

Utica College  
THE 441: Directing in the Theatre  
Fall 2021

**Credit Hours:** 3

**Prerequisites:** THE 115, THE 136

**Class Meetings:** MF 3:30pm-4:45pm

**Instructor:** Rachel M. E. Wolfe

**Office:** Library Concourse 132

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**Office Hours:** 10am-11am all weekday mornings

Welcome to Directing! In this class, we will be learning the basics of the director's craft through a combination of classroom study (during the first half) and hands-on projects (in the second). The class will culminate in the production of a festival of one-act plays, directed by you! It is expected that you will come into this class with a basic knowledge of how plays are produced and leave with a more in-depth knowledge of how directors facilitate that production. By the end of this course, you should be able to:

- Identify theme in a written play and shepherd an audience toward it
- Verbally communicate ideas and vision clearly to a small group
- Understand the various roles in theatrical production and coordinate between them
- Structure and run a rehearsal process
- Document a live performance in order to curate a professional directing portfolio

All of this is in the service of the CMM Theatre concentration goal that students will be able to "identify and employ the skills necessary for theatrical production."

## REQUIRED READING AND VIEWING

During the first part of the semester, before you begin rehearsals for your one-act, we will be doing a combination of reading and viewing plays. The reading is largely geared toward exposing you to reputable one-acts that might be good choices for your directing project, while the viewing is meant to expose you to different directing approaches and methods of staging plays. While a few readings will be provided electronically through Engage, the vast majority come from your assigned textbook:

Halpern, Daniel, ed. *Plays in One Act*. Hopewell, NJ: Ecco Press (1991).

The required viewing is likewise mostly drawn from one source, the National Theatre Live (NTL) database which our campus library subscribes to. The database can be found at <http://ezproxy.utica.edu/login?url=https://search.alexanderstreet.com/nath> , but each individual production will also be linked in Engage.

## GRADE BREAKDOWN AND ASSIGNMENTS

Your grade will be calculated as follows:

- **Attendance and Participation** – 28 class sessions at 2% apiece for a total of 56%
- **Midterm Pitch** – 8%
- **Rehearsal Process Documents** – 6 documents at 2% each for a total of 12%
- **Electronic Directing Portfolio** – 8 components at 3% each for a total of 24%

Attendance and participation will be calculated using points out of four for each day of class:

- One point for showing up
- One point for being present the entire class period (not arriving late, leaving early, or ducking out in the middle)
- One point for giving a verbal report to your classmates on the day's reading/viewing or your rehearsal process, as appropriate
- One point for engaging classmates in discussion and/or offering feedback

As you can see, points for doing the homework (daily reading/viewing, running rehearsals, etc.) are rolled into attendance and participation in the form of verbal reports. At the beginning of each class period, each person will give a verbal report on their outside-of-class work to their classmates. This will be helpful both because it gives you practice speaking in front of groups (a vital skill for a director), and because most days you will not all be doing the same thing for homework, giving you a chance to swap experiences and share knowledge. These reports can be made up: if you miss a class, you may give your verbal report for the missed class the next time you attend (alongside your usual report for that day). The other three points cannot be made up, though if you have a legitimate reason to miss class (illness or emergency), let me know and I will award you the two attendance points automatically—resulting in either half or three-quarters points for the missed day, depending on whether or not you make up the report.

Your major assignment in this course is to direct a one-act play of your choosing, to be performed the first weekend of December. During the first half of the semester, you will be expected to read many potential scripts and report back on them to your classmates during your verbal reports. At midterm, you will select a script to direct and give a formal pitch to an imaginary production team as your midterm assignment on **Friday, October 15**. Afterward, the actual process of directing your one-act will take up most of our class time and attention during the second half of the semester, and will result in several related sub-projects that will make up components of your grade:

1. **Rehearsal Process Documents**—this series of assignments consists of generating the kind of paperwork required by a professional theatre during a regular rehearsal process, including cast lists, actors' written acceptance of their roles, a rehearsal schedule, and weekly rehearsal reports. Each of these process documents is a relatively short and easy assignment, but will be instrumental in keeping you on-task and ensuring that your rehearsal process goes smoothly. Each may earn full points (you did it correctly), half points (you did it incorrectly), or no points (you didn't do it).

