**The University of Southern Mississippi**

**Graduate Student Handbook**

**Theatre Program**

**Updated Fall 2024**

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**General Introduction**

We seek to provide the best possible education in theatre and dance for our students, preparing them for careers in the professional and educational arenas. We emphasize the power of the imagination, passion, discipline, and collaboration in the creation of art. We seek to provide the best possible, and most creative, work environment for our students, faculty, and staff, while offering the strongest possible support for the specific missions of the Theatre and Dance programs.

**THEATRE PROGRAM**

**MISSION:**

Theatre is an artistic exploration and celebration of human life. We embrace risk-taking and build upon the combined and unique strengths of our artists and craftspeople.

**The MFA Degree: A Brief History**

You should know a bit of history about the degree you are seeking and why it is unique in the academic world.

The first theatre (as opposed to drama) courses at the collegiate level in America were created at Radcliffe University and then Harvard University in 1905 by the playwright George Pierce Baker. They were playwrighting courses. The first true theatre school as we know it was Carnegie Mellon School of Drama followed by many others. The Yale School of Drama opened in 1924. George Piece Baker moved to Yale in 1925 to head the program after Harvard refused to allow him to offer a degree in playwrighting. You may note that the early great schools of theatre were called "schools of drama." That signifies the struggle between traditional scholars (who only recognized theatre in its literary form as a legitimate field of study) and practitioners. Calling departments and schools "drama" was a way of flying under the academic radar. On one hand, it signaled to academics that the literary field of dramatic literature was theatre's admission to academic status; yet it allowed such programs to develop ambitious programs in performance - covertly. The arts have always had a subversive role in the academic community. And every brown edged hood that walks across the stage at graduation is a reminder that the arts are an essential component of a liberal education. The first Master of Fine Arts Degree in the world was offered at Yale in 1931.

**The MFA degree is a terminal professional degree -the highest degree in its field.** The PhD is a terminal research degree, typically is preceded by a Master's Degree (M.A). The course of study in a typical M.A. lasts from 1-2 years, after which the bearer usually goes on to complete a Ph.D. The professional MFA is intended to prepare the student for work in a specific profession. In the arts, it emphasizes application and creation rather than traditional research and scholarship. There are research degrees in theatre - one may get an M.A. in theatre and then proceed to get a PhD in Theatre which culminates in a dissertation and, usually a research career. The MFA, strictly speaking, is NOT a master's degree in the sense that most people mean. It requires a longer period of study and training than a simple master's degree It culminates in the artistic equivalent of a dissertation in the production of a creative body of work, and It is not a stepping stone to further formal study – it signifies the highest level of academic attainment in a creative field. **Be proud of your degree and insist on its correct and full title - the Master of Fine Arts, or MFA.**

**-Speech written by *Stephen Judd, Professor Emeritus***

**Guidelines for Graduate Students**

Graduate students are an important part of the educational mission of the theatre program. They serve as classroom teachers and supervisors. They are informal mentors, and as role models for undergraduate students. Most graduate students in the department are both students and employees of the university (if holding assistantships). In their capacity as candidates for a professional degree and as employees of the university, graduate students are expected to support the mission of the department to educate and train students, and to produce two seasons (Main Stage and Studio Season, Southern Arena Theatre Season) of plays for a paying public.

The following "guidelines," while requiring the application of good judgment on the part of graduate students, should be considered departmental policy. All questions should be referred to appropriate faculty or the department chair.

**1.Comportment**

a. Graduate students will abide by the relevant guidelines on sexual harassment and will need to be particularly mindful to consider their relationships with undergraduate students. Undergraduate students who have or had a romantic relationship with any graduate student should not be permitted to take a class under that instructor. Graduate students are expected to take particular caution on this issue, and to consult with faculty mentors when such conflicts arise or are likely to arise (Refer to section of student handbook).

b. Graduate students are expected to set a good professional model for undergraduate students in their co-curricular work on production as well as in the classroom.

c. Theatre is a dangerous place and all theatre workers put their lives and well-being in the hands of others. This is necessary for the work of theatre to proceed safely and is based on the belief that all practitioners understand the importance of safety. Therefore:

1. Any student who comes to campus or works in any university activity under the influence of drugs or alcohol is subject to disciplinary action if discovered, including immediate dismissal from the program.
2. Students are expected to report any student under the influence of drugs or alcohol to the appropriate faculty for any action necessary to preserve the safety of the student and others. This is absolute obligation.

**2. Academic Standards**

a. All graduate students are required to earn a GPA of no less than 3.0, and to abide by university academic standards for graduate studies.

b. Failure to achieve university academic standards for graduate students will result in loss of graduate assistantships and/or dismissal from the program.

c. It is the responsibility of each graduate student to consult with the faculty member who is the head of the appropriate area of emphasis (and/or their graduate faculty advisor) regarding graduate committees, semester MFA reviews, creative projects, etc.

**3. Graduate Assistantships**

a. Graduate Assistants are required to work 300 hours (20 hrs. per week x 15 weeks) and to enroll in 9-13 credits per semester.

b. Graduate Assistants will be given teaching and/or production and administrative work assignments that equal 20 hours per week. Graduate Assistants will be given credit for 10 hours per week for each class for which they are the Instructors of Record.

c. Graduate Assistants must have earned 18 credit hours in their area of discipline before being assigned as an Instructor of Record.

d. Graduate Assistants will be assigned a faculty supervisor for each area of assignment, and are expected to regularly consult on their assistantship work. Graduate Assistants are expected to abide by specific policies and rules that may exist in each area.

**4. Graduate Instructors**

a. Graduate Instructors will meet with the faculty member in charge of the content area prior to the first class. At that time arrangements for syllabi, textbooks, course expectations, and any other accommodations will be discussed. The faculty member will give clear instructions on the content of the class and expectations for student learning.

b. University policies on Academic Honesty and Students with Disabilities are required in all syllabi.

c. One copy of the syllabus should go to the faculty member who serves as the supervisor, one to the department office.

d. Changes of content, major rearrangement of teaching schedule or syllabi must be made in consultation with the faculty member in charge of the content area.

e. Faculty members may sit in the class at any time to offer advice or help on improvement if instruction.

f. Graduate teaching instructors are to preserve all tests and grade books and turn them over to the faculty member in charge of content at the end of the course.

g. Grades, attendance, and progress of each student are to be entered regularly in grade books and/or spreadsheets as appropriate.

h. Final grades must be entered prior to the deadline for grade entry at the end of each semester.

1. All Graduate Instructors will be trained on the use of SOAR grading by faculty mentors.
2. Graduate Instructors must be available on the morning of the grade entry deadline should the department need to be in contact.

**5. Department property**

Graduate students on assistantship are issued a space in either graduate design office or performance office.

a.Students are expected to keep their areas clean and orderly. Please report equipment problems.

b. All keys issued are the property of the Department of Theatre and Dance. Students are expected to return keys promptly at the end of the period of usage.

c. Possession of keys is a privilege - students may not use keys for personal benefit, or to gain access to areas where they are normally not expected to be.

d. Property belonging to the department of theatre (tools, properties, equipment, supplies, vans, etc.) is for the use of the department and the common good of all. Students may not borrow or use these items without the permission of the faculty overseeing that area or department.

e. Personal property should be secured safely in all areas of the building, particularly areas accessible by the public or shared spaces (the Graduate Offices, for instance).

**University Graduate School**

The graduate school website is https://www.usm.edu/graduate-school/ You will find important information here on due dates for plans of study, application for graduation, etc.

**GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIPS**

**Graduate Assistantships**

1.All Graduate student accepted into the University and program are eligible to receive a graduate assistantship unless on admitted on probationary status.

2. Graduate Assistants must enroll for at least 9 and no more than 13 graduate credit hours per semester for a total of 60 credits upon graduation.

3, Graduate Assistants must work 20 hours per week for the department. This work may involve teaching lower level undergraduate classes (for example: THE 100, 110, 201/L, 212/L) after completing at least 18 hours of graduate study. The work may also include a wide variety of positions in production and administration. For graduate assistants, one teaching assignment will count for 10 hours of work per week.

