

HONORS 302T: THEATRE AND ISSUES IN AMERICAN SOCIETY

SYLLABUS

I. COURSE OBJECTIVES:

- A. To analyze selected American dramas and productions through the reading of play scripts and/or the viewing of films and/or live theatre performances (as available), along with assigned readings, independent investigations and class presentations
- B. To utilize these artworks to foster personal student awareness of the potentially divisive issues of race, ethnicity, acculturation, age, gender, and socio-economic status in America today
- C. To promote a more global student understanding of the theatre and drama as a powerful cultural force in the fabric of American life—as a vehicle for ideas, as a medium for focusing the complementary insights of this diverse culture at the center of its life and awareness, and as a tool for effecting social change
- D. To develop student recognition of the contributions to the American theatre and drama made by writers/artists from diverse orientations of ethnicity, culture, and gender

II. TEXTS:

The play texts to be read for this class are available in the Titan Bookstore. Students will be responsible for the material contained in additional readings made available during the semester for each unit of instruction.

III. ASSESSMENTS:

Formative assessments will be assigned for each unit of instruction to determine whether the goals of the course are being met. These will consist of in-class, collaborative learning exercises and a variety of short written assignments based on questions/issues raised by the dramas, theatreworks, and secondary readings assigned for the class. These will be evaluated on the basis of the student's demonstrated ability to critically assess the issues raised by these materials, and his/her ability to critically discuss the social/cultural significance of same in a manner that is consistent with the objectives of the course. Each student will prepare a lecture, lecture outline, and an annotated bibliography for one of the playwrights/theatre companies under discussion during the semester, and lead a class presentation on same. [See further description of these presentations on page two of syllabus.] In addition, a full-term research paper of 5-7 pages will be developed by each student, in consultation with the instructor, and an in-class presentation of approximately 15 minutes will be required, in which each student will report the results of his/her research. It is expected that these projects will utilize sources discovered through the students' independent investigations, along with those sources made available by the instructor. A critique of a live theatre production/film will also be required, as available on a semester to semester basis. Periodic assessments will be designed to evaluate the student's assimilation, retention, and application of the goals and objectives of the course.

GRADING COMPONENTS:

Attendance/Preparation/Participation in Class Discussions	10 %
“Backgrounds” Presentation on Playwright/Company	15 %
Unit Assessments (total)	50 %
Full-Term Research Paper	15 %
Full-Term Research Paper: In-class Report of Findings	<u>10 %</u>
	100 %

V. GRADING OVERVIEW AND MANDATORY ATTENDANCE:

An “A” grade indicates exceedingly high quality work. The student masters all assigned work, completes work independently and on time, shows initiative and originality, does more than is required/assigned, and makes quality contributions to class on a consistent basis. A “B” grade indicates good progress, above the average, masters significant portions of the work, works with little assistance from others, is prepared, alert, and shows interest in the work, completes work on time and offers fine discussion points in class. A “C” grade indicates a quality of work acceptable for a 300 level Honors course. Satisfactorily completes assigned work under normal conditions and directions, shows interest in work, completes work on time, and makes constructive contributions to class discussions. A “D” grade indicates a need for greater effort to meet requirements of this grade level satisfactorily. Achieves below grade standards, completes a minimum of assigned work, seldom either responds in class or makes constructive contributions to class discussions. An “F” grade indicates failure to produce an acceptable quality of work for an upper division course in the Honors Program.

As should be evident from the above, and from the collaborative nature of this seminar, each student’s regular attendance and constructive participation in each class session is expected and required (except as amended by this paragraph). Each student will be evaluated on his/her mastery of all materials presented during the semester. An absence can only be “excused” when, upon returning to class, the student presents documentation (on a physician or court official’s letterhead) that specifically details how and why he/she was unable to attend class for medical or legal reasons. The instructor will approach the Director of the Honors Program with any request to have an absence “excused” for an alternate reason. [Note: A slip from the student health center that offers something non-descript, such as, “the named student was seen at the health center on the date indicated,” will not suffice.] The student will be responsible for obtaining all notes and making up any assignment missed as a result of an excused absence. A grade of “F” will be tendered for any assignment, including any in-class assessment or the like, that is missed during *any unexcused* absence. In addition to the above, a close tally will be made of any *unexcused* absences; and for each one after the first, the student’s final course grade will be lowered by one partial letter grade (Example: From “A-“ to “B+”).