2. **Electronic Directing Portfolio**—as your final for this class, you will build a professional-grade electronic directing portfolio that you will be able to keep and add to after this class. The portfolio is worth 24% of your grade total, and contains many components, some of which are due as a part of regular classwork and others of which are only due as part of the complete portfolio turned in at the end of the semester. The directing portfolio components are as follows:
- a. **Director’s Notes**—the short piece of writing, included in the program, where you get to talk directly to the audience. **First draft due November 22, final draft due as part of the Program on November 29.**
  - b. **Program**—the short pamphlet handed to the audience before your show, containing the final draft of your Director’s Notes, a complete list of the cast and crew with everyone’s names spelled correctly, and any special thanks to people who provided unofficial support to the production. **Due November 29.**
  - c. **Production Photos**—dynamic and interesting photographs of your play in action, taken during the final dress rehearsal with complete costumes, lights, and set. **Due December 3.**
  - d. **Reviews**—if any reviews were generated of your show (in The Tangerine or elsewhere), you must include relevant quotes in your directing portfolio and link the complete review. If no one reviewed your show, this step may be skipped. **Due in the final portfolio.**
  - e. **Self-Assessment**—a reflective piece of writing on what the process of directing your play was like, what you thought you did well or badly, how you would have changed things if you could have had more money / gone back in time / etc., and what you learned during this experience. **First draft due December 10, final draft in the final portfolio.**
  - f. **Theatrical Resume**—the list of your training, qualifications, and experience with theatre and related disciplines. **Due in the final portfolio.**
  - g. **Biography**—your professional biography as a director: what do you want people who might hire you to know about you? **Due in the final portfolio.**
  - h. **Professional Headshot**—a photograph of yourself from the shoulders up, wearing professional clothing and taken by another person (no selfies). **Due in the final portfolio.**

Undergraduate Grading Scale			
A	94 – 100	C	74 – 76.99
A-	90 – 93.99	C-	70 – 73.99
B+	87 – 89.99	D+	67 – 69.99
B	84 – 86.99	D	60 - 66.99
B-	80 – 83.99	F	0 - 59.99
C+	77 - 79.99		

## POLICIES

**Turning in Work:** I prefer to receive assignments electronically. Please turn in all written assignments via **ENGAGE as Word files**, not in hard copy. Please do not submit other file types—only Word documents will allow me to grade quickly and easily. I will return assignments with corrections and comments on ENGAGE. You will be able to track your grade progress on ENGAGE. ENGAGE is your friend.

**Late Work:** I accept late work. Each student may take one no-questions-asked two-day grace period to turn in an assignment of their choice during the semester. If more than two days have passed, or you have already used your freebie, and you need a further extension, please come see me during office hours so we can work out an alternate deadline appropriate to your situation. The only exception to this policy is the **PROGRAM FOR YOUR ONE-ACT**, which absolutely **MUST BE FINISHED BY THE DEADLINE** so your audience can see it. And even with regards to all your other assignments, deadlines exist so that your work will be spread out and not wind up snowballing into the world's biggest stress-fest at the end of the semester, so it is in your own best interests to meet them. And of course, any work not turned in by the end of the semester will earn a zero and negatively impact your grade.

**Due Dates:** Work is due by the start of class time on the due date. This timing is designed so that you won't have to miss my class because you're still working on something for my class. If you're not done by the start of class on the due date, put the assignment aside and come to class. It's already late, and will not incur extra penalties because you took an hour out to attend.

**Respectful Engagement:** The free and critical exchange of ideas is largely what a university education is all about, and there is no topic that is off-limits in this class. Because of this, and because the plays that we will be reading engage with many aspects of the human experience (some of which may be sensitive or politicized), it is vital that we approach all class discussions with respect for one another. While it is perfectly acceptable to disagree with ideas expressed by your classmates, and to refute those ideas with your own points, you must always direct your criticisms toward the points made and not toward the speaker. There is a difference between a disagreement and a personal attack, and personal attacks or insults toward a classmate will not be tolerated. Nor will derogatory remarks or slurs aimed at a larger social group (i.e. a particular race, gender, religion, etc.). It is important that you do participate in class discussion and engage with your classmates, but equally important that you do so in a manner that fosters respectful dialogue.

**Email:** I check my email once per business day. If you send me an email, please allow me at least 24 hours to respond. Also, please read through the syllabus and any available prompts before emailing me. It may be that your question has already been answered there.

**Plagiarism:** Academic honesty and plagiarism prevention are topics that I take very seriously. Students are warned to review the Utica College academic honesty policy: <http://www.utica.edu/academic/facultyinfo/honestypolicy.cfm> . If I find an instance of plagiarism, the student will receive a zero on the assignment in question and be reported to the Provost, who may impose further penalties.

**Students with Disabilities:** I am committed to creating a supportive learning environment for students with disabilities. Any student who has need of special accommodations in this class due to a documented disability should speak with me as soon as possible, preferably within the first two weeks of class (my office hours are at the top of this syllabus). You should also contact the **Director of the Office of Learning Services (315-792-3032)** in order to determine eligibility for services and to receive an accommodation letter. We will work with you to help you in your efforts to master the course content in an effective and appropriate way.

**Mental Health:** I am equally committed to safeguarding my students' mental health. If you are feeling overwhelmed, anxious, or depressed and this class is contributing to your having unacceptable levels of stress, please come talk to me during office hours, so we can work out an alternate plan for your coursework that will enable you to be both healthy and productive. Also, don't be afraid to take advantage of the resources available through the on-campus **Counseling Center (315-792-3094):** <https://www.utica.edu/student/development/counseling/>.

