

**THTR – 213 Section 62757**

**Corset Construction**

**Spring 2022—Monday, Wednesday: 12:00 pm - 1:20 pm**

**Location: Costume Shop (PED 114F)**

**Instructor: Carissa Dickerson (she/her/hers)**

**Office: PED 114F**

**Office Hours: By appointment**

**Contact Info: cedicker@usc.edu**

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**Course Description and Overview**

Students will learn the process of making a corset. Students will become familiar with the methods and supplies needed to build a corset. Students will survey the history of corsetry and its application in current theatrical practices and modern fashion. By the end of the course, students will have made their own corset to keep.

This class is appropriate for students wishing to learn professional approaches to costume construction. This includes acting students wishing to gain a deeper understanding of the importance of period undergarments as it relates to performance and posture, design students wishing to study period underclothes as they relate to silhouette and period design, as well as cosplay and Ren Faire enthusiasts who wish to improve their construction techniques and gain some insight into historical influences and design. This class is tailored to those with basic sewing experience already.

**Learning Objectives**

By the end of this course, a student will be able to…

Create a custom corset using hand and machine sewing techniques

Identify the materials and terminology needed to sew a corset

Demonstrate proper and safe use of the sewing machine

Analyze the history of shapewear from the 16th century to today, and its application in current theatrical practices and modern fashion

Recognize corset myths

**Prerequisite(s): None**

**Co-Requisite (s): None**

**Concurrent Enrollment: None**

**Recommended Preparation: None**

**Required Readings and Supplementary Materials**

**Required:**

Sam Mansfield, *The Quick and Dirty Guide to Corsets*, 2021, Good Hunter Designs

Digital and/or physical copy can be purchased from goodhunter.com.au – Please be aware the physical book ships from Australia and may therefore take some time to get. The PDF copy will be just fine for class.

Self-Fabric for Corset, approximately one (1) yard

Internet resources provided throughout the course include:

The Pragmatic Costumer; Historical Costuming for the Rest of Us.

[www.thepragmaticcostumer.wordpress.com](http://www.thepragmaticcostumer.wordpress.com)

The Dreamstress

[www.thedreamstress.com](http://www.thedreamstress.com)

Lucy’s Corsetry

[www.lucycorsetry.com](http://www.lucycorsetry.com)

Atelier Nostalgia

[www.ateliernostalgia.wordpress.com](http://www.ateliernostalgia.wordpress.com)

Bernadette Banner (YouTube Channel)

[www.youtube.com/channel/UCSHtaUm-FjUps090S7crO4Q](http://www.youtube.com/channel/UCSHtaUm-FjUps090S7crO4Q)

Karolina Żebrowska (YouTube Channel)

<https://www.youtube.com/c/Karolina%C5%BBebrowskax>

Abby Cox (YouTube Channel)

<https://www.youtube.com/c/AbbyCox>

Carissa DeLaine (YouTube Channel)

<https://www.youtube.com/user/294ced/featured>

Nicole Rudolph (YouTube Channel)

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCca-WkVPVe9nzs2iFct4wxg>

**Description of Grading Criteria and Assessment of Assignments**

In this course, students will be graded on a sewing sampler, 1 corset, 2 exams/quizzes, 1 essay, two presentations, and various in-class worksheets.

**Silhouette Essay**

Due: Wednesday, April 6th via TurnItIn

The complete assignment description and rubric can be found on Blackboard and in the Google Drive.

Figure drawing can be a helpful way to understanding structure and how clothing can aid in shaping the body. It can be interesting to see how your perception of the outfit changes after drawing the undergarments. Some drawing and rendering classes use this as an exercise; having the students first draw the complete outfit, then just the undergarments, then the complete outfit again after better understanding what is underneath.

Find a (full length) painting or photograph of a person from 1600-1900 who is wearing female-presenting clothing. Draw a picture of the complete outfit, as well as the foundation garments you suspect they are wearing underneath. Be detailed, please.

