##### **Alexander Technique for Performers**

##### **USC Course Syllabus – Fall 2014**

**School of Dramatic Arts**

**Course Name:** Alexander Technique for Performers **Theater #419 – 63024R**

**Time:** Mondays & Wednesdays 2pm – 3:50pm

**Location:** PED 205

**Instructor:** Babette Markus

**Title:** Adjunct Instructor, School of Dramatic Arts

**Office Hours:** Available by Appointment

**Email:**  [Babette.Markus@USC.edu](mailto:Babette.Markus@USC.edu)

**Telephone:** 310/922-6023 -cel

**Course Description:**

Actors, musicians, dancers, and athletes are developing specialized performance skills. They think about coordination but often have a vague concept of what that is. By teaching the basics of functional anatomy and vertebrate organization, combined with increased sensory awareness and kinesthetic sensitivity, the concept of coordination takes on a new perspective and concrete steps to change the movement repertoire become apparent.

The Alexander Technique offers a clear, systematic look into the underlying principles that govern human movement. F.M. Alexander discovered a primary mechanism for achieving balance and ease in uprightness: The head leads the spine in good coordination. This “primary control” is the central mechanism. It alters the physiology of the body by creating more space.

While Alexander Technique has its roots in the performing arts, it is widely accepted as an educational method that focuses primarily on changing habitual behavior. Participants learn to engage the body and mind to reduce tension in daily activities. It is this unique psycho-physical combination that has made Alexander Technique training such an important component of the practical and creative training for performing artists.

The principles and procedures of the Alexander Technique apply across all areas of daily practice and rehearsal routines, to performance and the mitigating of stage fright and health problems.

*“Alexander Technique gives us all the things we have been looking for in a system of physical education: Relief from strain due to maladjustment, and consequent improvement in physical and mental health...and along with this, a general heightening of consciousness on all levels. We cannot ask more from any system of education; nor, if we seriously desire to alter human beings in a desirable direction, can we ask any less.”*

—Aldous Huxley on Alexander Technique

Applying Alexander Technique Principles – awareness, observation, thinking in activity, using thought to change habits – we will explore how you “use” yourselves in daily activity. This involves recognizing our habitual patterns of movement, voice, breathing and expression; the specific habits that we repeat unknowingly from one activity to the next.

As this awareness becomes clear, we begin the process of subtracting our unconscious habitual reactions in order to bring the student closer to his/her essential self. This leads the performer to true spontaneous response (not habit driven). FM Alexander called this “psycho-physical re-education.” A healthy by-product of this “re-education” is a tangible improvement in coordination, posture, flexibility and freedom of movement.

The second phase of the course will layer in what Alexander called “respiratory re-education”. Well-coordinated respiratory function is based on proper functioning of the integrated body/mind. Good vocal production is enhanced by optimal breathing coordination. It is also vital to singers and instrumentalists to put ‘breath’ into their music. Athletes and dancers, yogis and martial artists will increase their endurance and fluidity of performance.

We can then focus on specific interests: For the actors, musicians and dancers - stage presence, performance anxiety, stage movement, speaking and singing voice, dance, connecting mind, emotions, and body, and so on. And for the athletes, in addition to the benefits above, we’ll look closely at their training, how to ‘work smart’ to minimize the risk of injuries, and develop strategies for sustaining a healthy daily practice while improving endurance and speed. The actual time frame may shift with the progress of the class. It is important to build a strong foundation in AT before applying these new AT tools to individualized interests.

Each lesson will incorporate thematic reading and discussion, hands-on guidance, as well as activities to illustrate Alexander concepts in an experiential way.

**Goals & Objectives:**

1. Practical and theoretical knowledge of the principles and practices of the Alexander Technique, including expanded awareness of habits in daily activity.

2. Improvement in the student’s kinesthetic sense, coordination and ease of movement, including breathing coordination.

3. Further the student’s understanding of the integration of mind and body.

4. Develop self-care skills for dealing with daily stress and performance anxiety, for greater access to freedom and creativity, as well as professional preparedness.

5. Apply the Alexander Principles to breathing coordination, vocal production, and performing in your field at a beginning level.

**Recommended Preparation:**

Participants must be involved in performing arts: Theater, Dance, Music, or Athletics, in order to get the most out of the course.

**Course Schedule and Assignments**

**Class 1 – Explore Mind/Body Connection--**Alexander Technique principles- awareness, inhibition and direction; introduce “Active Rest” lying-down practice using the thinking and inactivity to elicit stress reduction and direction; introduce “spatial thinking.”

Activity: Moving heads

Activity: Singing and moving

HANDOUTS: Syllabus; Journals; AT Overview; AT Made Easy/BP Concepts

HOMEWORK: Observe heads and necks

**JOURNAL 1: Introduce yourself**

**Class 2 – Explore “Primary Control”--**change your mind to change your body; body language and the head/neck relationship; how does this relate to anatomy of the head, neck and spine, “primary control”? Review “Active Rest”, lying-down practice using the thinking and inactivity to elicit stress reduction and direction, including “spatial thinking.”

