THDN 103-01 Basic Acting Spring, 2024

Day/Time: M/W 1:30-3:30

Room: TC155

Instructor: Godfrey L. Simmons, Jr. Office hours: Tuesday 4-5:30

Email: Godfrey.Simmons@trincoll.edu

**Course Objectives:**

***To develop and explore approaches to individual acting process and practice through the use of theater games, improvisation, class exercises and partnered scene work. Student actors engage in study that improves their ability to speak in public, move with intention and confidence, use, command and occupy space, engage and harness the imagination, connect to feelings, work with ease and relaxation, cultivate healthy egos, communicate clearly and respectfully with others, and serve the work as dramatic interpreters. Together we will commit to creating and fostering a learning environment of diversity, inclusion and equity, where every participant feels welcome and supported to do their best work.***

***Actors are introduced to a range of techniques and approaches based on the teachings of Augusto Boal, Anne Bogart, Michael Chekhov, Robert Cohen, Uta Hagen, Jacques Lecoq, Robert Lewis, Michael Rohd, Viola Spolin and/or others of the instructor’s choosing.***

Specifically, actors learn to:

* Increase physical awareness, ease and confidence in movement
* Develop vocal power, resonance, clarity and expressiveness
* Create and interact with imaginary environments
* Identify and commit to strong, playable actions
* Imagine and use a character’s “given circumstances” as the basis for understanding and building performable behavior
* Approach text analysis with insight and vigor
* Develop specific and various ways of working as individual actors, in partnership with others, and as members of a dynamic classroom ensemble.

Additionally:

* Students read 8-9 assigned plays by playwrights from the United States. There are weekly assignments related to this reading, and in-class discussions about the play/playwright.
* Student actors work on an assigned scene with a scene partner to develop and present in class during the last third of the semester.
* Student actors attend two theater productions (either live or virtual, depending on COVID) and are given writing assignments responding to the performances. These are assigned early in the semester.
* Student actors keep a journal that will document their process, assignments, learning, notes on the scenes they watch in class and the scenes they present.

**Required Productions for Student attendance:**

**REQUIRED ATTENDANCE:**

**Rodgers’ and Hammerstein’s Cinderella – Directed by Michelle Ong-Hendrick**

**Thursday-Saturday, March 21-23, 7:30pm**

**Saturday, March 23, 3:30pm**

**Goodwin Theater, AAC**

***Senior Thesis Projects - Week I***

**Tuesday, March 26, 7:30pm – Cassidy Willie-Lawes**

**Wednesday, March 27, 7:30pm – Caroline Frederick & Lily McMahon**

**Various Locations**

***Senior Thesis Projects - Week II***

**Tuesday, April 2, 7:30pm – Ugne Tumonyte**

**Wednesday, April 3, 7:30pm – Ren Logan**

**Thursday, April 4, 7:30pm – Tara Iyer**

**Various Locations**

***Student Choreography Concert* – Directed by Rebecca Pappas**

**Thursday & Friday, April 18-19, 7:30pm**

**OPTIONAL:**

**Last Night**

**(Theater and Dance Class Sharing)**

**Wednesday, May 1, 5:30pm**

**Performance Lab, Trinity Commons**

**Required Reading:**

**MACHINAL\*** by Sophie Treadwell 1928

(http:/[www.ciaranhinds.eu/pdf/machinal.pdf)](http://www.ciaranhinds.eu/pdf/machinal.pdf))

**RAISIN IN THE SUN** by Lorraine Hansberry, 1958

Vintage

ISBN 9780679755333

**ABINGDON SQUARE\*** by Maria Irene Fornes 1987 (Digital Edition, $5)

**ANGELS IN AMERICA** by Tony Kushner, 1992

Theatre Communications Group

ISBN-10: 9781559363846

**GRUESOME PLAYGROUND INJURIES**, etc. by Rajiv Joseph, 2009

Soft Skull Press

978-1593762940

**WATER BY THE SPOONFUL** by Quiara Alegria Hudes 2011 Theatre Communications Group

ISBN-13: 9781559365574

**THE THANKSGIVING PLAY**

by Larissa FastHorse 2018

Concord Theatricals

ISBN: 9780573707858

***PLEASE NOTE THAT UP TO NINE (9) PLAYS WILL BE ASSIGNED. IT’S POSSIBLE THAT THE MAKEUP OF CLASS REQUIRES THE REPLACEMENT/ADDITION OF A PLAY OR TWO. I’LL KEEP YOU POSTED.***