4.Graduate Assistants receive out-of-state fee waiver and full tuition. They also receive a stipend, which, for the nine month academic calendar in 2014-2015, was $8,200 regardless of degree plan (Directing, Performance, and Design}.

5. Graduate Assistants may interview and/or audition for Southern Arena Theatre, the departments summer repertory company with a commitment from the end of May through the very beginning of August.

6. USM provides a Health Insurance Program for graduate Assistants. If you prefer instead to remain on the insurance plan of a partner or parent, you will need to provide proof of insurance coverage.

7. All Graduate Assistantships are supervised by specific faculty and/or staff members in each area.

8. Graduate students are asked to apply for Federal Work Study, which may support their assistantship. The department is able to support only a certain number of Graduate Assistants who do not qualify for Federal Work Study. We typically do not accept students into a graduate theatre program without a full assistantship package.

9. The Department provides full registration, festival, and travel support for participation in the annual KCACTF event (Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival).

10. For more information please contact the Department of Theatre or the USM Office of Graduate Studies.

**GUIDELINES FOR THEATRE GRADUATE ASSISTANTS**

**Amount of Time Worked**

If you work in any of the shops, you are expected to put in at least 16 hours a week working in the shop. The remainder of the time for which you are being paid will be in strikes and miscellaneous smaller departmental duties.

On assignments other than in a shop or teaching, you are expected to put in at least 18 hours on combined assignments a week. The remainder of your 20 hours will be in strikes and various other departmental duties.

If you have more than one assignment, please allocate your work, week to week, to be available at "crunch time" for assignments that involve deadlines (usually those scheduled around productions).

**Submitting Hours are completed online.**

Classes taught account for 8 hours per week for each section. If you report less than the amount of time described above, the equivalent number of hours will be subtracted from 20 hours on hours reported by the program.

**SHARED SPACE POLICIES**

Theatre and Dance share the TAD building and many of its spaces. We share a common bond as artists and a common goal of educating and making art in the best way possible. That includes generously sharing spaces and extending courtesy toward our fellow artists.

**PRIORITY ORDER**

Both programs share a busy schedule of rehearsals, paid performances, showcases, and classes. Because we share a building, we have to be aware of these important events and show courtesy toward our fellow artists. We give priority in this order unless otherwise arranged: 1) performances, 2) showcases, 3) final dress rehearsals, 4) dress rehearsals, 5) technical rehearsals. If two groups are rehearsing opposite each other, common courtesy applies (keep volume down and refrain from yelling or talking/hanging out in the hallway). The same hierarchy applies to the greenroom and makeup/dressing room areas which become "backstage" areas for performances. When a show is in dress rehearsals and performance, the spaces will be off limits beginning at 5PM for evening performances and 2 hours before curtain for matinees. When both programs have a performance, the use of shared space will be negotiated by the faculty.

Classes often meet at the same times. Again, courtesy is necessary. Keep the volume down on recorded music or sound effects(the walls are not soundproofed, unfortunately), and, if you are going to shout out commands to your students, run equipment that requires earplugs, or scream bloody murder in your scene, close the doors to your space so that others may do their work, too.

**INDOOR SPACES**

Courtesy applies to all shared indoor spaces, including: the greenroom (eating and drinking approved), dressing rooms/showers/day lockers (you'll need a padlock and clear lockers by 5PM on performance and dress rehearsal days), makeup room, corridors, classroom, first-floor restrooms (public spaces, not dressing rooms), and the Studio Entrance lobby (eating and drinking approved).

The Front Entrance lobby is shared and public with a box office and entry to the offices above. Students may sit (not lounge or sleep) on the furniture to study or talk/run lines/mark dance steps (no music) very quietly if public decorum is observed.

TAD Student Lounge spaces include Greenroom, Studio/Student Entrance Lobby, Non­ smoking Courtyard, Porch, and Loading Dock when not in active use. The Thad Cochran Center has dozens of additional student spaces, the Cook Library has quiet study floors and group discussion rooms as well as a Starbucks, and both the Agora and the Powerhouse have indoor and outdoor spaces. There is also a walking trail just across Montague Street with lots of green space and easy access to the Payne center, water fountains, restrooms, and snacks.

**FURNITURE AND PERSONAL ITEMS**

Unless you have express permission from the owner or faculty- member in charge of the space or equipment, please do not move or "borrow" furnishings, equipment, or personal items in the building. If you find a space in particular disarray you should report it. You are responsible and must "neutralize" a space after use regardless of how you found it- put your toys away, tuck chairs in, wipe down tables, clear the wings, and turn lights off if the space will be empty (except for a "ghost light" in the theatres). That's easy, right?

**FACULTY /STAFF AND GRADUATE OFFICE SPACES**

The faculty and staff spaces on the second floor are all part of our professional work area. Please respect the spaces and furnishings in the Department Offices, Waiting Area, Conference Room, and Faculty Lounge. Students are welcome to visit. If you are meeting with a professor or staff member or if you have business to attend to such as a meeting or class in the Conference Room and need to gather in the Waiting Area. Otherwise, please make use of the first-floor Student Lounge spaces and 3 sets of restrooms. Restrooms in the faculty /staff lounge are available to students for emergency use only. Student dressing rooms and craft sinks for practicum are on the first floor.

The Graduate Student Offices on the first floor are also professional spaces and must be treated appropriately. Students in classes taught by MFA candidates will need to meet with them there. You are welcome to stop by, just don't hang out in there if it is not your office. Sure, the grads will have fun in there as well, but the professional function takes priority order. If any student knocks and comes in, professional decorum goes into effect.

**OUTDOOR SPACES**

Courtesy also extends to outside spaces, including: the Side Porch on the South wall (keep doors fully closed, please) and the Loading Dock on the North wall. This privilege will be extended as long as the spaces are kept tidy. The front entrance on the West side of the building and Courtyard on the East wall studio/student entrance are public access entrances.

**PUBLIC SAFETY**

Outside:

A word of safety for use of outside spaces is necessary. We recently had a surprise visit from the campus police in full SWAT gear, guns drawn. No, we did not have a threat to safety, but a student on campus saw students rehearsing with fake guns on the lawn of the TAD, thought it was real, and reported it to police (as one should). It was terrifying. The student holding the gun could have been killed. The Campus Police response was professional, swift, and effective. We are proud of the extensive training our security force has endured for just this sort of event. Now it is our turn to make sure it doesn't happen again. Refrain from carrying any weapons or fake weapons in the open outside of the studios and keep projects with "realistic" violence in the building.

Inside:

Specific safety policies for the shops and theatres will be addressed by the appropriate faculty and staff supervisors. General safety concerns all of us in all areas of the building. Campus Security locks the building near midnight and unlocks it in the morning (except Sundays, then you may need to call to get in). Call them if you have a show and the entrances are locked, but do not prop doors open and leave a space unattended. If you see anything suspicious or people in spaces where they should not be, call Campus Police and let them check on it. Keep shoes on whenever possible and sweep/mop floors if you will be barefoot. Glass, nails, wood splinters, and other debris are prevalent in the building due to the nature of our work. Wipe down or disinfect surfaces you use that others will touch. Please alert staff immediately if you discover a safety issue such as wet floors, leaky ceilings, running faucets, malfunctioning equipment, etc. Keep computers and book bags with you or locked up to avoid theft.

Most importantly, if you are (or may be) contagious, stay out of the TAD and away from others. We work very closely with one another. Respect your fellow artists and do not share your illnesses. Stopping in to "show us" you are ill only serves your drama and is not welcome. Contact your professors, get homework assignments, and stay home to get well. For highly contagious issues, contact the office and let them know if you have used intimate equipment, floor mats, dance floors, light boards, etc., so that the equipment can be treated. No one blames us for getting ill, only for spreading infection unnecessarily. How do you know? Go to the Clinic and get cleared. Sometimes (not always) a fever is an indicator and you are cleared after the fever is gone for 24 to 36 hours straight.

**POLICY ENFORCEMENT**

These policies will be rigorously enforced by all university employees who work in the TAD, including graduate students. All infractions must be reported to the department secretary who will keep a list. On a second infraction, students will be called up for a meeting. On a third infraction, more severe penalties may apply for the student's permanent record.