Activity: Explore spine and weight of head

Activity: Sit/stand

HANDOUTS: Gorman Spine/AO joint; ATI First Lesson; Active Rest/AT and Performance

HOMEWORK: Active Rest

**Class 3 – Gait Analysis**--examine habits in walking; what is our strategy for propelling ourselves forward? Animal movement; head leading, body following in walking; review Active Rest.

Activity: Trying on each other’s walks

HANDOUTS: Set of Directions

**Class 4 – Integration Class**--review significant concepts; examine how directing is thinking; primary control; non-doing; end-gaining; widening; bending/monkey; Active Rest with Silent La la la’s.

Activity: Bending and Monkey

HANDOUT: British Medical Journal Study

**Class 5 – Functional Anatomy**--use a skeleton to explore skeletal structure; talk about anatomy from AT point of view and vice-versa; review basic body mechanics from mechanical p.o.v. i.e. structural loads, levers, columns and beams.

Activity: Palpating body landmarks

HANDOUTS: Back Muscles/Multifudus; Upright/Neck & Vocal Structures; Skeleton, Netter; Pelvis Netter +Pelvis Conable

**Class 6 – Clarify use of shoulders and arms**--explore relationship of head/neck to shoulder girdle and arms; habits in use of arms; good “use” of arms based on primary control and length and width of back; connect arms with support of the back; reaching, lifting, pushing, pulling.

Activity: Use of arms in activities, exercise, martial arts, etc.

HANDOUTS: Actors and Directors on AT / selected quotes

**JOURNAL 2**: **Discovering your habits in movement:** Is your head leading, body following? What do you know about your own patterns? How are you working with the principles of Awareness, Inhibition and Directions?

**Class 7 – Integration Class**--review significant concepts; use of arms; secondary directions, as “torso back and up” and “front length”; practice monkey; relationship of mind and body; how thinking determines habits

Activity: Active Rest and silent counting

HANDOUTS: Significant Concepts; Pedro D’A. AT Principles

**Class 8 – Application of AT Principles to Activities**--staying with AT and spatial directions as you move; warm-ups; stretching; Active Rest and vocalized counting

Activity: Rolling down

HANDOUTS: Warming Up, L. Marshall

**Class 9 – Applied Ergonomics**--basic information about ergonomics and your relationship to the objects in your environment; your desk, chair, computer, car, etc.; simple ergonomic solutions

Activity: Ergonomic evaluation in computer lab

HANDOUTS: Resolving RSI, Comfort Zones, Choosing a Chair, Laptops

HOMEWORK: Re-organize your home and workplace ergonomically

**Class 10 – Training the Squat**--taking the load off the legs; squat as four-legged movement; connecting arms to back; importance of back in Breathing Coordination

Activity: Finessing the squat

Activity: Plies and port-de-bras

HANDOUTS: Matthews on Squatting

**Class 11 – Developmental Movement** – developmental movement from infant to toddler; primary and secondary curves; 4 legged to squatting to upright; psycho-motor connections

Activity: Developmental movement sequence

HANDOUT: TBA

**Class 12– Introduce AT Approach to Breathing**--anatomy of breathing; movement of rib cage and diaphragm; how to stop interfering with breathing process; effortless, efficient breathing; introduce “whispered ah”

Activity: Draw breathing models

HANDOUTS: Gorman Thorax Front/Back; Gorman Diaphragm; Excerpts from J. Wolf’s “Green Machine”

HOMEWORK: Download and review Breathing Coordination principles, Home Page, and Help Yourself; [www.breathingcoordination.com](http://www.breathingcoordination.com)

**Class 13 – Breathing Coordination and 3-DMovement**--Review respiratory function; sequence silent la la la’s, silent counting; non end-gaining

Activity: Explore amber light

Activity: Rib Animation Video

HANDOUTS: McCallion, Breathing Appendix/ Exploded Torso; Olsen on Breathing

**MIDTERM JOURNAL: The Actor and the Alexander Technique OR Alexander Technique for Musicians**

**Class 14 – Breathing Coordination and 3-DMovement--**introduce Whispered Ah; silent counting; vocalized counting; vocalized ah; vowel sounds; sustained sounds; doing less; connect voice with communicating; how does your character breathe?

Activity: Stough video

HANDOUTS: Whispered Ah Directions; Whispered Ah Notes/Benefits

**Class 15 – Actor and Character--**consciously going in and out of character; developing your own warm up using AT; body as instrument; authentic vs. best use; habit and spontaneity.

Activity: Tableaus

Activity: Explore character’s physicality and voice

HANDOUTS: McCallion, Stopping/Spontaneity Cherns on Acting

**Class 16 – Warm-ups**--what do you do to warm-up, physically and vocally? Using your more reliable sensory appreciation; “end-gaining / means whereby” or process / product; observing your acting/playing/singing habits

Activity: Going in and out of character’s physicality, breath and voice. HANDOUTS: Richmond’s Actor as Two People

**Class 17 – Learning Text/ Score**--Examine your habits for learning text; benefits of using monkey and active rest; develop lalala’s and silent counting

Activity: Monkey on wall

HANDOUT: Learning text assignment

**JOURNAL 3**: **Preferences for learning text**

**Class 18 – Spirals in Movement**--Crawling; spiraling out of Active Rest; rolling over; diagonal movement in walking; spirals in martial arts, dance, skateboarding, etc.