***\*Text available online.***

**Recommended Reading *(optional):***

AN ACTOR PREPARES by Konstantin Stanislavski

BUILDING A CHARACTER by Konstantin Stanislavski

CREATING A ROLE by Konstantin Stanislavski

THE ART OF ACTING by Stella Adler

RESPECT FOR ACTING by Uta Hagen

A PRACTICAL HANDBOOK FOR THE ACTOR by Melissa Bruder, *et. al.* FREEING THE NATURAL VOICE by Kristin Linklater

IMPROVISATIONS FOR THE THEATER by Viola Spolin

ACTORS THESAURUS by Maria Calderon

**Course Policies**

***Please…***

* Come to class on time or let me know if doing so consistently could be a problem. Class will always begin at 1:30 (and end at 3:30). Sans mitigating circumstances, chronic lateness (or early departures) could affect your grade. Communicate with me.
* My office hours are an opportunity for you to connect with me, a chance to ask clarifying questions about content, explore what you many want to do after you graduate, and find support for your work in class specifically or in school generally.
* Because the work we are doing is with our bodies, Acting class relies on folx being present. In general, more than 2 absences during the semester could also affect your grade. (Exceptions: observance of religious holidays, illnesses) 3 lates or early departures of 5 minutes or more will count as an absence.
* If you are unable to attend class, inform me by email or by indicating on the daily class sign-in sheet beforehand so I can plan accordingly. Others may be depending on your presence, as much of our work involves partnering.
* Absolutely NO electronic communications are allowed during class time. Turn off your cell phones and other devices and keep them put away and out of view during class.
* Wear clothes and footwear that are comfortable and will allow you a free range of movement in class. Do NOT wear flip-flops. Please.

**Course Assessment:**

Students are graded on attendance, participation in class exercises and discussions, completion and timeliness of homework assignments, monologue/ acting exercise/scene study preparation and in-class presentation of solo and partnered work, and the energy and commitment you demonstrate to develop your individual acting practice as an engaged, supportive member of our classroom acting ensemble. *(Note: evaluation of creative work is a subjective process)*.

The breakdown is as follows:

* Approximately 40% of your grade is determined by your class work participation. Your work will be evaluated in the following areas:
  + Warm-ups
  + Class discussion
  + Ensemble playing
  + Focus/concentration
  + Creativity/imagination
  + Listening/awareness
  + Pro-activity
  + Extension/risk
  + Energy management
  + Physical/vocal expression
  + Progress
* Approximately 40% of your grade is determined by your Creative work during the semester. This is work that includes outside preparatory assignments and in-class presentations of monologues, exercises, and small group performances.
* Approximately 20% of your grade is determined by the quality and timeliness of your written assignments in response to required play reading and production attendance, and the thoroughness of your journal.

NOTE: Dress Rehearsal and Final monologue presentations during the last 2 scheduled classes of the semester should be considered a “final exam”.

Missing these will considerably impact your grade.

**Contextualizing Our Work Together**

We are all individuals with multiple sociocultural identities that intersect and shape our worldview through the lens of privilege and oppression. These identities directly impact your work as an artist in this class because you, your body and your voice are the tools needed to tell stories as an actor. My commitment to you as your instructor is to minimize systemic forces of oppression within the classroom such as ableism, classism, racism, sexism, transphobia, and heterosexism in efforts to create a safe learning environment for all of us. I ask that you also join me in this commitment to foster respect for one another, enhance solidarity, and build community.

**Positionality Statement**

As a heterosexual, Black, cis-gender Black man, I strive to cultivate a compassionate learning environment that affirms and supports the whole student. Given that we are navigating challenging times as a community (COVID-19, Anti Black Racism, mental health concerns etc), I am committed to creating an atmosphere of open communication, access to campus resources, and an empathetic mindset. We will get through this together. Please view the resources on the final page of the syllabus.

