

2014

THTR 120-01 Acting I

Stephen Skiles

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Acting I, THTR 120-01, Fall 2014

Tuesday/Thursday 1:00 – 2:15

Gallagher Student Center Studio Theatre

Instructor: Stephen Skiles

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Phone: 513.745.3578

Email: skiless1@xavier.edu

Office Hours: 2:00-3:00pm M/W, 11:30am – 12:30pm T/R, by appointment

Text: *An Actor Prepares*, by Konstantin Stanislavski

A Practical Handbook for the Actor

Actions: The Actors' Thesaurus (recommended)**

Course Description:

Provides students with a valuable, practical insight into the art of acting, but enables them to develop essential "transferable" skills in communication, time-management, and teamwork. Exposure to acting empowers students to develop personal confidence through exercises in role-play and improvisation, and explore important issues from multiple perspectives.

Theatre is a collaborative art. An actor is merely one piece of the greater whole that is a production. As a set designer learns to create pictures on the stage that represent the action of a play, so must the actor learn how to create characters on the stage. It is no less a discipline learned, practiced and performed.

Much of our time will be devoted to improvisation and acting exercises, scene work, and discussion. I believe that one best develops an approach to acting by getting up and working. This approach puts much responsibility on the the students in the class. You must come to each class prepared to work, with an open mind, an enthusiastic approach and a supportive outlook of those around you.

Stanislavski: “Another word of counsel about watching the creative work of others. Begin to exercise your sense of truth by looking, first of all, for the good points. In studying another’s work limit yourself to the role of a mirror and say honestly whether or not you believe in what you have seen and heard, and point out particularly the moments that were most convincing to you.”

Skiles: My first responsibility to this class is to help create and maintain an environment in which we will all feel comfortable working. Acting is demanding in many respects, but none more so than the demand on us to take risks. It is my hope that we can create together an atmosphere not only where we can come to learn, but also one in which we can feel confident enough to make bold choices. I stand on the following statement: **It is okay to fail; it is not okay to not try!!**

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

- A. To introduce students to the basic framework, skills and techniques of acting.
- B. To actively engage the actor’s focus on their scene partner.
- C. To develop the actor’s understanding of the preparation and discipline needed to act.
- D. To stimulate the actor’s imagination toward specific and bold choices in acting.
- E. To strengthen the actor’s skill of character and scene analysis.

By the end of class, students should be able to do the following:

- Identify a specific objective/action and obstacle for a character in a scene or monologue
- Choose playable actions/tactics that are in-line with a specific objective
- Understand and identify the given circumstances in a scene or monologue
- Analyze and articulate, in both written form and oral discussions, another actor's performance
- Utilize warm-up exercises in preparation for performance
- Articulate and utilize the basic rules of improvisation

Grading Scale and Notes

	89-87: B+	79-77: C+	70-60: D
100-93: A	86-83: B	76-73: C	59-0: F
92-90: A-	82-80: B-	72-70: C-	

Exemplary work will receive a grade higher than "C". The grade of "C" constitutes basic fulfillment of the requirements of this course.

This semester will be broken down into five basic units. Each unit will focus on specific skills and components required for acting on the stage. Grades in each area will be based upon objective evaluation of your engaged attempt to develop these skills and successful completion of assignments. The unit breakdown is as follows:

Unit 1	Improvisation/Acting Exercises (general skills,risk taking, impulse)
Unit 2	Vocal and Physical Warm-ups (preparation)
Unit 3	Blank Scenes (given circumstances, imagination, objective)
Unit 4	Joe and Edna Scene (commitment, listening, responding, tactics)
Unit 5	Final Scenes (synthesis)

Final Grades will be awarded based on the following points:

100	Improvisation and Acting Exercises (Flags/Story Circles)
100	Paper on <i>An Actor Prepares</i>
100	Paper on <i>Practical Handbook</i>
100	Blank Scenes
150	<i>Waiting for Lefty</i> (Joe and Edna)
100	Final Scenes (TBD)
200	Final Exam Presentation
150	Play responses (75 points each)

Written Assignments

All written work should be emailed to the instructor prior to the start of class on the day the assignment is due. No hard copies will be accepted. We will read two acting texts during the semester: *An Actor Prepares* and *A Practical Handbook for the Actor*. Discussion on these texts will be minimal in class. Students will be responsible for reading each book and turning in a 2-3 page response on the text (due dates are indicated in the tentative schedule).

