



Abilene Christian University Theatre
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PROPOSAL:

Substitute THEA 325 for COMS 211 (currently COMS 240 until approved) applicable for Theatre's BFA Acting, Musical Theatre, Directing and Theatre Education Tracks.

RATIONALE:

There is precedent for this proposal. Under the former Gen Ed, selected Theatre tracks were exempt from COMS 111 (which will be replaced by COMS 211) based on both curricular and co-curricular experiences. These Theatre tracks continue to meet the competencies set forth in the revised syllabus created for COMS 211.

SUPPORT:

Theatre's BFA Acting, Musical Theatre, Directing and Theatre Education Tracks all share common courses which specifically engage the competencies in COMS 211. These courses include Intermediate Acting (THEA 325), Directing (THEA 454), Voice and Diction (THEA 320), History of Theatre I and II (THEA 495/496). Under the former Gen Ed, the registrar chose THEA 325 as the substitute course. We recommend continuing this as a simple solution.

Theatre Design/Tech Track and Theatre Ministry Track were not exempt from COMS 111. We are suggesting that these two tracks need COMS 211 because students in these tracks are not required to take the same common courses as the other Theatre tracks. For ease of discussion, however, this proposal will reference students in the BFA Acting, Musical Theatre, Directing and Theatre Education Tracks as "Theatre Majors." Through the rest of this document this reference of "Theatre Majors" does not include students in the BFA Design/Tech Track or the Theatre Ministry Track.

COMS 211 COURSE GOAL

As a result of this course, you should be able to speak competently. This includes the ability to think critically and use strategies appropriate for the rhetorical situation.

COMS 211 Competencies:

1. Demonstrate effective delivery for the rhetorical situation
 - Theatre Majors are placed in a variety of speaking situations. Most obviously, actors are required to memorize scripts and perform them in front of an audience. Much focus is placed on an awareness of the body in space, releasing tension, developing vocal power and clarity, as well as an engaged connection with the audience. Actors must appear before audiences of the public, their peers and their faculty hundreds of times throughout their tenure at the university.
 - Students in the directing class are required to speak prior to each scene they have

directed. They prepare a speech explaining the appropriateness of the concept they have chosen for the play; why this play is an important play to produce; and discuss its themes and worldview.

- Directing students also must present their ideas in a production meeting with actors discussing how they will embrace the play they are directing, the *mise en scène*, etc.
- Students in History of Theatre make oral presentations altered to fit a certain kind of audience, e.g., a mock conference presentation or a dramaturgical presentation.

2. Exhibit Christian principles in public discourse

- Students in the directing class are required to address an audience prior to each scene they have directed. They prepare a speech explaining the worldview of the play and how this agrees or disagrees with a Christian worldview.
- Directing students also must present their ideas in a production meeting with actors discussing the worldview of the play and how it agrees or disagrees with a Christian worldview.

3. Reduce public speaking apprehension

- The great acting teacher Stanislavsky wrote in his seminal work, An Actor Prepares, "All of our acts, even the simplest, which are so familiar to us in everyday life, become strained when we appear behind the footlights before a public of a thousand people. This is why it is necessary to correct ourselves and learn again how to walk, move about, sit or lie down. It is essential to re-educate ourselves to look and see, on the stage, to listen and to hear." This is an area of concentration in acting classes and voice and diction work. There is a great deal of work in relaxing the actor so that their concentration, focus and spontaneity are not constricted. Releasing physical and emotional tension makes the performance more plausible and allows the actor to reach a "believable truth."

4. Effectively prepare and organize ideas for the rhetorical situation

There are a variety of situations in which a Theatre major must prepare and organize her ideas before speaking before a group:

- The directing class student will prepare and organize his conceptual approach to the play, the themes and worldview of the play and the reasons this play should be produced (why the student chose to direct this piece). This speech is delivered before an audience prior to the performance of the piece. However, it is first given before a company of actors in which the director also discusses the rehearsal strategies he will use throughout the rehearsal period.
- The History of Theatre student must prepare and organize their ideas for a presentation focused on the public persona of a theatre practitioner vs. their private persona.
- The dramaturge must prepare and organize ideas before speaking for an audience at a talkback of a play. During this time, the dramaturge has a formal presentation giving background of the play, the playwright and the events during that time period that influenced the writing of the play. He also discuss the themes of the play and how those influence the characters within the play.