Write a 3 page essay describing the corset and other foundation garments that you suspect are being worn under the dress. Discuss the way that wearing these underpinnings alters the natural shape of the body to support the fashionable silhouette of the time. Tell me in what years the garment would have been fashionable, and briefly describe the fashion immediately before and immediately after to give context.

It will be graded on the details you notice – not on artistic ability.

**Sampler Project**

Due: various dates, in person

The complete assignment description and rubric can be found on Blackboard and in the Google Drive.

Derived from the Latin word *exemplum* (meaning a model or an example for imitation) a sampler is a specimen of needlework skills stitched onto a piece of fabric. Samplers allowed the needleworker to practice and learn new techniques and also to record stitches and patterns that could be used as a point of reference for future work. - “The Fitzwilliam Museum - Home: Online Resources: Online Exhibitions: Samplers: What Is a Sampler?” *The Fitzwilliam Museum News*, www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/gallery/samplers/what/index.html.

This project will be an intro and practice for making the corset. It will include:

Machine demonstrations to demonstrate proper and safe use of the sewing machine

Seams commonly used in corsetry (basic seam, felled seam)

Hand stitching samples commonly used in corsetry (cross stitch, slip stitch)

Bias bound edges, commonly used for finishing the edges of a corset.

Prussian tape, used for boning

**Corset Project**

Due: Wednesday, April 27th (last day of class) in person

The complete assignment description and rubric can be found on Blackboard and in the Google Drive.

Late 19th/early 20th Century

The students may choose to build it for themselves, a friend, or the costume shop. If a student chooses to build their corset for the shop, the shop will provide and choose the self-fabric and it will be added to stock for future use by the USC School of Dramatic Arts. If the student chooses to build it for a friend, the friend must be available for fittings with the student, and all Covid safety measures must be taken. Please ensure that the person in question will be available for fittings.  The fittings will need to be scheduled during class time or the instructor’s office hours.

You will be graded on fit and function as laid out in the grading rubric.

\*Note: an incomplete corset will not necessarily result in a failing grade.  The work done up to that point will be assessed and graded.

**Exams**

There will be two short open-note exams, both available on Blackboard. They will remain available for twenty-four hours, and once opened must be completed within the allotted time (90 minutes for the mid semester exam, 2 hours for the final).

**In Class Work (ICW)**

We will have a short discussion of the assigned readings at the beginning of class. Please come prepared to contribute. There will be a worksheet of questions to use as a guide. Some of these questions will be on the exams, so use these worksheets as your study guide.

Discussions will be worth 3 points total, every student will receive the full 3 points if they are in class for the first 15 minutes **and** contribute to/participate in the conversation. If the student is in class and participates, there is no need to fill out the questions or submit them.

If the student is unable to be in class, or misses the discussion portion, they can receive 2 points for the assignment by emailing the answers to the worksheet by the end of the day.

1 point will be given for a worksheet turned in by the following class period.

The lowest grade will be dropped from the total.

**Grading Breakdown**

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| **Assignment** | **% of Grade** |
| In Class Work (ICW) | 15% |
| Exams and Quizzes | 15% |
| Samples Project | 20% |
| Corset Project | 35% |
| Essays and Assignments | 15% |
| **TOTAL** | **100%** |

**Grading Scale**

Course final grades will be determined using the following scale

A 95-100

A- 90-94

B+ 87-89

B 83-86

B- 80-82

C+ 77-79

C 73-76

C- 70-72

D+ 67-69

D 63-66

D- 60-62

F 59 and below

The Pass/No Pass grade option is an enrollment option that allows you to earn units for a course without receiving a standard Letter grade.  As long as you earn a C- grade or better in a course, your transcript will show a mark of Pass (P) for the course.

**Assignment Rubrics**

Assignment descriptions and rubrics can be found at any time on Blackboard/Google Drive.

**Assignment Submission Policy**

Assignments must be submitted to the instructor on the day that they are due. Half a letter grade will be deducted from the grade for every day that the assignment is late. (an A will become an A-, an A- will become a B+, etc.)

**Grading Timeline**

Assignments will be graded and returned to the student within a week.