**We have a shared facility with specialized equipment and diverse occupants. Please follow these shared space policies for the good of all.**

**MFA Directing**

**MFA Directing Program**

The MFA Directing Program is a three year residency designed to give students progressive knowledge and experience in directing. The goal of this program is to prepare students for professional work as directors and/or for teaching at the university level.

**Curriculum**

The curriculum sequence includes a core of required classes, and a variety of other courses that can be tailored to the individual student's interests and needs (see MFA Directing curriculum). The Head of the MFA Directing program will evaluate the background and experience of each student on admission, and recommend initial classes. During the first semester, the Head of the Program will collaborate with each student on an outline of classes for the three year residency.

MFA Directing students enroll in THE 675 (Directing Studio) for 5 of 6 semesters in the program. This class provides a workshop for students and the program head to meet twice a week, engage in discussion of current directing projects, and to investigate specific aspects of directing chosen for each semester.

**MFA Committee**

In the second semester of the residency each student will choose a committee of three faculty members (the Head of the MFA Directing program will serve as committee Chair) to provide advice and mentorship. The committee will evaluate each student at the end of every semester in regard to professionalism, quality of academic work, quality of creative work and service to the department, professional goals, and progressive development of craft as a director.

**Directing Projects**

Students begin directing scenes in class, move on to directing Showcase productions in the Woods theatre, to Studio Series projects with limited budgets in the Gilbert F. Hartwig Theatre (black box), and finally to a Main Stage project in the Martha R. Tatum Theatre (thrust) with a full production budget.

The program's goal is to offer each student progressive work starting with script analysis, actors and character study, leading to collaboration with designers, and finally to more fully realized projects.

Each student will collaborate with the Head of the MFA Directing Program in choosing directing projects. Each fall students will submit projects of interest to the department's play reading committee, which helps choose the major season each year (usually chosen in February for each next year). The program goal is to offer students a chance to work on a wide variety of material in content, genre, form, and style.

**Sequence of Directing Projects (Subject to Change)**

**Year One (first semester)**

* Direct scene study in class
* Serve as Assistant Director or Stage Manager for a Main Stage Production Directed by Head of MFA Directing program
* Possibly direct Showcase production (up to 30 minutes) in Woods Theatre
* Possibly direct Freshmen, Sophomore, Transfer (FST) production in Woods Theatre

**Year One (second semester)**

* Direct scene study in class
* Direct Qualifying Production (usually in Woods Theatre) as part of THE 675 course work. Depending on the project, and the interests of specific students, directing an FST production or a Showcase production can serve as a Qualifying Production.

**Years Two and Three**

* In the third semester of study students may direct a special MFA directing project, usually in the woods theatre. This is an opportunity to work on a specific genre or style requiring little or no production elements. This project is optional, and dependent on scheduling.

Students will direct three larger projects in their final four semesters of residency, including:

2 Studio Series projects in the Gilbert F. Hartwig Theatre; and 1 Main Stage project in the Martha R. Tatum theatre. This latter project will serve as the students' final Creative Project.

**Qualifying Production**

In the second semester of the program each MFA Directing student will direct a one-act play of approximately 45 minutes in length, usually in the Woods Theatre. This project is usually part of a student's work for THE 675. This production will be reviewed by the Head of the MFA Directing Program, and other members of the students' MFA committee. The review will determine whether the student will continue in the MFA Directing program.

Students will submit Directors' Notes for this production (details on separate sheet), will meet with their committee to discuss their goals for the project, and to evaluate success in reaching these goals. It should be noted that the Qualifying Production is not viewed as a "master" project; the committee seeks to review a student's effort, discipline, talent, and commitment at the end of the first year of study, to evaluate the student's progress, and to determine whether a student should continue with the program.

**Production Books and Directors' Notes**

MFA Directing students are required to submit Production Books (including Directors' Notes) for the Qualifying Production, and for all Studio or Main Stage directing projects (details on separate sheet). This written material will be used as part of the grading for classes taken for directing productions.

**Final Creative Project**

Each student will direct a Main Stage production in the Martha R. Tatum theatre during the third year of a student's residency, and this project will be considered the student's Final Creative Project for the MFA degree in Directing. The student will submit a full Production Book for this production which will include:

1. Introduction: General Director's Notes on the Play and the project

2. Detailed Play and Script Analysis

a. the play's Dramatic Action

b. the Interpretation for Production

c. dividing the play into scenes, cycles, beats

d. identifying dramatic rhythms in the script

3.Research

a. the playwright

. the period

c. the production history of the script

4. Character Analysis (for each character)

5. The Design process

a. The nature of the collaboration

b. The progress of the process

c. Surprises and changes

6. Auditions and Casting

a. The company

b. The challenges

c. The promise of collaboration

7. Detailed rehearsal Log

8. Discussion of Production/Tech rehearsals

9. Impact of the Audience on the production

10. Post-show analysis

a. Development of the production during the performance run

b. Final Evaluation

11. Photos, Designs Images, Program, Publicity, Rehearsal schedules, Props lists, other relevant documentation

The Final Creative Project Production Book should include a detailed narrative of at least 20 - 30 double spaced pages, written in a clear and appropriate form. Footnotes should be provided where appropriate. This material is not intended to be a formal thesis, but it does need to discuss both conceptual and pragmatic aspects of the project.

On one hand, directors need to talk about their interpretation of the material from the conceptual point of view; the "why" that motivated directing choices. They also should report on what actually happened as the process of the production unfolded; the "how" it occurred. The material should be submitted in either a large loose-leaf binder or another bound form. The student must provide one copy of this material to be kept on file in the department office.

It's critical the student meet with the Head of the MFA Directing program to outline a timetable for submission of the Production Book to the student's MFA Committee in enough time for several reviews of the material before the Final Creative Project Production Book can be accepted.

The front page of the Creative Project Production Book must include space for signatures by a student's MFA Committee members (the form can be obtained from the department office).

**Final Evaluation and Exit Interview**

At the end of the final semester of residency, each student will have a final evaluation with the MFA Committee to review their work in the program, and to discuss future work in the profession. At this Final Exit Interview the Committee will determine whether a student should be acknowledged as having accomplished the MFA degree in Directing.

**Southern Arena Theatre**

It is recommended that MFA Directing students interview for positions with SAT at least once during the three year residency. These positions usually include stage managing, company managing, and assistant directing.

**Professional Internship**

The department is developing informal internships in which MFA Directing Students can serve as Assistant Directors at major regional theatres, mostly in the southeast area. These internships may take place during the third year of residency, and will normally be about four weeks in length during a rehearsal process. As of 2009, this internship program is not formalized, but we hope it will continue to be scheduled around students' interests, and around the availability of opportunities in the field.

**MFA DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY**

**GRADUATE STUDENTS BY YEAR CALENDAR**

This is an outline of activities/events/assignments graduate students in Design & Technology may usually expect in the course of the three-year program (subject to modification based on individual needs).

**First Year**

**First Semester**

* All Graduate students are admitted on a probationary basis
* Continuance is based on satisfactory performance
  + Grades
  + Completion of courses or skill deficiencies
  + Production Assignments
  + Portfolio Review
  + Qualifying Project
* All Graduate Assistants will get a college orientation, department orientation, and area orientation
* Meet with mentor and draw up a Three Year Course Plan (submit by end of first semester)
* First main stage production assignment
* First Faculty Review at the end of semester

**Second Semester**

* Second main stage production assignment
* Qualifying Project
* Second Faculty Review at the end of semester

**Second Year**

**First Semester**

* Update Course Plan
* Name graduate committee (end of semester)
* Possible main stage or studio design assignment (#1)
* Submission of post design write-up (TBD by mentor)
* Name graduate committee by the end of semester
* Third Faculty Review at the end of semester

**Second Semester**

* Meet with graduate committee early in the semester
* Possible main stage or studio design assignment
* Submission of post design write-up (TBD by mentor)
* Fourth Faculty Review at the end of semester
* Meet with graduate committee by the end of semester

**Third Year**

**First Semester**

* Update Course Plan
* Meet with graduate committee at beginning of semester Begin Creative Project Work
* Main stage design assignment
* Submission of post design write-up (if not creative project design - TBD by mentor)
* Fifth Faculty Review at the end of semester
* Submit application for graduation
* Meet with graduate committee at end of semester