5. Effectively select and narrow a topic for the rhetorical situation

This competency is addressed in large part by the discussion of Competency #4. The director, the dramaturge and the History of Theatre student must narrow their topics prior to the speaking event. The director must narrow the myriad of choices for a concept and how that will be framed. The director and dramaturge must decide upon the themes in the play and how to state the worldview of the play. The History of Theatre student must select a public practitioner and deliver an informative presentation on that practitioner's public life. More choices must be made as the student contrasts the practitioner's public life with the practitioner's private persona.

6. Effectively conduct scholarly research for the rhetorical situation

- Scholarly research is most clearly evidenced in the History of Theatre class. Theatre History II requires MLA documented research papers, as well as presentations crafted from this research. This speech is generally designed as a mock conference presentation or as a dramaturgical presentation intended for a talkback.
- Actors, too, like directors, must conduct research as they prepare for their roles. It is important to remember that actors have analyzed not only their character, but also the play as a whole. This would include research on the playwright, the current events bearing on the themes of the play, the critical reviews of the play and essays commenting on the play.

7. Effectively create and deliver supporting presentational aids for the rhetorical situation

- History of Theatre I and II requires oral reports with presentational aids which can be PowerPoint or Keynote presentations and/or other visual assists.
- Dramaturges also make use of these visual aids in the delivery of their research in cast meetings for productions and for the talkbacks following each production.

8. Effectively develop arguments for the rhetorical situation

- Directors, actors and dramaturges employ persuasive tactics in their work.
- The actor and director are required to "lift out the conflict" in the play. This means that the director/actor must develop the ideas of what a character "is fighting for" in each scene. Understanding the inherent argument in the scene is the basis for conflict and central in drama. The actor is required to complete a "beat book." This beat book breaks down a script intoactable beats. The actor chooses an action he is playing in each beat. The actor must decide what goal he is pursuing in the scene, what the obstacle is that keeps him from obtaining that goal, what tactics he employs to achieve that goal and why he expects to achieve it. Within this, the arguments of the play must be fully developed before the performance of the scene or play.
- In his speech before the audience, the director must make a cogent argument as to why the play should be produced often addressing the issues of language, violence and sexual situations.

9. Effectively use style for the rhetorical situation

- The director, the dramaturge and the History of Theatre student are required to choose language that is appropriate for different speaking occasions.
- When the director is delivering a speech to the cast, the choices should include vocabulary that best communicates the needs for rehearsal and background; when speaking prior to the performance of the play to an audience, the director must use language that best suits the audience's understanding.
- The History of Theatre student and the dramaturge must use effective style as he engages the audience with both the historical significance of his topic as well as applicable themes for the culture today.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

A variety of other factors weigh in on accomplishing the competencies stated in the course syllabus for COMS 211. Although voice and movement are not referred to directly in the competencies, they are part of the speech grading rubric for COMS 211. Both of these areas are emphasized in Voice and Diction (THEA 320) and other acting courses such as Intermediate Acting (THEA 326) making elocution paramount in the training. Freeing the natural voice, along with projection, diction, and articulation are critical for the actor. Using the body in space, understanding the power of gesture, movement and animation are all vital principles taught in these courses.

Interpersonal work done in these tracks is significant, too. Collaboration is at the heart of working in theatre. Table work, bouncing ideas off one another, compromising on choices and direction are all part and parcel of working as actors and directors. Eventually agreeing on the direction of a project and working together to accomplish a vision, tell a story, and have an effect on an audience is the beauty of the theatrical arts.

Co-curricular training also should be considered. Theatre Majors are required to audition and accept all roles during the academic year. Students are regularly cast in productions giving them experience to accomplish many of the competencies in front of a variety of audiences through the run of a production. This is comparable to extended labs creating an environment in which Theatre Majors are regularly addressing voice and body work, thinking critically about the themes of plays and discussing their own worldviews.

FINAL COMMENTS:

The Department of Theatre recognizes the excellent work in the revisions and upgrading the course from COMS 111 to COMS 211. The Department of Theatre values the class and believes it is important for the Core. For this reason, the Department does not feel that all of our tracks are suitable for the substitution. As with COMS 111 we only believe the tracks that share the common courses and experiences are appropriate to use THEA 326 as a substitution for COMS 211. Therefore, BFA Design/Tech Track and Theatre Ministry Tracks are not exempt from taking COMS 211. The Department of Theatre supports COMS 211 in the Core and recognizes that there should be good evidence for any exception to be granted. We believe we have made the case for the selected tracks to satisfy that exception specifically in the competencies of the course but also by examining the grading rubrics of the course.