**Academic Integrity**

It is critical that you submit only your own, original work for this class, and that you follow scrupulously appropriate academic standards for acknowledging the work of others in your writing and research

**Students with Disabilities**

Trinity College is committed to creating an inclusive and accessible learning environment consistent with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Students with disabilities who may need some accommodation in order to fully participate in this class are urged to contact the Student Accessibility Resource Center, as soon as possible, to explore what arrangements need to be made to assure access.

If you have approval for academic accommodations, please notify me by the end of week two of classes. For those students with accommodations approved after the start of the semester, a minimum of 10 days’ notice is required. Please be sure to meet with me privately to discuss implementation.

Student Accessibility Resources can be reached by emailing [SARC@trincoll.edu](mailto:SARC@trincoll.edu).

**Statement On Use of A.I.**

You may have heard by now about increasingly popular publicly-available artificial intelligence (A.I.) tools that produce writing when given human input/prompts. There have been many concerns raised by teachers across grade levels and institutions about the prospect of students using such technologies to cheat by having an A.I. write their essays or other writing assignments for them. We are in an acting class, so the need for A.I. on your writing assignments should be negligible. You may, though, feel like you can get away with it, as most written assignments will be pretty short - 3-5 pages. However, a word of caution: any attempt to pass off A.I. writing as your own in this class constitutes a violation of Trinity College's intellectual honesty policy. As the Student Handbook explains, “Intellectual honesty assumes that students do their own work and that they credit properly those upon whose work and thought they draw” (28-37; 28). Failure to abide by the policy may result in censure, suspension, or even expulsion. The use of A.I. writing tools for the purposes of cheating is also practically unwise for the following reasons:

* As with any other kind of cheating, **the main person you’re cheating is yourself** – if you don’t actually put in the work of developing your writing skills organically, you’ve just paid a bunch of money to learn nothing, and that lack of organic skill development will catch up with you.
* In a word, **A.I. writing is not consistently good, and it’s risky to use**. A.I. writing software – in its best current iteration – produces writing that is mostly formulaic and generic, lacks the ability to meaningfully integrate critical contextual detail, and cannot properly cite / synthesize sources (in fact, it often fabricates them, which is a major academic integrity violation if caught).
* **It is simply much easier to write your own work in this class**. A.I. writing tools are notoriously context-blind, and in a class where written work draws on localized concepts and points of discussion from our class (including written reflections on your own personal writing process), you’re likely going to get frustrated if you try to ask an A.I. to perform these tasks for you. I’ve tested the writing prompts & assignments I’ve developed this semester with some of the best A.I. writing tools out there, and none of them can consistently produce writing that meets the standard required for this course.
* As a human reader and your teacher, I don’t care what you can get an A.I. program to write. **I want to hear your unique voice** and help you develop it into something you can use throughout your life, in a wide array of contexts. So please be genuine in your writing for this class – I promise that will make things far more enjoyable for all of us.

And just to illustrate the need for transparency and ethics: this statement was adapted from a statement by Alex Helberg here at Trinity. I could’ve A.I.’d this, but just giving the damned credit was easier.

**RESOURCES:**

**Registrar’s Office**

**https://www.trincoll.edu/registrar/**

**Counseling & Wellness Center**

**https://www.trincoll.edu/counseling-wellness-center/**

**Writing Center**

**https://www.trincoll.edu/writing-center/writing-center/**

**Quantitative Literacy Center**

**https://www.trincoll.edu/quantitative-center/**

**Student Emergency and Equity Fund**

**https://www.trincoll.edu/diversity-equity-inclusion/student-emergency-and-equity-fund/**

**Research Library Liaison**

**https://www.trincoll.edu/lits/about/people/library-liaisons/**

**Helpdesk**

**https://www.trincoll.edu/lits/help-support/tech-support/**

**Community Learning**

**https://cher.trincoll.edu/community-learning/faculty/course-design/**

**Career and Life Design Center**

**https://careerlifedesign.trincoll.edu**

**The Bantam Network Residential Learning Community**

**https://www.trincoll.edu/bantam-network/**