**Second Semester**

* Meet with graduate committee at beginning of semester (optional)
* Continue Creative Project Work
* Possible main stage design assignment
* Submission of creative project paper
* Meet with graduate committee at end of semester, to review creative project
* Exit interview (with graduate committee)
* GRADUATE

**MAIN STAGE DESIGNER GENERAL RESPONSIBILITIES**

Students assigned to design University Main Stage or Studio Production are expected to fulfill the following requirements:

1. Attend all scheduled production meetings, and design meetings.
2. Keep a log of all meetings, rehearsals, and other events associated with the design process.
3. Be available to consult on short notice with the director or crew heads during the build or hang the show.
4. Regularly confer with faculty advisor on the progress of the design.
5. Adhere to all dates and deadlines in the master design calendar.
6. Provide all plans, drawings, sketches, renderings, models, lists, etc. required for the shops to execute the design.
7. Attend the first read-through of the play.
8. Make a design presentation to the company on a date specified by the director {usually the first read-through).
9. Attend designer run-throughs.
10. Attend all technical rehearsals and dress rehearsals as required by area of design responsibility.
11. Attend and participate in all post-rehearsal note sessions during tech week.
12. Communicate all notes to the appropriate crews for completion by the morning following each technical or dress rehearsal.
13. Sound and lighting designers will attend and participate in paper tech; scenic designers will attend paper tech if scene shifts are required.
14. Attend the opening of the show.
15. Attend and participate in the KCATCF response.

In addition to these production related duties, there may be several additional requirements:

1. Prepare materials for lobby that shows the design process for the public.
2. Write a brief paper focusing on the process with particular attention to the artistic choices relevant to the script and director’s interpretation of the play (mentor’s option).

* See "Post Production Analysis and Evaluation of Design"
* Additional guidelines specific to the area or the educational needs of the student designer may be added by the design mentor

Design Process

A SHORTENED VERSION OF "DESIGN PROCESS"

The design faculty creative a systematic approach to design for students and faculty to understand and fully utilize all significant steps to the collaborative process of designing. This is the process which we use for all main stage and studio productions. It lasts approximately 11 weeks from first meeting to beginning of the build. Artistic teams may be asked to present work in progress at the end of any stage before moving forward to next stage.

**CONCEPTUAL/ ANALYTCAL**

**One**

Week 1 and 2

Discussion Decisions/Evidence

1, What is the story (plot/action)?

2.What is the dramatic conflict?

3. Who are the main characters and what is their relationship?

4. What do the main characters want?

5. What are the obstacles to getting what they want?

6. What is the play about?

6. What is absolutely necessary to physically present the play (based on the text)?

7. What are some of the indictors of "style" in the play?

8. What are the main images of the play?

THESE ARE BASIC QUESTIONS-THERE WILL SURELY BE OTHERS YOU WILL NEED TO ADDRESS AS EACH PLAY IS DIFFERENT

**Two**

**Weeks 3 and 4**

Assembling Material and Reactions

Decisions/Evidence:

Inspirational images and materials that have strong sensory impact (touch, taste, smell, touch, sight). This is not historical or circumstantial research. It is material that stimulates the imagination of team that relevant to the script. Should show evidence of culling, narrowing the focus on specific images/materials.

**RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT**

**Three**

**Weeks 5 and 6**

Deep Culling and Early Preliminaries

Process: Use culled material to begin to do play building: early reactions/collages, etc. and thumbnails, possible GPs, costume ideas/sketches etc. Early research. Hone culled material as much as possible.

Decisions/Evidence: Thumbnails of major scenes; characters; lighting moments; preliminary GPs; materials may still reflect a number of alternative paths and choices. Use these materials to decide definite direction for Stage 4.

Establish contact with shops and begin preliminary coordination.

**Four**

**Week 7 and 8**

Establishing Decisions through Preliminary Design

Decisions/Evidence:

Show "preliminary designs."

"Preliminary designs" should point the way to a clear direction and approval of a design (subject to adjustment, not major change) in each design area by the director and Producer. Indication by shop heads that preliminary designs are, subject to some revision, acceptable in terms of capabilities of the shops.

**DESIGN IMPLEMENTATION**

**Week 9**

Five Designs Approved (Design Finals)

Decisions/Evidence: Completion of all materials needed for the director to understand and approve the design in all areas. Costume renderings, set renderings, white model and painter's elevations or colored model as appropriate; ground plans; etc. are all presented in a single meeting of the artistic team. Designers should ensure that the shop supervisors have seen and approved final designs (subject to adjustment).

*Designs are approved by director and producer.*

**Six**

Week 10 and 11

implementation Package

Development of final models, sketches, renderings, all material needed to execute the designs (defined by shops and approved in each area by shop managers). Includes props, decor and accessories research/design.

**DESIGN EXECUTION**

**Seven**

Variable-weeks to tech

Execution of Design

* Design team will present design at a point the director designates (usually the first reading). This presentation will focus on:
* How design fulfils team's goals (aesthetic, conceptual, story)
* Issues that affect performer or help draw attention to performer's relationship to the design
* Presentation should be professional, brief but as thorough as necessary to communicate the intent of the design to the cast.
* All plans, drawings, charts, research books, lists, etc. are in the hands of the shop supervisors (or dates of delivery are determined) before build begins (clate-t0 be determined by each shop).

**PROJECTS AND ASSIGNMENTS**

**Qualifying Project**

Graduate students admitted into the program on a probationary basis. Each student will be assigned a qualifying project {to be determined by the area head of the candidate's concentration). Successful completion of the graded project {B or better), portfolio reviews, completion of all classes with minimum 3.0 GPA, and adherence to "Guidelines for Graduate Students" is normally considered to be the baseline for a student to be admitted to full candidacy to the program for the remaining two years.

**Production Assignments**

All assignments will be made by the mentor in the area of the candidate's concentration, usually in consultation with other relevant faculty and with the student. Production assignments usually involve increasing responsibility and scope, although occasionally an assignment may involve giving a student an opportunity to focus on some specific area of development. Design assignments are assigned practicum numbers that reflect grading for design as well as for technical preparation, communication, and execution {where appropriate). For example, a costume designer will normally receive 2 credits for design {THE 686) and 1 credit of technical production {THE 682).

**Teaching/Instruction Assignments**

We expect students to consider themselves as part of the instructional team in class and in production. This means setting the bar high for yourself as a student. The better you are as a student, the more credible you are as an instructor, both in informal situations where you may be working with a crew or in a formal situation where you are actually giving instruction in a classroom or lab.

Students may not be instructors of record until they have had at least 18 hours of instruction in their area of specialization. Under normal conditions, you will not be asked to teach until the second year at the earliest, although you may be given opportunities to teach individual classes under the guidance of your mentor. Graduate students in D&T usually begin by teaching lab sections and advance to teaching specific classes as appropriate and needed. If you are interested in teaching, tell your mentor early so that adequate attention can be given to preparing you. If you have previous teaching experience, let your mentor know.

More specific issues about teaching are given in the "Guidelines for Graduate Students."

**INTRODUCTION TO PRODUCTION**

Production is critical to the education of students, to the university community and to the audience from the general community who come to see the plays.

The Department of Theatre and Dance sees production as an academic, educational element of its instruction. It also sees its public performances as projecting the best professional standards of the theatre to our audiences.

Therefore, although we expect all students to focus on learning and educational progress, we also expect them to consider themselves as essential members of a resident company with a paying audience. As in professional theatre, the quality of work at every level of art and craft is always a priority.

Production is the place where lessons learned in the classroom, shops, labs, and rehearsal spaces are tested and evaluated. Production is not practice - it is real. The consequences of playing before a live audience are real, audience expectations are real, success and failure are real.

This section of the Handbook is intended to grow in coming years and may eventually become a manual that fully expresses our processes the creation of theatre. In the future, it may include technical job descriptions, sample contracts, and other important information relating to production.

**PRODUCTION**

Design for Main Stage Productions

Written Project Analysis and Evaluation

At the end of each main stage production, the student designing sets, costume, lighting, or sound may be asked to submit a written evaluation of the project before a final grade will be issued. One part of the evaluation is self-evaluation of the design and process; the other is an evaluation of the project.