**Additional Policies**

**Attendance, tardiness, and absences**

Please be respectful of the class by coming to class prepared and on time. Please notify the instructor as early as possible if you will be late or absent. If you are feeling unwell, please do not come to class. If you can not pass your Trojan Check, notify the instructor **before** the start of class, or the absence will not be excused. Absences due to sickness will not be penalized. As this is a hands-on course, students will be expected to attend all scheduled classes or make up the time they have lost during the instructor's office hours

In the event that the university must return to remote learning, students will need a sewing machine. If they will not be in the Los Angeles area, they must supply their own machine.

Students doing work of C- and below by midterm will receive mid-semester warnings.

**The costume shop and/or sewing machines may be used for class work only**. You may not work on outside projects in the costume shop. The shop is for the use of the production staff, SDA students, and the students in applicable classes only.

**You will be expected to maintain a clean and orderly workspace**. The costume shop is shared by this class, the production staff, and the design students and actors of SDA. All parties must be considerate of one another. **Failure to pick up after yourself will affect your grade** as outlined in the grading rubric you will receive in advance of your corset project

**Shop Safety**

According to the USC Office of Environmental Health and Safety, open-toed shoes are not to be worn in the costume shop. Additionally, you will be expected to use all machines (including irons) in a safe manner to avoid injury and damage.

**Sharing of course materials outside of the learning environment**

USC prohibits sharing of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment.

*SCampus Section 11.12(B)*

*Distribution or use of notes or recordings based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study is a violation of the USC Student Conduct Code. This includes, but is not limited to, providing materials for distribution by services publishing class notes. This restriction on unauthorized use also applies to all information, which had been distributed to students or in any way had been displayed for use in relationship to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the Internet or via any other media. (SeeSection C.1 Class Notes Policy).*

**Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown**

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|  | **DATE** | **TOPICS/DAILY ACTIVITIES** | **READINGS AND HOMEWORK** | **ASSIGNEMENTS DUE** |
| **Week 1 (via Zoom)** | Monday, January 10th | * Go over syllabus * What is a corset? * Corset Myths/Assumptions |  |  |
| Wednesday,  January 12th | * ICW: Discuss *Karolina Żebrowska*. Answer some myths/assumptions * The parts of a corset (using *Quick and Dirty Guide to Corsets* pg. 6-7) | * Watch: *Karolina Żebrowska* “How Victorian Men Taught Us to Hate Corsets: The Biggest Lie in Fashion History” * Read: *Quick and Dirty Guide to Corsets* pg. 8-9: What is a corset? and Why wear one? |  |
| **Week 2** | Monday, January 17th | **MLK Jr Day; No Class** | | |
| Wednesday, January 19th | * ICW: Discuss *The Pragmatic Costumer --* What does a corset do? * Fabric Swatches pt. 1 * Start learning the sewing machines * Sampler Project: Learn basic seams | * Read: *The Pragmatic Costumer* “With and Without: How Wearing A Corset Affects You and Your Clothes” * Read: *Quick and Dirty Guide to Corsets* pg. 16-18: Fabrics |  |
| **Week 3** | Monday, January 24th | * Overview of 16th ce. silhouettes * Fabric Swatches pt. 2 * Sampler Project: learn hand sewing techniques | * Read: *Quick and Dirty Guide to Corsets* pg. 21: Pattern matching | Sampler Project: demonstrate threading the machine and winding a bobbin |
| Wednesday, January 26th | * Antiquity through 16th ce. corsets * 16th ce. skirt supports * Sampler Project: Continue hand sewing techniques | * Watch: *Samantha Bullat* “Dressing a Tudor Queen: Historically Accurate 1530s Clothing” * Watch: *Samantha Bullat* “Get Ready with Me: Early 16th Century Tudor Common Woman’s Clothing” | Sampler Project: Basic Seams |
| **Week 4** | Monday, January 31st | * 17th ce. silhouettes * Sampler Project: learn bone casings | * Read: *Quick and Dirty Guide to Corsets* pg. 24-27: Boning | Sampler Project: hand sewing techniques |
| Wednesday, February 2nd | * 17th ce. corsets * Sampler Project: continue bone casings | * Watch: *Samantha Bullat* “Getting Dressed in the Early 17th Century Historical Clothing: 1600-1625” |  |
| **Week 5** | Monday, February 7th | * Additional 17th ce. * ICW: Discuss *Sarah Bendall* * Sampler Project: learn binding | * Read: *Quick and Dirty Guide to Corsets* pg. 72-75: Binding * Read: *Sarah Bendall* - “Bodies or Stays? Underwear or Outerwear? 17th ce Foundation Garments Explained.” | Sampler Project: Bone casings |
| Wednesday, February 9th | * 18th ce. silhouettes * Sampler Project: continue binding * Go over grading rubric for corset project * Learn Measurements * Try on corsets! | * Read: *Quick and Dirty Guide to Corsets* pg. 12-13: Sizing and Measuring * Watch: *Crows Eye Productions* “Getting Dressed in the 18th Century – Busks” * Please come to class with a tight fitting layer to wear under the corset |  |
| **Week 6** | Monday, February 14th | * 18th ce. corsets * Put together corset pattern pieces and begin laying out pattern on coutil | * Read: *Quick and Dirty Guide to Corsets* pg. 46: Cutting * Watch: *Samantha Bullat* “Getting Dressed in 18th Century Working Class Women’s Clothing” * Watch: *National Museums Liverpool* “Getting dressed in the 18th century” | Sampler Project: Binding |
| Wednesday, February 16th | * ICW: Discuss *The Dreamstress* * Additional 18th ce. * Modern Silhouette Project example * Continue cutting coutil | * Read: *The Dreamstress,* “Terminology; Stays, Jumps, & Corsets” * Watch: *Crow’s Eye Productions* “Getting Dressed in the 18th Century - Dido Elizabeth Belle (1779)” |  |
| **Week 7** | Monday, February 21st | **Presidents Day; No Class** | | |
| Wednesday, February 23rd | * **Modern Silhouettes Project 16th – 18th century** * Continue cutting coutil * Begin bone casings | * Read: *Quick and Dirty Guide to Corsets* pg. 29-32 | Modern Silhouettes Project 16th – 18th century |
| **Week 8** | Monday, February 28th | * Children’s and Pregnancy corsets * Continue bone casings |  |  |
| Wednesday, March 2nd | * ICW: Discuss *Nicole Rudolph* * Transitional corsets 1780-1820 * Finish up sewing bone casings | * Watch: *Nicole Rudolph* “Regency Corset Shapes || Comparing 4 Styles on the Same Body” – bring three questions to discuss in class |  |
| **Week 9** | Monday, March 7th | * ICW: Paper corsets 16th – 18th century * Begin basting coutil for mockup | * Read: *Quick and Dirty Guide to Corsets* pg. 47-50: Sewing and Ironing |  |
| Wednesday, March 9th | * **QUIZ** * Continue sewing mockup (if time) |  |  |
|  | Monday, March 14th | **Spring Break, No Class** | | |
| Wednesday, March 16th | **Spring Break, No Class** | | |
| **Week 10** | Monday, March 21st | * 19th ce. silhouettes * ICW: Discuss *Abby Cox* * Discuss fitting * Start fitting mockups | * Watch: *Abby Cox* “A Dress Historian Explains the Difference between Corsets and Stays” * Read: *Lucy’s Corsetry* “Addendum to ‘Corset Gaps’: Troubleshooting More Corset Fitting Issues” * Read: *Quick and Dirty Guide to Corsets* pg. 88-92: Fitting |  |
| Wednesday, March 23rd | * 19th ce. corsets * Continue to fit mockups, if needed * Mark corrections to pattern | * Read: *Quick and Dirty Guide to Corsets* pg. 80-82: Lacing * Watch: *Nicole Rudolph* “100 Years of Corset History: How 8 Corsets affect the same body” | Mockups Due, must be fit by the end of the day for full points  Self Fabric due |
| **Week 11** | Monday, March 28th | * ICW: Discuss *Bernadette Banner* * Take mockup apart * Mark alterations to coutil, recut pieces if necessary | * Watch: *Bernadette Banner* “What Did Victorian Corsets \*Actually\* Look Like” |  |
| Wednesday, March 30th | * Additional 19th ce * ICW: Discuss *The Dreamstress* * Lay out and begin cutting self-fabric | * Read: *The Dreamstress* “Swiss Waist, Waist Cincher, Corset and Corselet: What’s the Difference?” |  |
| **Week 12** | Monday, April 4th | * LGBTQ Corsets * Roll Pinning demo * Begin flatlining / roll pinning corset | * Read: *Quick and Dirty Guide to Corsets* pg. 19-20: Roll Pinning |  |
| Wednesday, April 6th | * Edwardian Era * ICW: Discuss *Atelier Nostalgia* * Silhouette Review * Continue flatlining | * Read: *Atelier Nostalgia:* Achieving the Edwardian Silhouette, but how?” | Silhouette Paper Due |
| **Week 13** | Monday, April 11th | * 20th ce. silhouettes * Fining flatlining * Begin sewing corset together |  |  |
| Wednesday, April 13th | * 20th ce. corsets * ICW: Paper corsets 19th – 20th ce. * Continue sewing corset |  |  |
| **Week 14** | Monday, April 18th | * **Modern Silhouette Project 19th – 20th century** * Continue sewing corset |  | Modern Silhouette Project 19th – 20th century |
| Wednesday, April 20th | * ICW: Silhouette Review * Grommet Tabs |  |  |
| **Week 15** | Monday, April 25th | * Corsets for Theatre * Historically Accurate vs. Historically Adequate * Binding corset edges | * Watch: *Abby Cox* “Costuming in Historical Fantasy vs. Historical Accuracy in Movies & TV | Bridgerton Costumes” |  |
| Wednesday, April 27th | * Busting Corset Myths * Where to go from here * Flossing * Final corset finishing | * Read: *Quick and Dirty Guide to Corsets* pg. 85: Protect Your Corset and Storage | CORSET DUE by the end of the work day (5:30pm) |

