

**Christopher Shaw**

**Assistant Professor of Theatre Practice in Acting and Directing**

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**Office Hours: By Appointment**

**All Office Appointments Must be Scheduled in Advance.**

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### **Course Description and Overview**

Because of its close ties to playwriting and directing, acting is often considered an interpretive skill. But acting is its own independent art form, through which actor's craft performances using techniques that differ from those of other artists. As such, acting is a discrete art that can be studied and evaluated on its own terms. This class investigates major theories and techniques that characterize twentieth and twenty-first century acting in the United States. Students will examine primary texts about acting theories and will engage in basic studio exercises that explore the techniques of acting. The studio exercises will uncover how actors explore the meanings and visions in plays; how intellectual study of texts uncovers the training of voice, speech, and movement. Thus, students will develop respect for the complexity of acting as they learn to articulate how the actor's art is distinctive and to evaluate performances.

### **Learning Objectives**

This course will fulfill the following four learning objectives in the Arts Category:

1. *Analysis* will be assessed through a critical paper evaluating performance/acting through the lens of explored theories and techniques from the class. This will require attending a performance of a play (TBD) in performance this semester within the USC SDA Theatre Season.
2. *Making* will be incorporated into weekly studio exercises, in-class rehearsals and scene presentations
3. The *Context* of acting as an art will be explored through lectures and class discussions on the history and theories of acting.
4. The course overall will prompt students to build life-long *Engagement* with the art of acting by becoming informed spectators.

### **Class Meetings**

- Will involve discussions on the required readings and performances, as well as practice-based studio workshops.
- Students are required to participate fully in all studio exercises. Talent or prior experience in acting will not be necessary to succeed; however, the instructor expects from all students an honest and disciplined commitment to the studio work.
- Turn off all cell phones and other electronic devices during class sessions.
- Please do not wear flip-flops or sandals to class.

### **Required Readings and Supplementary Materials**

*The Great Acting Teachers and Their Methods*; Richard Brestoff; Smith and Kraus; 1995  
*Acting in Film*; Michael Caine; Applause Theatre Book Publishing 1990 ( Amazon)

## Description of Assignments & Examinations

- Performance Paper—(15% of final grade)— 2-3 cogent, well-written pages analyzing the acting work in the stage production *GNIT* within the School of Dramatic Arts Theatre Season this semester. Pay particular attention to: a. the “style” and believability of the acting b. the quality, volume, and pace of the dialogue c. how much is communicated through looks and physical gestures d. the character choices, both physical and behavioral, the actors have made.  
TICKET STUB AND PROGRAM FROM THE SHOW MUST BE STAPLED TO PAPER WHEN SUBMITTING IT AS PART OF THE GRADE OR PAPER WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED
- Studio Work—(20% of final grade) —Students will engage in “open scene” work and 10- minute play exercises. This will entail both out of class rehearsal (meeting with scene partner) and in-class rehearsal and will culminate in performance of 10-minute plays.
- Preparation and rehearsal outside of class will be required
- “Actors Homework” – ( 10% of final grade) there will be specific worksheets that you will complete as preparation for your scene work
- Mid-term Exam—(20% of final grade)— This will be comprised of 1) a performed scene from a play and 2) multiple choice and essay exam on the history of acting training in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.
- Final Exam— (20% of final grade)— This will be comprised of 1) a performed scene from a play 2) a multiple choice and essay exam.

## Grading Breakdown

- Performance Paper 15%
- Studio Work 20%
- Mid-term Exam: Performance 5%
- Mid-term Exam: Multiple Choice and Essay Question 15%
- Actor Homework / Worksheets 10%
- Final Exam: Performance 5%
- Final Exam: Multiple Choice and Essay Question 15%
- Active Participation 15%

## Grading Criteria

- **Excellent** A = 96-100 A- = 91-95
- **Very Good** B+ = 88-90 B = 85-87 B- = 81-84
- **Good** C+ = 78-80 C = 75-77 C- = 71-74
- **Satisfactory / Threshold** D+ = 68-70 D = 65-67 D- = 61-64
- **Unsatisfactory to Poor** F = 60 or below

The final course grade is articulated as a Letter Grade. This grade is translated into a G.P.A using the following scale: A = 4; A- = 3.7; B+ = 3.3; B = 3; B- = 2.7; C+ = 2.3; C = 2; C- = 1.7; D = 1; F = 0.

When the average falls between two grades, the final grade will be weighted toward the positive end of the scale for students whose attendance and participation in class has been good, but will be weighted toward the negative end of the scale for those with poor attendance and participation.

## ATTENDANCE:

### Absences/Tardiness:

Learning in class depends on the layering of intellectual and emotional discovery resulting from the consistent active exploration of **100%** of the Ensemble **No absences or tardies are allowed. Cumulative active class participation points will be lost.** *Attendance is weighted at no more than 15% as per University Guidelines*

## GRADING POLICY:

**Grades are not dictated** by the success of acting presentations or the instructor's subjective opinion of talent and artistic preference.