For MFA Design & Technology students, these will be mini-projects that will be used to support the final creative project document.

For BFA Design & Technology students this will be the form of the written elements of the Production Book for the Senior Project, exclusive of visual elements. This may also be used as part of the Senior Capstone.

The faculty advisor and student will determine the length and scope of the document. Students are advised to keep a log or journal of work on the production throughout the process that they can use as a reference in writing the analysis.

Form: The form of the evaluation will be narrative. Students will be expected to write in clear, concise language. Attention will be paid to sentence structure, spelling and grammar as mechanisms important to the development of the designer's ideas.

Elements

A. Production Book. All physical elements produced by the designer in the process of preparing the show, including production photos of the final project (see "Production Book" document).

B. Post-Show Analysis and Evaluation of the Design

1. Formal

a. Analysis of script, with emphasis on noting the chief design problems and technical challenges.

b. Analysis/Discussion of the needs of the text as evolved by the director, or in response to other members of the artistic or technical production team.

c. Articulation of the production idea: the concept, master symbol, or image of the play or dramatic action statement as agreed upon by the director and design team.

2. Qualitative

a. Aesthetic excellence of the project, according the elements and principles of design: relationship between aesthetic choices and the production idea. (Use the principles and elements of design appropriate to each area)

b. Considerations arising from the space of performance: examples might be type of staging, actor/audience relationship; how space affected use of design elements or application of principles.

c. Process

i. Evaluate working relationship with Director

ii. Evaluate working relationship with other artists

iii. Evaluate working relationship with all department technical heads.

3. Quantitative

a. Meeting of established deadlines

b. Adherence to Proposed Budget

c. Budgeting and Use of time to Achieve Design.

Evaluation of the Project : Evaluation of the project in terms of objectives, successes, and lessons learned. Comments may be made designed to improve the project for future students.

(Note: Each area may have a variation of this general structure).

**GRADUATE COMMITTEES**

**Selecting a Committee**

Graduate students will select committees no earlier than end of spring semester, first year, and no later than end of fall semester, second year.

You must get the approval of our major professor before committee form online is completed.

**Composition of Committee**

* The committee will consist of at least three faculty members of student's choice.
* The committee will be chaired by the major professor unless other exigencies call for a change.

**Intent of Committee Meetings**

* Report on most recent work since previous meetings
* Provide Self evaluation of goals set in last meeting
* Project goals for upcoming semester
* Provide feedback to and from faculty committee

**Committee Meetings**

* The meeting will consist of an agenda. The following agenda is provided a guideline. You may add items as needed.

1. Long Term and Short Term goals
2. Review of classes currently in which you are currently enrolled
3. Assistantship Assignment
4. Review of production work in current semester
5. Progress on creative project
6. Internships/summer/outside employment in profession
7. Progress on Portfolio and Competition Submissions
8. Next semester plans

a. Classes

b. Assistantship

c. Production Assignments

• The committee will meet at least once each semester after appointment until final semester when more meetings may be necessary

**Committee and Creative Project**

* Committee will provide feedback, as appropriate, on progress of creative project (see "Creative Project Document Guidelines")
* Committee will review creative project document and return drafts for rewriting as needed Committee will sign creative project title page when project is successfully completed

**THE CREATIVE PROJECT Part One**

**INTRODUCTION**

Your creative Project is one of the most important pieces of work that you will do in your three years of residency. Its quality is a reflection on you but also on the University of Southern Mississippi and the Department of Theatre.

The project has two major elements: 1) the production; and 2) the document that describes your process and evaluation of the production.

Your mentor is committed to helping you produce the best document possible, while assuring that all documents conform to the conventions of writing in an art discipline.

This brief document offers guidelines for you to follow as you write, edit, and finalize your document. It is not intended to create an "academic" approach to your process or to the documentation of your work. Nor is it intended to encourage "look-alike" documents. However, it is intended to encourage a somewhat unified approach to the writing which will help both you and your committee plan and evaluate your work.

Follow all instructions as closely as possible; any deviations must be approved by your mentor and, if necessary, the Head of Design.

Process

1. You will name your MFA committee by the end of the third semester of your residency at USM.
2. You will receive your creative project assignment in the spring preceding the year you will graduate.
3. Meet with your graduate advisor as soon as you have received your creative project assignment.
4. Set established dates for drafts, rewrites, and final approval with graduate advisor.
5. Your graduate committee will have at least one review of a draft before final copy approval.

**Elements of the Manuscript**

Although all creative project documents will vary somewhat from one another, certain elements should be common to all manuscripts

1. Flyleaf (blank page - do not number)
2. Title page (page i - DO NOT NUMBER)
3. Dedication (if included - page iii - bottom, center)
4. Acknowledgments for special assistance and copyright permissions (if needed)
5. Table of Contents
6. List of Tables (if needed)
7. List of Illustrations in the Text
8. List of Abbreviations (if needed)
9. Text
10. Appendices
11. References
12. Flyleaf

**Format of the Manuscript**

Please format every page of your manuscript to these specifications:

Margins Leave a left-hand margin of one and one half inches (This margins is necessary for binding.) Leave a right-hand, top, and bottom margin of one inch. Do not justify the right margin.

All photographs, prints, figures, tables, graphs, etc. used in the text must be contained within the prescribed margins.

See your mentor about specific placement and captioning of photographs, illustrations and other embedded material.

Reduce any oversized materials to meet margin requirements. In certain cases, you may arrange to have foldouts in your document; contact your mentor if you have material which cannot be made to fit the requirements (for instance, drafting or patterns).

Use black type in 12-point size. Acceptable fonts include Arial and Times New Roman. Check with you mentor if you want to use another font.

Double-space the work both within and between paragraphs (with the exception of long quotations, long tables, footnotes, and multi-line captions.

Paragraphs should be indented one half inch.

Use a letter quality printer.

**Style**

Your major professor should approve the guide that you follow for matters of style, organization, format, and documentation.

Please be sure you follow this style guide consistently. Acceptable guides include such works as the following:

* Kate L. Turabian, A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses, and Dissertations, fifth or sixth edition.
* MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, seventh edition. •
* The Chicago Manual of Style, fourteenth edition

**References**

Title references as your style guide tells you to ("works cited," "references," "bibliography," etc.), but place the title in all capital letters, one inch from the top of the page, centered. Continue page numbering at the top right margin.

Follow your handbook for correct expression of bibliographic information.

Be sure to go back and double check for consistency and make certain that you have included bibliographic information for all the authors you have cited in your document.

**Title Page** {see sample title page)

* Count this page as page i, but do not number it. Have the title page approved by your mentor before you make copies to have them signed by your committee.
* You will need two (2) signed copies of your title page. Make sure all committee members sign in BLACK ink.
* The top line {one inch from the top of the page) of your title page should read "The University of Southern Mississippi" {not University ...") in upper/lower case letters, centered.
* The bottom line (one inch from the bottom of the page) will bear the month (i.e., August, May, or December) and year (with no comma between them) of your graduation, centered.
* Center vertically the rest of the information (title, your name, etc.) leaving enough white space below and above for aesthetics and committee members' signatures.
* Lines for signatures should be quadruple spaced; the lines should begin at the left margin of the page and extend about 2/3s of the way across the page.
* Type your title in capital letters, and the rest of the information in upper/lower. Italicize the title of the play and throughout the document.
* Please type your full name (FIRST, MIDDLE, AND LAST - NO INITIALS).
* The Department of Theatre prefers that you keep acknowledgments to those of a professional nature.
* This is the place to thank those who have assisted in the production of the document and those who have provided permission to use copyrighted material.
* The number of the page should appear at the bottom center.
* The word "ACKNOWLEDGMENTS" should appear, centered, one inch from the top of the page; if the acknowledgments run to two pages, begin the second page one inch from the top

**Table of Contents**

* Number the table of contents, bottom center, with the appropriate roman numeral(s).
* Center the words "TABLE OF CONTENTS" one inch from the top of the page; if the contents run to two pages, begin the second page one inch from the top of the page (leaving the page number at bottom center).
* List major sections of the document in all capital letters, showing the appropriate page numbers. Do not list the table of contents in the table of contents.
* Number chapters with upper case roman numerals. List only major subheadings under each chapter; do not list sub-subheads.
* Give page numbers for chapters only; do not list page numbers for subheads unless your committee advises you to do so. Indent subhead titles, and list in upper/lower case.

