a concern and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.
- Counseling and Wellness Center: Visit the Counseling and Wellness Center website (counseling.ufl.edu) or call 352-392-1575 for information on crisis services as well as non-crisis services.
- Student Health Care Center: Call 352-392-1161 for 24/7 information to help you find the care you need, or visit the Student Health Care Center website (<https://shcc.ufl.edu/>).
- University Police Department: Visit UF Police Department website (<https://police.ufl.edu/>) or call 352-392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies).
- UF Health Shands Emergency Room / Trauma Center: For immediate medical care call 352-733-0111 or go to the emergency room at 1515 SW Archer Road, Gainesville, FL 32608; Visit the UF Health Emergency Room and Trauma Center website (<https://shcc.ufl.edu/>).
- GatorWell Health Promotion Services: For prevention services focused on optimal wellbeing, including Wellness Coaching for Academic Success, visit the GatorWell website (<https://gatorwell.ufsa.ufl.edu/>) or call 352-273-4450.

Academic Resources

- Writing Studio: <https://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/> --2215 Turlington Hall, 352-846-1138. For help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers.
- Library Support: <http://cms.uflib.ufl.edu/ask>. Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.
- E-learning technical support: Contact the UF Computing Help Desk at 352-392-4357 or via e-mail at helpdesk@ufl.edu.

Course Evaluations:

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

GRADING:

Rehearsal Log/Journal: 15%

Monologue 1 (process/participation): 10%

Scene 1: 15%

Scene 2/Midterm: 20%

Shakespeare Package/Final: 20%

Participation in Class (both physically and conversationally): 10%

Critical Response Papers: 10%

More information on UF grading policy may be found at:

UF Graduate Catalog

Grades and Grading Policies

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx#calculatinggpa>

FINAL NOTES FROM INSTRUCTOR:

This kind of specialized education (really any education) is a serious privilege. Please honor that. Honor those people who don't have this opportunity. Honor those who are not allowed any education. Honor the people who have supported and cared for you to make this possible, by always bringing your best, your most curious, your most eager, your most dedicated selves to our work.

You are the owners of your experience.

On a more personal note...

I am a very kind, reasonable person and instructor. I expect rigor AND I understand that life happens (and our access needs are all different). Communicating with me will go a long way. Please keep the lines open if you need extra help, support/accommodations or simply want to chat about the work.

This syllabus is subject to change based on the needs of the class.