

THTR – 213 Section 62757  
Corset Construction  
Spring 2024—Monday, Wednesday 12:00 pm - 1:20  
pm  
Location: PED 114E & PED 114F

Instructor: Howard Schmitt  
Office: PED 114F  
Office Hours: Mon. & Wed. 11 am – 12 pm (or after  
class)  
Contact Info: [schmitt@usc.edu](mailto:schmitt@usc.edu)

### **Course Description and Overview**

Students will learn the process of making period corsets. Students will become familiar with the methods and supplies needed to build a corset. Students will observe the history of corsetry and its application in current theatrical practices.

This class is appropriate for students wishing to learn professional approaches to corset 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; cosplay and Renaissance Faire enthusiasts who wish to improve their construction techniques and gain insight into historical influences on design; as well as those interested in approaches to drag. Medical students have also excelled in corset construction class.

However, note that this is not an introductory sewing class.

### **Learning Objectives**

Learn how to make period corsets. (The student may choose to make corsets for themselves to take home at the end of the semester. Self Fabric –aka fashion fabric--for Corset, is to be purchased when the project starts.)

Learn the materials and terminology needed to make corsets.

Learn about the patterning and cutting of corsets.

Learn how machine sewing is used in the construction of corsets.

Learn about the hand sewing techniques necessary for the finishing of corsets.

Prerequisite(s): None

Co-Requisite (s): None

Concurrent Enrollment: None

Recommended Preparation: None

## **Recommended Readings**

These texts are available for perusal in the costume shop book collection.

Linda Spark, *The Basics of Corset Building, A Handbook for Beginners*, 2005, St. Martin's Griffin

Norah Waugh, *Corsets and Crinolines*, 1954, Theatre Arts Books

Jill Salen, *Corsets: Historical Patterns and Techniques* 2008, Quite Specific Media Group , Ltd.

Jean Hunnisett, *Period Costume for Stage and Screen, series*, 1991, Players Press, Inc

Julie Colins Brealey, *Making Corsets*, 2021, Crowood Press, Ltd

Samanatha Mansfield, *The Quick and Dirty Guide to Corsets*, 2021, Good Hunter Design

Robert Doyle, *Waisted Effort*, 1997, Sartorial Press Publications

## **Description of Assignments**

### **Assignment #1 Short Book Report**

Due: **Monday, January 22 @ midnight**

Write a one and a half page report on one of the corset books in SDA's collection. This can be done in bullet points rather than continuous prose. Indicate the strengths of the books, what information it covers as well as what it doesn't cover. Indicate what it is useful for.

### **Assignment #2 Essay**

Due: **Monday, February 12 @ midnight.**

Topic: Corsets in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Write a three to four page essay on the use of corsets in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. This may include areas such as fashion, cosplay, Renaissance Faires, historical reenacting, drag, medical, cultural, as well as theatre and film use (or non-use—e.i. performers declining to wear one). You may also choose to cite the current interest in books on how to make corsets.

Being an essay you will have quite a bit of choice in the focus of the short paper. Do take care to write it with the same seriousness of purpose as when writing for critical studies or history courses.

## **Assignment #3 Short Research Paper**

Due: **Wednesday, March 20 @ midnight.**

Write a three to three and a half page analytical paper on historical corsets from one of the following eras:

Louis XIV, second half of the Seventeenth Century

Louis XV, middle of the Eighteenth Century

Jane Austin, Regency, first third of the Nineteenth Century

Early Victorian, middle third of the Nineteenth Century

Late Victorian, last third of the Nineteenth Century, beginning of the 20th century

Students in the past have written on the style of corset that they have chosen for their final project.

### **Corset Projects**

The first two construction projects will use the late 1840s corset pattern found on page 78 of Norah Waugh's *Corsets and Crinolines*. We will use this pattern for several reasons: it is one of the quickest basic corsets to sew; we have samples of it to look at. Being a short corset it is quite suited for use on all genders; and it can be altered for stylistic differences in the bustling and the high hip.

### **Group Introductory Project**

As a class we will make two historical reproductions of this corset, straight from the book though adapting for modern sizing. When completed we will analyze what we've done and how to adapt it for the contemporary body for the second project.

### **Preliminary Project**

Each student will make a modern theatrical version of the late 1840s corset in either white or black coutil. Students may choose different approaches to boning.

### **Final Project**

Due, Presented and part of a Group Photograph at the final: **Friday, May 3<sup>rd</sup> at 11:00 am**

Students will select or adapt a corset from one of the historical corset books used in class and construct it. (Commercially sold corset patterns have not been effective for this project in the past and adapting them has taken much more time than developing a corset from the historical corset books.) The student will choose and supply an appropriate fabric to be flat lined to the coutil the shop will provide. (Charmeuse, taffeta and silk dupioni are not appropriate fabrics for first time corset projects.) Students will develop the pattern for the corset with instructor's guidance.