**Binding**

1. Provide two final copies (one for you and one for the department.
2. Copies should be bound (spiral, soft cover).
3. You may provide an individualized title page as a cover in front of the signing page.

**THE CREATIVE PROJECT DOCUMENT** **Part Two**

**Contents of the Document**

The written component of the creative project is to give students the opportunity to consider and evaluate their produced work and to communicate that evaluation to their faculty committee for feedback.

In order to help graduate students in all design and technical areas plan for this part of the project, the D&T faculty has agreed on some common elements that all D&T creative project documents should contain. In addition, each of the three areas will also have more detailed and unique requirements that may supplement this outline.

**Content Areas**

I. Analysis

A. Analysis of script

B. Analysis/Discussion of the design needs

C. Production idea

*Pre-production analysis of design needs, style, color choices, texture choices, research, coordination with other designers, etc. Optional material may include elements like background of playwright, critical reception of play, or an overview of notable productions of the play.*

II. Research

A. Image Research

B. Historical Research

C. Design, Decor, Cultural Research

D. ETC.

Ill. Process

1. Director/Choreographer/Music Director
2. Design Team
3. C. Technical and Management Heads
4. ETC

*Make sure that you include a specific chronology as you discuss the process - from first being informed of project assignment - all production meetings, design choices, planning problems, budgets, construction (preparation) problems and solutions, etc.*

IV. Evaluation

1. Evaluation of the Design

* Aesthetic Excellence of Project
* Functionality of the Project

1. Evaluation of the Project

* *Post-show analysis. How did the design function? Did it do to and for the audience what it should have and/or what you wanted it to? How was it received? What would you do differently? If it functioned, why did it function? If not, why not?*

V. Documentation/Images/Research (unless embedded in the text)

*Plans, Production Photos, lists, charts, sketches, etc. may be appended.*

**MFA Evaluations**

**MFA DESIGN/TECHNOLOGY EVALUATION PROCESS**

Evaluations ("Reviews") occur at the end of each semester. The sign-up sheet be shared one to two weeks prior to the end of the semester. The evaluation will normally occur during exam week.

All evaluation sessions are 50 minutes. Please arrive to the evaluation prepared, on time and professionally dressed.

Each evaluation is an opportunity for the faculty to assess your work, progress and direction in the program. It is also an opportunity for you to discover and review strengths and weaknesses in your work. The faculty expects that you will use these evaluations as tools to reflect upon you creative development and solidify your educational goals.

The evaluation sheet and a letter will be given to you that summarizes the faculty's assessment of your work. Both will be placed in your permanent file.

You must prepare four copies of the following for distribution to the design and technology faculty at each review:

• a 'goals sheet' (the form is on the document tower in the main office)

• a current resume (or several if you have a design resume and a tech resume)

*Sequence of Reviews*

• **First semester: Initial Evaluation**

*The emphasis in this evaluation is to produce an initial assessment of each student's initial progress and potential in the program.*

You should be prepared to give a brief presentation of your resume and portfolio (or the materials shown at the application into the program). Include production and class work from the first semester.

The faculty will give feedback concerning the direction your portfolio should take. Suggestions will be made to improve the resume. You are expected to take notes.

You should also bring course work organized for review. You should be prepared to speak about your work and to answer questions. You should be ready to discuss their personal and creative goals going into the second semester.

• **Second semester: Review of Educational Goals**

*The emphasis of this evaluation is to discuss progress*

In addition to recent theatre course work, you should bring updated portfolio materials., which should be organized. The portfolio should address suggestions made in the previous evaluation and display selected class projects, examples of design process from inception to completion, and photos of realized production work, including both design and craft areas. The faculty will set expectations for the second year which you will discuss with your mentor. You should also begin to think about the formation of the graduate committee. Questions concerning the operation of the committee should be discussed with your mentor.

• **Third semester: Review of Creative Process**

*The purpose of this evaluation is to summarize your progress and set specific goals for the final half of your residency*.

You should present a completed, formal hard portfolio. This evaluation will include a brief presentation of changes made to the portfolio and resume based upon previous recommendations. Goals for the your final three semesters will be discussed. You must be able to confirm that you and your mentor have discussed formation of the graduate committee at this time. The core of this evaluation will be to hear and discuss critical analysis of your creative work. You should bring in ALL materials that demonstrate design choices that were made during the creative process of a production, including: research, sketches, drafting, models, elevations, samples, swatches, calendars, production notes, journals, and process and production photos. You should consult your advisor with any questions well in advance of this evaluation.

• **Fourth semester: Portfolio Review**

*The purpose of this evaluation is to focus on your portfolio.*

You must come prepared to speak articulately as you present their portfolio by leading the faculty, pointing out elements that you wish to highlight. You should be prepared to answer questions about design choices and experiences and support them with examples from your portfolio. You should show that you are developing a digital portfolio and a website. If a digital portfolio has been prepared, it may be projected for the convenience of the viewers. Prior arrangement should be made to insure that the necessary equipment is set up and operational. The evaluation will include immediate feedback on the presentation and effective ways prepare the portfolio for display to potential employers.

• **Fifth semester: Mock Job interview**

*The purpose of this review is to help students develop presentation and interviewing skills*.

You should research an actual job listing: for which you consider yourself qualified. The may be a job to which you may actually apply. You must write a letter of application and prepare a finished resume with references. Copies of the job listing, the application letter and resume must be distributed to all four design/technology faculty mailboxes at least four days prior to evaluation. You should conduct yourself from the start of the evaluation as if the job application were genuine, including attention to: personal appearance, attitude, portfolio presentation and specific questions related to the job. The design/tech faculty will ask questions specific to the job title. The faculty will expect that you have researched the facility and the position's expectations in preparation for the interview.

**Post Production Write-Ups**

**Design for Main Stage Productions**

**Written Project Analysis and Evaluation**

One part of the evaluation is self-evaluation of the design and process; the other is an evaluation of the project.

* For MFA students, these will be mini-projects that will be used to support the final creative project document.
* For BFA students - this will be the form of the written elements of the Production Book for the Senior Project, exclusive of visual elements. This may also be used as part of the Senior Capstone.

The faculty advisor and student will determine the length and scope of the document.

Students are advised to keep a log or journal of work on the production throughout the process that they can use as a reference in writing the analysis.

I. Form The form of the evaluation will be narrative. Students will be expected to write in clear, concise language. Attention will be paid to sentence structure, spelling and grammar as mechanisms important to the development of the designer's ideas.

II. Elements

A. *Production Book.*

All physical elements produced by the designer in the process of preparing the show, including production photos of the final project (see "Production Book" document).

B. *Post-Show Analysis and Evaluation of the Design*

1. Formal

a. Analysis of script, with emphasis on noting the chief design problems and technical challenges.

b. Analysis/Discussion of the needs of the text as evolved by the director, or in response to other members of the artistic or technical production team.

c. Articulation of the production idea: the concept, master symbol, or image of the play or dramatic action statement as agreed upon by the director and design team.

2. Qualitative

a. Aesthetic excellence of the project, according the elements and principles of design: relationship between aesthetic choices and the production idea. (Use the principles and elements of design appropriate to each area)

b. Considerations arising from the space of performance: examples might be type of staging, actor/audience relationship; how space affected use of design elements or application of principles.

c. Process

i. Evaluate working relationship with Director

ii. Evaluate working relationship with other artists

iii. Evaluate working relationship with all department technical heads.

3. Quantitative

a. Meeting of established deadlines

b. Adherence to Proposed Budget

c. Budgeting and Use of time to Achieve Design.

1. *Evaluation of the Project*

Evaluation of the project in terms of objectives, successes, and lessons learned. Comments may be made designed to improve the project for future students.

(Note: Each area may have a variation of this general structure).