Activity: Revisit crawling to walking

HANDOUT: TBA

**Class 19 – Exploring your Kinesphere**--effect of fear on spatial relationships and breath; expanding spatial awareness; discover your 3-D body; breathing into your “voluminous” back; reduce frontal orientation; connecting front to back

Activity: DaVinci Man

Activity: “Feel the fear and do it anyway”

HANDOUTS: Fear’s Body-Mind; Amygdala Wikipedia; Jill Bolte-Taylor

**Class 20 – Dealing with Performance Anxiety**--using AT skills to regulate your nervous system; using breathing coordination to connect body, mind, emotions; recognizing your nervous habits and applying “conscious inhibition” and direction.

Activity: Mock Auditions

HANDOUTS: 3 Types of Startle Patterns; Performance Anxiety, J. R-F

**Class 21 & 22 - Applying AT to Monologues**--bring in your work in progress; use active rest and breathing coordination combined with your warm-up; preparation for rehearsal and onstage; practice monologue

Activity: Monologues

HANDOUTS: Mamet, On Character (True or False)

**JOURNAL 4: Daily Active Rest**

**Class 23 & 24 - Using Alexander Technique in Scenes**--Stage presence; performance anxiety; stage movement; voice and character; connecting mind, emotions, and body; working with partners on scenes; making physical contact with partners in scenes.

**Class 25 - Applying AT to singing**--Exploring singing habits and practice inhibition and direction; Using Breathing coordination in silent la la las, 123, vocalized counting; sustained sounds;

Activity: Singing

HANDOUTS: Principles of AT for Musicians, J R-F

**Class 26 – Integration and review**

**Required Reading: Choose one**

For Actors: The Actor and the Alexander Technique, Kelly McKevenue; OR

For Musicians: Music and the Alexander Technique, Kleinman/Buckoke

For Athletes and others: Body Learning, Michael Gelb

to be read by. BUY IT NOW, and start reading.

**Various handouts** to be distributed by instructor.

**Assessment:** Based on written assignments, reading, class participation, attendance, and final paper. Students will be evaluated on progress toward Goals and Objectives.

**100 possible points**: All points are awarded based on prompt and effective completion of stated requirements.

**Written assignments:**

**40 pts**. There will be 4 journal assignments, 1-2 pages double-spaced, 12-point font. Each paper is worth 10 points. ***Papers must be typed and turned in on time, not emailed unless you have special permission***.

**15 pts**. Midterm Journal, based on Body Learning, 2-3 pages.

**20 pts.** Final paper, 3-4 pages.

25 pts. – Achieved Goals and Objectives; 5 stated goals, 5 pts. each.

**GRADING RUBRIC**

A 96-100 A- 90-95

B+ 85-89 B 80-84 B- 70-79

C+ 65-69 C 60-64 C- 55-59

D+ 50-54 D 45-49

NOTE: The Goals and Objectives for this course are in service of the UNDERGRADUATE DEGREE PROGRAMS LEARNING OBJECTIVES as follows:

* Provide concentrated training in the essential technical skills and working vocabularies of a specific area of theatre arts in order to enable students to realize their professional and artistic goals.
* Develop the students’ unique voices as artists.
* Apply their developing physical, vocal and emotional skills to performances.

**Attendance:** Attendance is mandatory. If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to find out about what we covered in class, homework assignments, and to obtain any handouts.

**Note From the DSP:**

Students requesting academic accommodations based on a disability are required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP when adequate documentation is filed. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is open Monday-Friday, 8:30-5. The office is in Student Union 310; the phone is 213/740-0776.

**Statement for Students with Disabilities**

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Website and contact information for DSP:

http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home\_index.html, (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 740-6948 (TDD only), (213) 740-8216 (FAX) ability@usc.edu.

**Statement on Academic Integrity**

USC seeks to maintain an optimal learning environment. General principles of academic honesty include the concept of respect for the intellectual property of others, the expectation that individual work will be submitted unless otherwise allowed by an instructor, and the obligations both to protect one’s own academic work from misuse by others as well as to avoid using another’s work as one’s own. All students are expected to understand and abide by these principles. SCampus, the Student Guidebook,

(www.usc.edu/scampus or http://scampus.usc.edu) contains the University Student Conduct Code (see University Governance, Section 11.00), while the recommended sanctions are located in Appendix A.

**Emergency Preparedness/Course Continuity in a Crisis**

In case of a declared emergency if travel to campus is not feasible, USC executive leadership will announce an electronic way for instructors to teach students in their residence halls or homes using a combination of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technologies.

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I have read the above Syllabus and understand the Requirements and Assessment policies.

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NAME DATE

Please sign and return to Professor by September 12, 2014.