This corset can be taken home by the student at the end of the semester. The students may choose to build it for themselves, a friend, OR the shop.

If a student chooses to build their corset for the shop, the shop will provide and help select the self fabric and it will be added to stock for future use by the USC School of Dramatic Arts.

On both projects be sure to measure your boning runs in advance so additional bones may be ordered if needed. Precision and accuracy in both sewing and patterning are important. Points will also give given for the difficulty of the corset selected for the final project

In addition to the final project itself, each student will either do a short presentation on their project or have prepared a “poster session” on their project. The purpose of this is to prepare for post-university practices. The presentation could be viewed as “what would you say in a job interview situation” about the corset. The poster session is geared for conference presentation of your work. We will discuss these more at the end of the semester.

\*Note; if you choose to make this corset for someone else 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.

### **Grading Breakdown**

5%	Report on Corset books
10%	Essay
10%	Research Paper
5%	Group Project
20%	Preliminary Corset Project
35%	Final Corset Project
5%	Presentation of Final Project
10%	Daily work in class

### **Additional Policies**

Attendance, tardies, and absences.

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, Monday and Wednesday 11am – 12:00pm. Failure to do so will put the student behind and will adversely affect their grade. Students doing work of C- and below by midterm will receive mid-semester warnings.

Since this class deals with fitted garments, rather than semi-fitted garments, and the process and timeline for construction will vary with body type, points for the work in progress will be given for the continued progress rather than reaching certain steps by certain class periods. Students will receive up to five points for each class period’s work on on their projects, starting with class #3. The two lowest days will be dropped.

Listening to group music or personal headphones will not be allowed at any time during class. The noise level of the classroom is already high and doing so may cause the

student to miss important information or announcements.

Cell phone use during class will not be permitted except at the discretion of the instructor. (Apps such as calculators may sometimes be needed in the course of class work.) Texting and taking phone calls during class time is not allowed.

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 at any time. The shop is for the use of the production staff, SDA students, and the students in applicable classes only. The shop staff are not a substitute for the instructor, they will be busy building, altering and fitting costumes for the many SDA shows that are in production. You must arrange in advance any time spent working on your project with the instructor. Ideally this will take place during the instructor's office hours. If the office hours conflict with your schedule you must arrange time with the instructor when you can both be at the shop. It is much more productive to avoid making a mistake than to have to take it out and start over.

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. You will also find it more difficult to do a good job on your projects if you lose your materials and supplies.

## Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

- Monday, Jan 8<sup>th</sup>                      Class #1  
Discuss syllabus, assignments, and projects for this course  
Present and discuss books on corsetry  
Present and discuss theatrical corsets and boned bodices in SDA's collection  
Look at materials, supplies and tools used in making corsets
- Wednesday, Jan 10<sup>th</sup>              Class #2  
Present and discuss theatrical additional corsets in SDA's collection  
Look at pictures from previous class projects  
Coutil as a corset construction fabric  
Intro to the industrial irons  
Assemble photocopies of corset pieces enlarged to scale  
Layout corset pattern pieces on coutil  
Wash more coutil to be ready for subsequent projects
- MLK Jr Day, Monday, January 15<sup>th</sup>  
Federal holiday. No class.
- Wednesday, Jan 17<sup>th</sup>              Class #3  
Look at 18<sup>th</sup> Century corset tabs over a bum roll  
Look at early 20<sup>th</sup> Century waist cinch  
Pin and cut out patterns pieces  
Exchange adjacent pattern pieces  
Pin pieces together to prepare for stitching  
Iron coutil
- Monday, Jan 22<sup>nd</sup>                    Class #4  
Review and adjust syllabus  
Look at early 20<sup>th</sup> Century shaped belts  
Sew pattern pieces  
Fill out forms on machines and irons  
**Assignment #1 due @ Midnight**
- Wednesday, Jan 24<sup>th</sup>              Class #5  
TBD continue to work on corset projects
- Monday, Jan 29<sup>th</sup>                    Class #6  
TBD continue to work on corset projects
- Wednesday, Jan 31<sup>st</sup>              Class #7  
TBD continue to work on corset projects
- Monday, Feb 5<sup>th</sup>                    Class #8  
TBD continue to work on corset projects
- Wednesday, Feb 7<sup>th</sup>              Class #9

TBD continue to work on corset projects

Monday, Feb 12<sup>th</sup>                      Class #10  
TBD continue to work on corset projects  
**Assignment #2 due @ Midnight**

Wednesday, Feb 14<sup>th</sup>              Class #11  
TBD continue to work on corset projects

President's Day Holiday; Monday, Feb 19<sup>th</sup>  
Federal holiday. No class.