Students are also required to attend two Xavier Theatre productions during the semester and to write a 1-2 page general response about the production. Basically, write about what you thought. Please pay particular attention to the acting performances. Xavier's performance this semester:
The Last Five Years – September 5-6
Godspell – October 17-25

Black Fly Spring – December 4-7

You can secure tickets by calling the box office (745-3939), purchasing online (www.xavier.edu/theatre) or by visiting the box office from 2:30-6:30pm Monday – Friday.

Final Exam Presentation

Your final presentation will be the performance of one monologue and scene. The monologue will be one that you have chosen outside of class and will be presenting in front of the class, and a public audience, for the first time**. This monologue will meet several specific requirements:

Be 1-2 minutes in length

Be from a published play from 1980 to the present

Be either comic or dramatic

Be approved by the instructor

You will also perform your final scene from class. The grading breakdown is as follows:

Monologue Performance – 100 Points

Scene Performance – 100 Points.

** I encourage you to seek time outside of class to work with me on your monologue, either during office hours, or by setting a specific appointment time.

COURSE POLICIES:

Performance Attendance Policy:

The faculty of the Department of Music and theatre agree that attendance at our program productions and performances is one of the more valuable educational experiences offered by our program. As students in this class, **you are required to attend all departmental theatre productions throughout the semester. These are THE LAST FIVE YEARS (September 5-6), GODSPELL (October 17 – 15) and BLACK FLY SPRING (December 4-7).** You are also encouraged to attend a music concert and art exhibition throughout the semester.

Class Attendance Policy:

Each student is allowed two (2) absences from class. Each absence over two will result in the lowering of your final grade by 3 points. Please note that I do not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences. Exceptions to this rule will be dealt with on an individual basis in consultation with the student.

I will also expect you to be on time to class and to stay for the entire session. You should not leave class during our scheduled time, and never during a performance. For each time that you arrive late or leave early (by leaving early, I also mean stepping out of the room for any reason during class time), you will be counted tardy. Two tardies will equal one absence for the course.

Participation

I stand on the following statement: **It is okay to fail; it is not okay to not try!!**

This course requires active participation in discussions, exercises, and the presentation of performance projects. Many exercises will require out-of-class preparation – this will be particularly true of our performance projects. Much of this will also require working with a partner. While coordinating schedules may be difficult, it is essential to successful completion of this course.

Be prepared.

Being present and prepared on performance days is essential. If you are absent on the day you are assigned to present or to perform an improvisation, scene or monologue, your grade for that assignment will be a “o”, regardless of how many times following that day you are required to perform the scene again – unless you have made prior arrangements with your partner and the instructor.

- If you are ill or have a medical emergency, you will not receive a “o” if you provide a doctor’s written excuse.
- **Written work will not be accepted late without prior arrangements with the instructor.** All written work should be emailed to the instructor prior to the class the assignment is due. “Late” is defined as any moment after the start of the class the material is due. No hard copies of written assignments will be accepted.

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Turn off all cellular devices when entering the room. If you utilize a cell phone or electronic device during class, you will be counted tardy for that day.

Laptops, tablets, etc. may not be utilized in class to take notes.

No visitors are allowed in class without prior permission of the instructor.

Appropriate clothing for class

Wear comfortable, movement clothes to class: tights, sweats, etc. Likewise, flip-flops, clogs, stiletto heels, or any other shoe that restricts movement will not be acceptable. Sneakers are the best choice. We will be working on the floor at times, so wear clothes that can get dirty. When presenting a scene or monologue, choose clothing that is appropriate for the character. (For example, a simple skirt, or shirt and tie.)

If you are unsuitably attired for the day’s class work and are unable to participate, you will receive a tardy for the class.

No food or drinks are allowed in class. Water is acceptable.

Academic Honesty

The pursuit of truth demands high standards of personal honest. Academic and professional life requires a trust based upon integrity of the written and spoken word. Accordingly, violations of certain standards of ethical behavior will not be tolerated at Xavier University. These include theft, cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized assistance in assignments and tests, unauthorized copying of computer software, the falsification of results and material submitted in reports or admission and registration documents, and the falsification of any academic record including letters of recommendation. (2008-10 Xavier Catalogue, page 54.) See catalogue for full statement on academic honesty.