VI. INDIVIDUAL PLAYWRIGHT/THEATRE COMPANY PRESENTATIONS:

Each student will be required to prepare a fifteen-to-twenty-minute lecture-demonstration from the Schedule of Presentation Topics (which will be developed once the enrollment in the class has stabilized). A typed lecture outline and bibliography of at least five relevant print sources must be given to the instructor at least *two full class periods before* the presentation, to allow for timely feedback, as necessary. *Failure to follow this guideline will seriously affect the evaluation of your presentation.* These presentations will be carefully timed and each should be accompanied by a lecture guide/outline that clearly indicates the 4 or 5 key points to remember about each playwright or theatre group. Presentations will be evaluated on the basis of organization, clarity, coverage of the important points of the topic, depth of understanding, quality of the distributed outline, ability to lead the post-presentation discussion, and overall execution. [Good Guide: I. Bio/Apprenticeship (no more than 4 minutes; included here are to be only those materials that are most relevant to the figure or company's contribution to our study this semester); II. Characteristics of Playwright's/Theatre Company's Dramaturgy: Thematic Concerns and Style; III. Samples of the Work; IV. Annotated Bibliography of no fewer than five of the most helpful print sources (the annotations are to be a minimum of 25 words, and evaluative in nature—indicating where this source ranks in your survey of the literature on the subject, and why), along with the Pollak Library call number.] I must get a sense that you genuinely want others to learn the material you have prepared. These lecture/demos are expected to be of upper division Honors Program quality and will be evaluated accordingly.

VII. FULL-TERM RESEARCH INVESTIGATIONS/PAPERS/AND REPORTS OF FINDINGS:

These investigations/papers/in-class reports of research findings, as described above, are to be based on approved research problems pertinent to the course materials. It is expected that each student will schedule a meeting with the instructor as early as possible during the semester to discuss the nature and scope of the investigation to be undertaken. Formal proposals must be submitted by the deadline established in the Course Calendar.

VIII. COURSE CALENDAR

M Feb 2	Introduction to Course, Backgrounds, Definitions
W 4	Historical Overview: "Theatre as a Medium of Ideas"
M 9	Principles of Script Analysis
W 11	Principles of Script Analysis
M 16	Presidents' Day—Campus Closed
W Feb 18	Principles of Script Analysis, Genre, and Style

- M 23 “The Social Problem Play: Social Imperatives and Personal Responsibility”
Presentation on Arthur Miller (Dr. Jasper)
- W 25 Film: Arthur Miller, Death of a Salesman
- M Mar 1 Film: Arthur Miller, Death of a Salesman concludes
- W 3 Arthur Miller, Death of a Salesman Assessments Due and Class Discussion
“Artists at the Barricades: Guerilla Theatre Warfare on Socio-Economic Themes”
Student Presentation on The San Francisco Mime Troupe
- M 8 The Commedia dell’arte Performance Style (Dr. Jasper)
Film: Troupers (San Francisco Mime Troupe)
- W 10 Film: Troupers (San Francisco Mime Troupe) concludes
- M 15 Troupers Assessments Due and Class Discussion
“The Dysfunctional Family and the Decline of the American Dream: Metaphor and Reality”
Student Presentation on Sam Shepard
- W 17 Film: Sam Shepard, True West
- M 22 Film: Sam Shepard, True West
- W 24 Sam Shepard, True West Assessments Due and Class Discussion
“Gender Issues and the American Theatre: Emerging Voices and Evolving Roles”
Student Presentation on Eve Ensler
- ****REMINDER: Proposals for Research Papers Are Due Prior to Spring Break

M&W 29&31 SPRING BREAK

- M Apr 5 Eve Ensler, Vagina Monologues Assessments Due and Class Discussion

- W 7 Eve Ensler, Vagina Monologues Class Discussion continued
 “Issues of Race/Ethnicity in American Life: The African-American Experience”
 Student Presentation on George C. Wolfe
- M 12 George C. Wolfe, The Colored Museum Assessments Due & Class Discussion
- W 14 George C. Wolfe, The Colored Museum Class Discussion continued
 “Issues of Race/Ethnicity in American Life: Contemporary Hispanic Voices”
 Student Presentation on Luis Valdez
- M 19 Film: Luis Valdez, Zoot Suit
- W 21 Film: Luis Valdez, Zoot Suit
- M 26 Zoot Suit Assessments Due and Class Discussion
 “Issues of Race/Ethnicity in American Life: Emerging Asian-American Voices”
 Student Presentation on David Henry Hwang
- W 28 David Henry Hwang, M Butterfly Assessments Due and Class Discussion
- M May 3 David Hwang, M Butterfly Class Discussion continued
 Background: “The Joy Luck Club” (Dr. Jasper)
 Film: “The Joy Luck Club”
- W 5 Film: “The Joy Luck Club”
- M 10 “Joy Luck Club” Assessments Due and Class Discussion
 Issues of Homosexuality in American Life and Art/AIDS as Metaphor and Reality
 Student Presentation on Tony Kushner
- W May12 Tony Kushner, Angels in America: The Millennium Approaches Assessments Due
 and Class Discussion

- M 17 Tony Kushner, Angels in American: The Millennium Approaches Class Discussion cont.
Special Guest: Professor Deborah Lockwood, “Producing ‘Angels in America’”
- W 19 Student Research Presentations and Discussion
- F 28 Student Research Presentations and Discussion