Wednesday, Feb 21<sup>st</sup>              Class #12  
TBD continue to work on corset projects

Monday, Feb 26<sup>th</sup>                  Class #13  
TBD continue to work on corset projects

Wednesday, Feb 28<sup>th</sup>              Class #14  
TBD continue to work on corset projects

Monday, March 4<sup>th</sup>                  Class #15  
TBD continue to work on corset projects up

Wednesday, March 6<sup>th</sup>              Class #16  
TBD continue to work on corset projects

Spring Break; March 10<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup>

Monday March 18<sup>th</sup>                  Class #17  
TBD continue to work on corset projects

Wednesday, March 20<sup>th</sup>              Class #18  
TBD continue to work on corset projects  
**Assignment #3 due @ Midnight**

Monday, March 25<sup>th</sup>                  Class #19  
TBD continue to work on corset projects

Wednesday, March 27<sup>th</sup>              Class #20  
TBD continue to work on corset projects

Monday, Apr 1<sup>st</sup>                      Class #21  
TBD continue to work on corset projects

Wednesday, Apr 3<sup>rd</sup> Class #22  
TBD continue to work on corset projects

Monday, Apr 8<sup>th</sup> Class #23  
TBD continue to work on corset projects

Wednesday, Apr 10<sup>th</sup> Class #24  
TBD continue to work on corset projects

Monday, Apr 15<sup>h</sup> Class #25  
TBD continue to work on corset projects

Wednesday, Apr 17<sup>th</sup> Class #26  
TBD continue to work on corset projects

Monday, Apr 22<sup>nd</sup> Class #27  
TBD continue to work on corset projects

Wednesday, Apr 24<sup>th</sup> Class #28  
Finish Final Project

Final Examination Date:

Friday, May 8th  
11 am – 1 pm

Present Final Project. Take a group photograph of projects.



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

USC policy 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. (See Section C.1 Class Notes Policy).*

## **Course evaluation**

Course evaluation occurs at the end of the semester university-wide. It is an important review of students' experience in the class. You should expect to receive an email update once the system has launched to provide your feedback on this course. In addition, you are always welcome to connect with me as the instructor to offer any feedback on the course.

## **SDA PRODUCTIONS, ISPS, AND EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES**

SDA productions, ISPs and Extracurricular Activities\* will not excuse you from any class work. There will be no exceptions made for absences in class, missed or delayed assignments, homework or lack of class participation resulting from your involvement in any of the above. Your grade will reflect your work in this class, independent from work in any other class or activity.

\*Activities that have been officially sanctioned by the larger university (such as marching band, song girls, or varsity sports) are exempt. You must submit official documentation to your professor regarding your participation in an event prior to your absence.

## **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 Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from OSAS. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. OSAS is located in GFS 120 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Website for OSAS and contact information: (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 814-4618 (Video Phone), (213) 740-8216 (FAX) [ability@usc.edu](mailto:ability@usc.edu).

Students must contact the OSAS for accommodations on an assignment or test two weeks prior to the due date or exam date. OSAS does not make retroactive accommodations.

### **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.

\*\*\*

### **Equity, Diversity & Inclusion + Intimacy in Theater Consent Culture Statement:**

Through our pluralistic approach of diverse pedagogies, methodologies, ideologies, and modalities of artistic expression, we invite(engage) and challenge students to expand their breadth and depth of knowledge, complexity, and range of the human experience. Even though we nurture, guide, and challenge our students to embrace the unknown or unfamiliar and step outside of their comfort zones through storytelling/art, we aim to practice effective strategies and offer tools to students mindful of their physical, psychological, social, and emotional wellbeing. In alignment with professional and industry standards, we will integrate core principles and techniques of Intimacy in Theater and Building Cultures of Affirmative Consent. This will provide agency, offer resources and support to the teachers, students, directors, and staff to establish healthy boundaries of consent when working on material that is physically, intimately, or emotionally charged content in both the classroom and production.

\*\*\*

### **SDA Student Support & Reporting Form:**

To facilitate a supportive environment of accountability, SDA has created an internal system of reporting for students to address issues/concerns and to offer feedback or suggestions for improvement. This mechanism provides a pathway for reporting and offering feedback without fear of retaliation or judgment. Any submission filed through this form will be reviewed and processed accordingly through SDA Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion.

To file a report, please visit: <https://bit.ly/SDAstudentreporting>

\*\*\*

### **Support Systems:**

*Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call*

[studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling](http://studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling)

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

*National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call*

[suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

*Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press “0” after hours – 24/7 on call*

[studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault](http://studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault)

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

*Office of Equity and Diversity (OED) - (213) 740-5086 | Title IX – (213) 821-8298*

[equity.usc.edu](http://equity.usc.edu), [titleix.usc.edu](http://titleix.usc.edu)

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

*Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298*

[usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care\\_report](http://usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care_report)

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office of Equity and Diversity | Title IX for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

*The Office of Student Accessibility Services - (213) 740-0776*

<https://osas.usc.edu>

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

## **Catalogue Description**

**THTR 213 Corset Construction (3-3, FaSp)** Design and construct period corsets, along with the materials and terminology needed to sew (machine and hand) corsets.