**Final Examination Date:**

*Friday, May 6th*

*11 am – 1 pm*

*The final will consist of a quiz covering everything learned from after the previous quiz. The quiz will be available on Blackboard starting at 11:00 am Friday, May 6th until 11:00 am Saturday, May 7th (24 hours). Once started, you will have two hours to complete the quiz. The quiz will not be re-opened after the 24 hours are up, so make sure you take the quiz, or risk getting a zero.*

*Additionally, you will be able to pick up your graded corsets on the day of the final. Please come in at 11:00 am so we can take a group picture with our corsets on.*

**SDA PRODUCTIONS**

SDA productions are courses and therefore do not supersede any other courses in which you are enrolled. When in an SDA production, students must not register for evening classes that conflict with regularly scheduled rehearsals. In short, being involved in an SDA production is a curricular assignment and must be treated as any other curricular assignment.

**EXTRA-CURRICULAR COMMITMENTS AND ISPS**

Should you choose to participate in any extra-curricular project, such as an Independent Student Production, the SDA administration and faculty will not make allowances or exceptions for absences in class, missed or delayed assignments, home work that is required as preparation for class, or lack of participation in class resulting from your extra-curricular involvement.

**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](https://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 GFS 120 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) 814-4618 (Vidoe Phone), (213) 740-8216 (FAX) 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:**

*Campus Support & Intervention (CSI) – (213) 740-0411*

Campus Support & Intervention is an office within Campus Wellbeing and Crisis Intervention. We are a team of professionals here to assist students, faculty, and staff in navigating complex issues. Whether you are here seeking support for yourself or someone else, we are available to help you problem solve, understand options, and connect with resources. <https://uscsa.usc.edu>

*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](https://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](https://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: <https://titleix.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. <https://titleix.usc.edu/>

*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/)

*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](https://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/)