The University of Southern Mississippi Department of Theatre

(Title of Manuscript)

By

(Author Name)

A Creative Project Document Submitted to the Department of Theatre of The University of Southern Mississippi In Partial Fulfillment for the Degree of Master of Fine Arts

Approved

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(Chair Name and Title)

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

(Committee Member: Name and Title)

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

(Committee Member Name and Title)

Month of Graduation

**MFA PERFORMANCE**

**Performance**

**MFA in Performance**

**Year By Year**

Graduate actors in the MFA Performance Program must perform in either main stage or another approved forum every semester. The work should be progressive in difficulty and achievement. Quality should take precedence over quantity, particularly during the first year. Studio and Performance class work must be complete and on-time, with the student's best efforts at achievement on every assignment. Therefore, first year students must obtain written permission from all Performance Faculty Members to participate in any work other than the student's own assistantship, scheduled classes, and main stage roles. The Performance Faculty Members are unlikely to approve anything in the first semester, particularly after mid-term. Second and Third year students must consult with their Committee.

**First Year**

Graduate Acting Studio both semesters required

Graduate Voice and Movement both semesters required

At least one Graduate Seminar completed - required

Additional classes as advised by Performance faculty based on goals and skills

All conditional requirements from Admissions completed

**Second Year**

Graduate Acting Studio both semesters → required

Graduate Voice and Movement both semesters – required

All remaining Graduate Seminars completed - strongly recommended (You may postpone your Seminar elective, but not the two required)

Additional classes as advised by Committee based on goals and skills

**Third Year**

(At this point, all NAST standards and guidelines for graduate actors must be met or within reach in voice, movement, and acting)

Classes and Studio as advised by Committee based on goals and skills

Creative Project in first semester strongly recommended

Continued Creative Project hours second semester to complete process

Open schedule: continue growth in Voice, Movement, and Acting

**First Year Benchmarks**

The National Association of Schools of Theatre is the national accreditation body for theatre. The University of Southern Mississippi has met the rigorous requirements for the accreditation. By the time a student reaches the third year of residency as an MFA candidate, they should have the standards met or within reach, with rare exceptions based on the special abilities of the student. While each actor is different, the NAST guidelines serve as a tool of measurement for both students and faculty to evaluate skills and progress against a national bar. Neither NAST nor USM advocate a carbon-copy approach to training. In fact, celebrating the individual artist is central to our mission. However, first year students should work vigorously with the faculty to identify strengths and weaknesses as well as areas of study that will enhance their artistic goals.

First semester, establish a strong reputation for hard work, openness to learning, patience with the educational process, professionalism, and support of fellow artists. The first year of graduate school is often challenging and frustrating. Pressures of all kinds are part of the process, emotionally, physically, intellectually, and artistically. Some students hit a "wall" of seemingly insurmountable challenges near the end of the first term. That is, actually, normal. Ultimately, each artist is responsible for his/her own process, technique, and creative drive. While no technique works for everyone, remain open to new forms, ideas, and approaches. Techniques with substantial depth or detail will require more than one semester to master. You don't have to know all of the answers at this point. Communicate often with the Performance Faculty about challenges in process and technique. Begin to define a clear set of goals for both short and long-term.

Second Semester, work with your committee to establish a Plan of Study for the Graduate School, particularly if your professional goals are off of traditional paths. Stay flexible and highly disciplined. Focus on larger goals will keep you on track in the daily work. By the end of the second semester, graduate actors should have strong foundations in analysis, character development, and performance integration. They should also have an acute awareness and understanding of their own instrument and a defined process for voice and movement work free of overt personal habits. These tools will evolve gradually with individual attention and personal commitment. Begin to define a personal aesthetic, original thinking, and creative adaptation of ideas.

**Auditions**

MFA candidates in Performance are required to audition for the main stage productions and play as cast. Students who wish to request permission to deviate from this policy must put the request in writing to the Performance Faculty. Those with professional engagements that conflict with audition dates may submit a recorded audition. Professionalism requires a positive attitude, particularly regarding casting.

**Main Stage**

Auditions for main stage roles take place in the first few days of each Fall semester, and after Thanksgiving Break for Spring productions. On rare occasions, alternative dates will be set and posted. Students perform a one-minute monologue and 16 bars of music (and an additional 30 seconds) for musicals. A warning hand will go up at the 50 second mark, so keep it under that if possible. Dress professionally but not formally.

**Call backs**

Normally, call backs are held during the following two or three days. Each director creates his/her own format which may include cold reading, prepared sides with assigned partners, improvisations, movement or voice work, dance calls, songs etc. All information, call back lists, and cast lists are posted on the call board. Casting: The department guarantees MFA actors casting at least once per year in main stage roles. In the third year, casting in a major Creative Project role is guaranteed. Depending on the season, some graduate actors may be better served in a major showcase production or Special Project rather than the main stage. Casting at Southern Miss is decided by the individual directors. Therefore, getting cast – or not - in a main stage production carries no weight in evaluations. It's part of the business. What you do with the roles you are given or with those you choose for yourself – matters.

**Evaluations**

All MFA students participate in evaluations. For first year Performance MFA candidates, the evaluations happen in the final week of the semester with the individual student and the Performance Faculty. Prepare a list of specific short and long-term goals, bring a current resume and headshot, and be ready for a detailed discussion of all aspects of their work. Every performer has strengths and weaknesses, areas of success and areas in need of further development. The Performance Faculty will give students who are not meeting graduate school expectations a written notice of Probation for the subsequent semester, during which, the student must work to improve the specific deficiencies outlined by the faculty if they want to remain in the program. Most students successfully accomplish these tasks and proceed through the remainder of the program with their peers and without further remediation. After the first semester, evaluations of MFA candidates are conducted by the MFA Committee.

**MFA Committee**

In the second semester of the residency, normally before March advisement, each student will request an MFA Committee of three faculty members to provide advice and mentorship for the remainder of their residency. The chair of the committee must be a Performance Faculty Member. The Committee will evaluate each student at the end of every semester in regard to professionalism, quality of academic work, quality of creative work, service to the department, professional goals, and progressive development of craft.

Creative Project Guidelines, Analysis, and Evaluation

I. The Performance Creative Project is the live performance in front of an audience, the acting work itself. The performance must reflect thorough analysis, research, and development of creative work during the rehearsal process. The live performance is also the most important aspect of the Creative Project requirement for the degree. The work should reflect a high level of accomplishment and skill as well as creativity, artistic growth, and professionalism.

II. When does this happen? The Performance Faculty vote and assign the roles at the end of the second year after reviewing the student’s preferences and after discussion with the directors. The process begins after the department announces the season and usually concludes by the start of summer term. Projects occurring late in the last semester of study will often result in a delayed commencement but no academic penalty as long as the Committee has agreed to the timing in advance

III. What roles qualify for Creative Projects? Projects will most often come from featured main stage roles. Students and/or their committee may request approval of the Performance Faculty for other venues or types of acting projects, including but not limited to professional productions, campus showcases, studio projects, alternative media presentations, or solo experimental endeavors. Performance Faculty may require extensive written proposals and proof of early research for non-traditional creative projects.

IV. Who approves proposals for alternative processes? The Performance Faculty will make final approvals of any requested changes to guidelines or timelines. Actors must seek approval prior to the first deadline to deviate from the guidelines below. The chair of your MFA committee will manage internal deadlines with you.

