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**ALEXANDER TECHNIQUE FOR PERFORMERS**

**SDA #419 Spring 19**

**BABETTE MARKUS**

Section 63121 - M/W, 4-5:50 pm, MCC 112

Office Hours: Tutorials, available by appointment

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**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:**

**The course is open to all**, and geared to (though not limited to) participants involved in performing arts: Theater, Dance, Music, or Athletics.

**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. Also let me know in advance if possible when you are unable to attend.

**Required Reading: Choose one**

For Actors, Athletes and others: **Body Learning,** Michael Gelb

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

**BUY IT NOW, and start reading**.

**Various handouts** will be posted on Blackboard. You may be asked to print and bring to class.

**Assessment:** Based on written assignments, reading, class participation, attendance, and final paper. ***Additionally 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:**

**30 pts**. There will be 3 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 or Music and the Alexander Technique; 3-4 pages.

**20 pts.** Final paper, 4-5 pages.

**10 pts.** Attendance/participation

**Progress on Achieved Goals and Objectives:**

**25 pts.** 5 stated goals, 5 pts. each

**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 performing 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.

**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

**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; Syllabus Agreement; 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: Introduce Sit/stand

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

HOMEWORK: Active Rest

**JOURNAL 1 DUE: 1/9**

**Class 3 – Mechanics of Sitting/Standing--**identify our individual sitting habits; directing length and width; widening the pelvis in order to bend

Activity: Trying on each other’s sit/stand patterns

Activity: Active Rest

HANDOUT: Set of Directions

**Class 4 – 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

HANDOUT: British Medical Journal Study

**Class 5 – 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: Cherns on Acting

**Class 6 – Functional Anatomy**--use a skeleton to explore skeletal structure; anatomy from AT point of view; review basic body mechanics from mechanical p.o.v. i.e. structural loads, levers, columns and beams; Bio-Tensegrity.

Activity: Palpating body landmarks

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

**Class 7 – 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.

**JOURNAL 2 Prompt**: **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 8 / 9 – Application of AT Principles to Activities**--staying with AT and spatial directions as you move; warm-ups; stretching; Active Rest

Activity: Stretching and Rolling down

HANDOUTS: TBA

Working Out, Peta Bee; Running, M Balk

**JOURNAL 2 DUE: 2/4**

**Class 10 – 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 11 – 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 12 – Training the Squat**--taking the load off the legs; squat as four-legged movement; connecting arms to back; importance of back in Breathing Coordination; lunges

Activity: Finessing the squat

Activity: Plies and port-de-bras

HANDOUTS: Matthews on Squatting;

**Class 13 – Introduce AT Approach to Breathing**--anatomy of breathing; movement of rib cage and diaphragm; how to stop interfering with breathing process; effortless, efficient breathing

Activity: Draw breathing models

Activity: Active Rest + silent and vocalized counting

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

Activity: Explore amber light

Activity: Active Rest + silent and vocalized counting

HANDOUTS: McCallion, Breathing Appendix/ Exploded Torso

**MIDTERM JOURNAL PROMPT: Gelb’s Checkpoints from Body Learning OR Alexander Technique for Musicians; DUE 3/6**

**Class 15 – Breathing Coordination and 3-D Movement**--continued;

visualizing the internal movement; examine your mental/emotional thoughts regarding your breath; review amber light concept

Activity: Rib Animation Video

Activity: Active Rest + silent and vocalized counting

HANDOUTS: Olsen on Breathing

**Class 16 – Whispered AH--**introduce Whispered Ah; silent counting; vocalized counting; vocalized ah; vowel sounds; sustained sounds; doing less; connect voice with communicating

Activity: Stough video

Activity: Active Rest + silent and vocalized counting + Whispered Ah

HANDOUTS: Directions for Whispered Ah, Whispered Ah, J. Wolf; Carrington

**MIDTERM DUE: 3/6**

**SPRING BREAK\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Class 17 – Actor and Character--**consciously going in and out of character; examine your performer self; developing your own warm up using AT; body as instrument; authentic vs. best use; habit and spontaneity; how does your character breathe?

Activity: Tableaus

Activity: Explore character’s physicality and voice

HANDOUTS: McCallion, Stopping/Spontaneity Cherns on Acting

**Class 18 – 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: Let’s Twist , Dimon

**Class 19 – Active Warm-ups/ Active Character**--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: Guided active AT warm-ups

Activity: Spirals

Activity: Going in and out of character’s physicality, breath and voice

HANDOUTS: Warming Up, L. Marshall; Richmond’s Actor as Two People

**Class 20 – 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

Activity: Active Rest + BC

**JOURNAL 3 prompt: Preferences for Learning Text OR How do you practice? Due 4/1**

**Class 21 – Exploring your Kinesphere**--effect of fear on spatial relationships and breath; expanding your 3-D body; breathing into your “voluminous” back; reduce frontal orientation; connecting front to back

Activity: “Feel the fear and do it anyway”

HANDOUTS: 3 Types of Fear Response; Fear’s Body-Mind; Amygdala Wikipedia; Jill Bolte-Taylor

**JOURNAL 3 DUE: 4/1**

**Class 22 – 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, slating

HANDOUTS: Performance Anxiety, J. R-F

**Class 23 – Advanced Breathing Coordination**--closely observe the transitions from Whispered Ah’s to silent to done; vocalized to silent, and silent to done; conscious decision to shift in response to the kinesthetic messages; choosing to extend the exhalation without tightening

Activity: Active Rest + Advanced vocalized counting and beyond

HANDOUTS: Advanced Vocalized Counting/Dangerous Corner

**Class 24 – AT and Singing**-- Singing habits what’s your singing stance? Explore open jaw for vowels; How do you visualize scales;

Activity: Singing scales

Activity: Expanded awareness – singing and moving

HANDOUTS: Karl’s notes; Face and Throat, Dimon; Beyond Posture, Hanko

**Class 25 – Applying AT to Monologues/Music**--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: Group led warm-up

Activity: Performance

**Class 26 – Small Motor Coordination**--re-thinking writing and texting

Activity: Handwriting

Activity: Cell phone behavior

HANDOUTS: I-Hunch, Amy Cuddy; Yr Txtn Life

**FINAL EXAM PROMPT: DUE DATE TBA**

**Class 27 – 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; vocalized Ah

Activity: Active Rest and BC for warm-up

Activity: Singing

**Class 28 – Performing Monologues/Music** --Work in progress

HANDOUTS: Mamet on Acting, Mamet On Character, True and False;

The Actor in You, Baron

**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.