**Emergency Preparedness:** Students are advised to review the campus safety information and procedures available at <http://www.utica.edu/finance/environment/safety/>, particularly the sections on lockdown and shelter-in-place procedures. Students are expected to stay current with any and all COVID-19 policies adopted by the college in response to the evolving situation, including mask wearing. In addition, any student with safety-related special circumstances to report (EpiPen, evacuation assistance, etc.) should come to office hours early in the semester to create an emergency plan with me. All students should be aware of the locations of the first aid kit and fire extinguisher nearest to the classroom. I am Red Cross certified in first aid and CPR. If you have any emergency training or certifications, please let us know!

**Adverse Weather:** In case inclement weather prevents our meeting in-person as a class, we may hold a Zoom class through ENGAGE instead. In the event that a snowstorm or other weather emergency prevents me from getting to campus, I will post an announcement to the coursepage informing the class of the switch to an e-class for the day. During an e-class, you are expected to be logged in to ENGAGE during the regular class hour for the entire time.

**Trigger Warnings:** Because what triggers any given individual is highly variable and subjective, I do not issue specific trigger warnings in this class. In a general sense, students should be aware that this course covers stories on many different topics, some of which are violent, sexual, religious, or otherwise highly charged. If you would like to discuss this policy or your individual needs with me surrounding trigger warnings, you are welcome and encouraged to schedule a meeting with me or to come see me during office hours.

## SCHEDULE

### WEEK ONE: INTRO

Mon 8/30—Course Intro

Fri 9/3—A Brief History of Directing

## WEEK TWO: SCRIPT SELECTION

Mon 9/6—Choosing a Show Part I

**Reading:** *Trifles* (on Engage)

Fri 9/10—Choosing a Show Part II

**Reading:** any two plays from one-act collection

## WEEK THREE: CASTING

Mon 9/13—Casting Considerations

**Viewing:** NTL *Frankenstein* same scene (47:45-1:04:00)—or whole play—in both versions (Cumberbatch as Creature and Miller as Creature)

Fri 9/17—Auditions for *Trifles*

**Reading:** any two plays from one-act collection

## WEEK FOUR: DESIGN

Mon 9/20—Visual Considerations

**Viewing:** NTL *One Man, Two Guvnors*

Fri 9/24—Staging Considerations

**Viewing:** NTL *Jane Eyre*

## WEEK FIVE: COLLABORATION

Mon 9/27—Working with a Production Team

**Reading:** any two plays from one-act collection

Fri 10/1—Working with Actors

**Reading:** any two plays from one-act collection

## WEEK SIX: REHEARSAL PROCESS

Mon 10/4—Running Rehearsals

**Reading:** any two plays from one-act collection

Fri 10/8—The Art of Blocking

**Viewing:** NTL *Les Blancs*

WEEK SEVEN: MIDTERM

NO CLASS Mon 10/11 (Fall Break)

Fri 10/15—**MIDTERM: Directing Pitches**

WEEK EIGHT: WORKING WITHIN CONSTRAINTS

Mon 10/18—Financial Constraints: Budgeting

**Viewing:** NTL *Romeo and Juliet*

Fri 10/22—Time Constraints: Scheduling

**Reading:** Commedia dell'Arte scenario (on Engage), Shakespearian sides (via email), your chosen one-act

WEEK NINE: CASTING REVISITED

Mon 10/25—Auditions for Directing Class One-Acts

**Due: Cast Lists**

Fri 10/29—Check-In and Getting Started

**Due: Actor Acceptances, Rehearsal Schedules**

WEEK TEN: TECH WEEK

Mon 11/1—A Close Look at the Tech Week Process

**SEE OPENING NIGHT OF *Trifles* ON THURSDAY, 11/4**

Fri 11/5—Example debrief: *Trifles*

**Due: Rehearsal Reports from previous week**

WEEK ELEVEN: AUDIENCES

Mon 11/8—Audience Response Theory

Fri 11/12—Reviews and Reviewers

**Due: Rehearsal Reports from previous week**

WEEK TWELVE: PORTFOLIOS

Mon 11/15—Components of a Directing Portfolio

Fri 11/19—Web Design

**Due: Rehearsal Reports from previous week**

WEEK THIRTEEN: DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Mon 11/22—Director's Notes

**Due: Director's Notes**

NO CLASS Fri 11/26 (Thanksgiving Break)

WEEK FOURTEEN: PERFORMANCES

Mon 11/29—Tech Your Shows

**Due: Programs**

Fri 12/3—Directing Class One-Acts Go Up

**Due: Production Photos**

WEEK FIFTEEN: DEBRIEF

Mon 12/6—Self-Assessment

Fri 12/10—Course Wrap-Up

**Due: Self-Assessment**

**FULL ELECTRONIC DIRECTING PORTFOLIO IS DUE BY 7:30PM ON FRIDAY,  
DECEMBER 17, THE DAY OF THE FINAL.**