V. Support Documentation Dossier contains support materials for preparation and analysis of the work. Oral and written components must be appropriate to the terminal degree level. The process must be thorough, professional, and well documented. The Performance Faculty will require further study and/or rewrites until the work reflects a high level of thought and expression, originality, and thoroughness. Proofread all drafts until they are free of obvious grammar and spelling errors. Get help from the Writing Center or a qualified professional before you turn in any work. Cite all research and production documentation, including internal references, renderings, and photographs/images. Though some analysis will overlap categories, the support materials will include the following, often completed and/or presented in this order:

a. Research Presentation: synthesis and analysis of the most useful of the research you found from a wide variety of credible sources on period, style, playwright, and given circumstances of the play, including time, location, environment, historical contexts, economics, spirituality, society, education, etc., as it applies to your artistic process for the role. (THE 612 is required of all graduate students in Theatre.) Provide MLA citations of all materials and a typed bibliography using MLA format. The live presentation of research must be theatrical, creative, and thorough. Candidates must present the full research component to her/his committee chair (or chair’s delegate) at least one week prior to scheduled final presentation. Power point materials (or recording of alternate presentation method), handouts, bibliography, and a short synopsis (2-5 pages) of applied research must be included in the printed materials.

b. Text Analysis: including:

i. script analysis for the structural and thematic elements of the play (THE 601 is required of all graduate students)

ii. actor’s text break-down or scoring for the character’s units, beats, intentions/actions, obstacles, secrets, through-line, journey, moment before for each scene, etc.

iii. scansion, language markings, dialect annotations, phonetic changes

iv. any physical, technical, or mechanical actor tasks

v. notes from the director prior to rehearsal about the text or role.

c. Character Analysis: a detailed exploration of character, including any areas not already covered by research, that reflects a thorough understanding of the character’s background (social, educational, relational, spiritual, historical, political, etc.), point of view, motivations, fears, dreams, complexities, etc. A first-person biography is appropriate here as a process for developing the character’s “voice” and perspective on the events of the play. Textbook formats may assist with organization of ideas (Hagen, Shurtleff, etc.). Most actors will use a combination of structured answers to prompts and first-person biography. Attach inspirational materials including sketches, pictures, letters, photos of 3-d objects, etc. Back up preliminary decisions about acting, movement and vocal choices with clues quoted from the text. Include all initial notes from the director about the character (10 – 30 pages of written analysis depending on role).

d. Daily Rehearsal Log: an essential section of the support materials dossier, this log captures the actor’s journey. Please ensure that these logs are detailed, professional, proactive, and typed. Some actors will add a weekly reflection of the work. The appendix may include entries from a hand-written journal or sketchbook. Keep logs strictly professional and focused on your process as an actor. While creative expression can be enlightening and useful, the faculty may require the log to be edited either after the first viewing or post-production if the work is considered unprofessional, inflammatory, or in need of clarity (25-45 entries, one page per rehearsal in a formatted log, plus all notes from the director).

e. Post Show Analysis/Oral Defense: This is an oral presentation, an in-depth analysis of the work including what went well, what you could have improved, and what you learned from the Creative Project. The Performance faculty recommend that the student arrive with detailed written notes. After the candidate professionally presents a thorough and honest analysis, the Committee will comment on the presentation and question choices, process, and performance outcomes until the candidate can successfully articulate a professional process to the satisfaction of a majority of the Committee. This is the Oral Defense. On successful defense of the Creative Project, the Committee will sign the cover page of the support dossier and commence with the Exit Interview.

VI. Timelines: The Chair of the Committee will set deadlines for the CP. Actors will meet with their Committee Chair regularly throughout the process to discuss the work. Additionally, all members of the Performance Faculty are available for consultation in their respective specialties.

Research, Character Analysis, and Text Analysis installments (still evolving and adapting through rehearsals) go to the Committee chair by the assigned deadlines. The chair will consult with the other Committee members and call a meeting if needed.

You must show all Daily Rehearsal Logs to your Committee chair after the first week of rehearsals and again halfway through the process. You are responsible for these deadlines. Do not wait for prompting. Turn in the final complete log with the first full draft of the Creative Project Support Materials Dossier.

Those whose CPs are in the first four productions will have the 30 days after the closing performance to complete the first full draft of the creative project with all appropriate proofreading, documentation, photographs, etc. The work must meet graduate level standards to pass. If the due date lands over a university break (or if the student has a professional conflict), the committee chair may adjust the exact due date at his or her discretion.

Most MFA candidates will do two or more rewrites until the Committee agrees that the materials are complete. This stage often requires multiple drafts with two to three weeks of faculty review time between drafts. The final copy will have a cover page with a creative title and a caption that says: Support Materials for the Creative Project in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Fine Arts in Theatre, Performance This will be followed by places for each Committee member to sign (either above or beside their name and title with the chair listed first, then others alphabetically). A document box, a three-ring binder, or an equivalent container will keep the work tidy and professional.

**SAMPLE SCHEDULE**

The following sample schedule applies to the first four shows of a season. Students whose CPs are later in the season will have altered timelines with a shortened post-show process but an extended preparation period. Pre-rehearsal: Research, Text Analysis, and initial Character Analysis are always due to Chair before rehearsals begin with specific deadlines for each part to be set with Committee chair and shared with Committee. \*Meet with Chair of Committee (possibly via email or phone). Chair shares update with the Committee for response. Schedule Character Research Presentation Rehearse presentation with fellow graduate students Present Research for Chair of Committee

**Week One:**

* Begin a Daily Rehearsal Log
* Prepare before every rehearsal: work on movement, speak the lines aloud until they come easily, etc.
* Graduate students, particularly when cast in advance for the Creative Project, must set the bar and arrive at first rehearsal 100% off book, prepared with dialect/text work/scansion/figurative language/music/etc., and open to collaboration. Do not lock in online readings or externals. Stay flexible by learning lines through intention and by discovering the character’s lexicon, rhythms, and structure. Actors may use the script in tablework and first staging rehearsal for staging notes only.
* Graduate actors must use rehearsal clothes, shoes, etc. and warm up - in the space whenever possible to model effective warm up process. Your research should tell you what to prepare. As soon as you see the design for your costume, you should adapt your own rehearsal gear to approximate the feel and function of the costumes.
* Document all notes from the director including verbal direction.

**Week Two:**

* Continue Daily Rehearsal Log
* Continue development of character
* Meet with Chair to review both acting and writing

**Mid-rehearsal:**

* Continue Daily Rehearsal Log Check with specialists for evaluation of physical/vocal work Review earlier research and text analysis Make adjustments and document discoveries
* \*Meet with Committee Chair to discuss progress in role

**Final stages:**

* Continue Daily Rehearsal Log
* Maintain professionalism through Tech and Performances
* Document discoveries
* Make an advance appointment at the Writing Center

**Week One After Closing:**

* Get ALL Performance Faculty feedback for PSA/Oral Defense.

**Two Weeks After Closing:**

* Work on Post Show Analysis for Oral Defense Complete compiling, writing, editing, and proofreading.
* Go to Writing Center.

**30 Days After Closing:**

* Complete First Draft due.
* Meet with chair and schedule Committee meeting Engage in edits and rewrites as assigned by Committee

**Month Two:**

* Engage in polishing stages for support dossier
* Use 11 or 12-point font with 1” margins
* Compile and format research images and inspirational work
* Make title / signature page
* Schedule Oral Defense and Exit Interview

**Final:**

Print final approved copy onto high quality white paper

Schedule Oral Defense and Exit Interview

V. Penalties for Missed Deadlines, Missed Meetings, and Incomplete Work:

Students who do not meet with the Committee Chair to discuss / set benchmarks for their acting and those who do not get feedback along the way on the support materials dossier run the risk of failure on the Creative Project. This will result in postponement of the Exit Interview (until he/she completes another Creative Project in additional semesters) regardless of prior grades in the program.

Committees will lower grades on Creative Projects one letter grade for each missed deadline or meeting including missed deadlines in the rehearsal schedule, fittings, photo calls, etc. Unedited materials and work with obvious errors in MLA format, citations, spelling, grammar, and usage will not count as on time. The committee will make exceptions for hand-written journals and sketchbooks. Rehearsal logs may use bullet points and fragmented grammar for expression.

A Creative Project Document

Submitted to the Theatre Program

The University of Southern Mississippi

In Partial Fulfillment for the Degree of Master of Fine Arts

By

Name

Approved

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(Name) (Chair)

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(Name)

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

(Name)

Please see your Advisor/MFA Committee Chair within two days of casting!

We have a support system in place to assist you with your performance work. You will receive credits for your practicum work in acting whether on main stage or in showcase. The focus is on your work. Even if your schedule did not allow for the credits, you will still get the meetings with your advisor. Their goal is to assist you, guide you, and facilitate your process.

You will be asked about your process (research, analysis, physical and vocal work, etc.). Bring your work-in-progress to your meeting.

Your advisor will meet with you periodically to follow your preparation and progress. Meet with them within two days of casting and then at least once every two weeks through performance.

Your advisor or another performance faculty member will attend a couple of rehearsals to observe your rehearsal process.

Your advisor will not give direction, but will assist you outside of rehearsal with challenges, obstacles, and methods to achieve what you and your director are working to achieve.

Break a leg! Stay healthy. Act professionally.

**APPENDIX**

**Faculty and Staff**

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