**Grades are dictated** by

- Participation, preparation, attendance
- Constructive feedback of classmates' acting presentations
- Willingness to experiment and apply the constructive feedback of instructor and students on one's own scenes, presentations, and exercises
- Meeting all assignment deadlines: reading, writing, acting
- Application and understanding of methods being explored in class and in reading to scene work and studio exercises
- Scene and acting exercise preparation and presentation and memorization of lines
- Availability to fellow classmates to rehearse scenes

**Note:** *If a deadline is missed because of a classmate / project partner's unavailability, the available partner/s will not be penalized. If problems arise, a discussion with the professor with all involved must be arranged before the day of the scheduled scene or everyone will be held equally accountable. BEFORE ANY SCENE MAY BE REHEARSED ON ITS FEET IN CLASS, THERE MUST BE A MINIMUM OF 2 HOURS OF OUTSIDE REHEARSAL. LINES MUST BE ACCURATELY MEMORIZED BY SECOND IN CLASS REHEARSAL.*

**Assessment of "Participation"** 15% of the final grade is earned through class participation. This will be defined as:

- **Students are required to be on time for all scheduled sessions unless they are genuinely too ill to attend or affected by unavoidable personal or external circumstances. If the student has more than 2 absences or late arrivals during the course they will not be able to fulfill their ability to fully participate in class. Additionally, students must keep the teacher informed of any absence or late arrival IN ADVANCE. Failure to do so also constitutes a lack of participation and points will be deducted.**
- **Printed copies of all scenes, monologues and play scripts must be brought to every class meeting. No electronic copies (laptops, tablets, phones) may be used in class. NO EXCEPTIONS.**
- **Appropriate rehearsal clothing and props for ALL EXERCISES AND IN CLASS REHEARSALS.**
- **Openness to new methods of working and eagerness to attempt them.**
- **In class active student analysis and commentary on text.**
- **Constructive feedback on classmates' acting presentations.**
- **Energized support of all classmates' work.**
- **Willingness to experiment and apply the constructive feedback of professor and fellow students on ones own work.**
- **Meeting all assignment deadlines.**
- **Memorization of assigned material.**
- **Availability to fellow classmates to rehearse outside class.**

### 1. Additional Policies

- ***Except for water, no food or drinks are allowed in class at any time. NO EATING DURING CLASS***
- ***Please use restroom before class and during break, do not interrupt the flow of class with leaving studio unless for an emergency at which point you must inform instructor by raising hand and entire class will take the one 2 minute break at that time***

- *There is absolutely no technology allowed in the classroom. No cellphones, no computers. No texting , no social media – TURN THEM OFF AND PUT THEM AWAY Anyone caught using cellphone in class will be held responsible for destroying the working atmosphere in the classroom and graded accordingly*
- *All students must help with the set up and strike of every class*
- *Students must place all extraneous belongings, (backpacks, sweaters, jackets, skateboards, laptops, cell phones, etc.) in the designated corner of the classroom at the start of class*
- *Students must be in proper rehearsal clothes (whatever they may be and understand that they change throughout the semester) at the start of class. NO FLIP FLOPS UNLESS THE SCENE OR CLASS TAKES PLACE AT THE BEACH!*