Learning Assistance Center

Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a documented disability should contact the Learning Assistance Center at 513-745-3280 on the Fifth Floor of the Conaton Learning Commons, Room 514, to coordinate reasonable accommodations.

Tentative Schedule (Subject to Change)

1. T 8/26 Introductions/Course Expectations
 2. R 8/28 Syllabus Review/Beginning Improvisations/Story Circles/Flags
 3. T 9/2 Physical Warmup Exercises
 4. R 9/4 Improvisations/Acting Exercises
 5. T 9/9 Vocal Warmup Exercises
 6. R 9/11 Improvisations/Acting Exercises. LFY Response Due.
 7. T 9/16 Vocal/Physical Warmup/Flags
 8. R 9/18 Improvisations/Acting Exercises/Blank Scenes Distributed
 9. T 9/23 Improvisations/Acting Exercises
 10. R 9/25 Improvisations/Acting Exercises
 11. T 9/30 Improvisations/Acting Exercises/Flags
 12. R 10/2 Blank Scene Work/Given Circumstances
 13. T 10/7 Blank Scene Work
 - 14. R 10/9 FALL BREAK – NO CLASS**
 15. T 10/14 Blank Scene Work Group 1
 16. R 10/16 Blank Scene Work Group 2
 17. T 10/21 Blank Scene Performance. AN ACTOR PREPARES PAPER DUE.
 18. R 10/23 Joe and Edna Intro/Blocking/Work
 19. T 10/28 Joe and Edna Work
 20. R 10/30 Joe and Edna Work. GODSPELL Response Due.
 21. T 11/4 Joe and Edna Performance/Final Scene Distributed/Flags
 22. R 11/6 Joe and Edna Work Group 1
 23. T 11/11 Joe and Edna Work Group 2
 24. R 11/13 Joe and Edna Performance
 25. T 11/18 Final Scene Intro/Blocking/Work
 26. R 11/20 Final Scene Work Group 1
 27. T 11/25 Final Scene Work Group 2
 - THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 27 – THANKSGIVING – NO CLASS**
 28. T 12/2 Final Scene Performance/Flags. HANDBOOK PAPER DUE.
 29. R 12/4 Final Scene Work Group 1
 30. T 12/9 Final Scene Work Group 2
 31. R 12/11 Final Scene Work/Class Evaluation/Final Presentation Prep. BFS Response Due.
- Final Exam – Thursday, December 18 10:30 – 12:20pm**

Some Final Notes/Thoughts:

This course is not about perfecting the way to act and perform. Rather, it is meant as an introduction to acting. By the end of the semester, you will not have mastered these techniques, but you will have started the process of understanding and utilizing them.

Part of acting is coming to terms with your weaknesses on stage. We will explore and identify some of these during the semester. However, I will do my best to teach to your strengths. I look at this aspect of my job much the same way that a coach goes about preparing a team. I would not put an individual that was skilled at a particular position on the field into a position that does not suit them. Therefore, although part of our time will be spent identifying areas of possible individual improvement, I will strive to help you identify, and utilize often, the natural abilities that you each inherently possess.

The outcomes of the course are usually met by students by the end of the semester. However, results are most often determined by the amount of time, focus and attention that you give to the work in and out of class. Very simply put – you usually get out of it what you put into it. I will come to class prepared, open, enthusiastic, attentive and supportive– Every day! It is my hope that you will do the same.

Finally, I would like to take a quick moment to explain more fully a statement that I make earlier in the syllabus: It is okay to fail; it is not okay to not try. By this I do not mean that you should settle for a failing grade in the class. It is exactly the opposite. Acting is very vulnerable. Not only in the fact that we are performing for a group of people, but more importantly, that we are called upon to present some of the most vulnerable moments in the lives of our characters; the exact moments that we often try to hide from other people in our normal, everyday lives (good theatre is not about the day that nothing happens). So by this statement I simply mean that you should always push yourself to take chances. To act without a safety net. To be willing to take risks and to worry about what other people think after the fact – if at all. I would much rather do things in one of two ways – I want to either succeed or fail in a tremendously committed way. I would never want to fall into the realm of “okay”. But rather, even when I make a choice or take a chance that doesn’t quite work, I want to fail giving it all that I have. That in and of itself, is also worthy of an “A.”