### Weekly Schedule (CALENDAR SUBJECT TO CHANGE)

Week 1	Intro to Course / Questions about acting. STUDIO: Acting exercises, Theatre Games VIEW: The Origins of Acting and “The Method.” ASSIGN: Bring in a film or TV scene featuring great acting.
Week 2	STUDIO: Acting exercises, Theatre Games VIEW: Scenes brought in by class: Discussion “What makes a great performance?” <b><u>READ FOR WEDNESDAY</u></b> : Chpts. 1 & 2, <i>The Great Acting Teachers and Their Methods</i> <b><u>Discuss Wednesday</u></b> : Reading Assignment above <b><u>WEEKEND READ</u></b> : Chpts.3&4, <i>The Great Acting Teachers and Their Methods</i>
Week 3 NO CLASS – MONDAY 1/21	STUDIO: Acting exercises, Theatre Games VIEW: Scenes brought in by class: Discussion “What makes a great performance?” <b><u>Wednesday Discuss</u></b> : Chpts. 3&4, <i>The Great Acting Teachers and Their Methods</i> ASSIGN: Personal Story – True or False
Week 4	STUDIO: Present Stories, Acting exercises, Theatre Games VIEW: Actors Personal Stories <b><u>READ FOR WEDNESDAY</u></b> : Chpts. 5 & 6, <i>The Great Acting Teachers and Their Methods</i> <b><u>Discuss Wednesday</u></b> : Reading Assignment above ASSIGN: Open Scenes and Scene Partners.
Week 5	STUDIO: Acting exercises, Theatre Games IN CLASS REHEARSALS: Open Scenes <b><u>READ FOR WEDNESDAY</u></b> : Chpts. 7 & 8, <i>The Great Acting Teachers and Their Methods</i> <b><u>Discuss Wednesday</u></b> : Reading Assignment above ASSIGN: Actor Homework; Hagen 6 Steps Worksheet
Week 6	STUDIO: First Pass Open Scenes w/ Notes. <b>Assignment Due Hand in Wednesday</b> : Hagen Worksheets <b><u>READ FOR WEDNESDAY</u></b> Chpts. 9 & 10, <i>The Great Acting Teachers and Their Methods</i> <b><u>Discuss Wednesday</u></b> : Reading Assignment above ASSIGN: Outside Rehearsals <b>OPPORTUNITY TO ATTEND</b> (Once) Gnit Feb 11 – March 2 for Performance paper
Week 7 NO CLASS – MONDAY 2/18	STUDIO: Continued Rehearsal of Open Scenes w/ Notes. <b>OPPORTUNITY TO ATTEND</b> (Once) Gnit Feb 11 – March 2 for Performance paper
Week 8	STUDIO: Continued Rehearsal of Open Scenes w/ Notes. <b>MIDTERM, PART ONE: Final Performances of Open Scenes</b> <b>MIDTERM, PART TWO: Written Exam</b> <b>OPPORTUNITY TO ATTEND</b> (Once) Gnit Feb 11 – March 2 for Performance paper

Week 9	STUDIO: Begin Scene Study ASSIGN: New Scenes <b>Performance paper Due MONDAY 3/4</b>
Week 10 SPRING BREAK	SPRING BREAK
Week 11	STUDIO: Scene Study – In Class Rehearsal VIEW: Acting in Film READ: Chpts. 1-4, <i>Acting in Film</i> <b>Discuss:</b> Reading Assignment above ASSIGN: Actor Homework; Hagen 6 Steps Worksheet
Week 12	STUDIO: Scene Study – In Class Rehearsal READ: Chpts. 5-7, <i>Acting in Film</i> <b>Discuss:</b> Reading Assignment above <b>Assignment Due Hand in Wednesday:</b> Hagen Worksheets
Week 13	STUDIO: Scene Study – In Class Rehearsal READ: Chpts. 8-9, <i>Acting in Film</i> <b>Discuss:</b> Reading Assignment above
Week 14	STUDIO: Scene Study – In Class Rehearsal
Week 15	STUDIO: Perform Scenes Group One
Week 16	STUDIO: Perform Scenes Group Two ASSIGN: Final Exam Review
FINAL May 6 8:00 am	<b>WRITTEN FINAL EXAM – MULTIPLE CHOICE AND ESSAY.</b>

## Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

### Academic Conduct:

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” [policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b](http://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b). Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

### 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 for DSP and contact information: (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 740-6948 (TDD only), (213) 740-8216 (FAX) [ability@usc.edu](mailto:ability@usc.edu).

### 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. See the university’s site on Campus Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

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### Support Systems:

*Student Counseling Services (SCS) – (213) 740-7711 – 24/7 on call*

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention. [engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling](http://engemannshc.usc.edu/counseling)

*National Suicide Prevention Lifeline – 1 (800) 273-8255*

Provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. [www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

*Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) – (213) 740-4900 – 24/7 on call*

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm. [engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp](http://engemannshc.usc.edu/rsvp)

*Sexual Assault Resource Center*

For more information about how to get help or help a survivor, rights, reporting options, and additional resources, visit the website: [sarc.usc.edu](http://sarc.usc.edu)

*Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)/Title IX Compliance – (213) 740-5086*

Works with faculty, staff, visitors, applicants, and students around issues of protected class. [equity.usc.edu](http://equity.usc.edu)

*Bias Assessment Response and Support*

Incidents of bias, hate crimes and microaggressions need to be reported allowing for appropriate investigation and response. [studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support](http://studentaffairs.usc.edu/bias-assessment-response-support)

*The Office of Disability Services and Programs*

Provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange relevant accommodations. [dsp.usc.edu](http://dsp.usc.edu)

*Student Support and Advocacy – (213) 821-4710*

Assists students and families in resolving complex issues adversely affecting their success as a student EX: personal, financial, and academic. [studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa](http://studentaffairs.usc.edu/ssa)

*Diversity at USC*

Information on events, programs and training, the Diversity Task Force (including representatives for each school), chronology, participation, and various resources for students. [diversity.usc.edu](http://diversity.usc.edu)

*USC Emergency Information*

Provides safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible. [emergency.usc.edu](http://emergency.usc.edu)

*USC Department of Public Safety – UPC: (213) 740-4321 – HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24-hour emergency or to report a crime.*

Provides overall safety to USC community. [dps.usc.edu](http://dps.usc.edu)