

**Ursinus College Spring 2011**  
**THEA 350: Community-Based Theater and Civic Engagement**

Professor Domenick Scudera, M.F.A.

Classroom: 120 Kaleidoscope

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Class Meets: Mon., Wed., Fri at 10 – 10:50 am

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“Community-based art is a field which artists, collaborating with people whose lives directly inform the subject matter, express collective meaning ... [A community-based performance] is a collaboration between an artist or ensemble and a “community” in that the latter is a primary source of the text, possibly of performers as well, and definitely a goodly portion of the audience. That is, at the source of community-based performance is not the singular artist but a “community” constituted by virtue of a shared primary identity based in place, ethnicity, class, race, sexual preference, profession, circumstances, or political orientation ... [Community-based art] is often a cultural expression of identity politics, referring to groups of people who connect on the basis of shared identities fundamental to their sense of themselves.”

Jan Cohen-Cruz, *Local Acts*

“All the world’s a stage.”

William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*

**COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

In this course, we will examine the history, theory and practice of a variety of community-based theaters, and will design and execute performance work tailored specifically to local communities. Students will develop the ability to assess particular needs in under-represented communities or communities in conflict, and will gain the skills to address those needs through community-based performance practices. This course combines both academic and studio work, allowing students to be knowledgeable and responsible artists engaged with their local communities.

This course was developed with a grant from Project Pericles and Prof. Scudera has been chosen as Ursinus’ Periclean Faculty Leader. Project Pericles is a not-for-profit organization that encourages and facilitates commitments by colleges and universities to include and encourage social responsibility and participatory citizenship as essential elements of their educational programs and student learning experiences. Founded in 1999 by philanthropist Eugene M. Lang, Project Pericles works directly with its member institutions (such as Ursinus) that, as Pericleans, individually and collaboratively foster the civic engagement and related learning experiences of students in the classroom, on the campus, and in the community.

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**

1. to ground students in an understanding of the theories, history, practices and techniques employed by a variety of theater artists whose work is civic-minded and community-based.
2. to raise the awareness of the students about social issues in their community that could benefit from the exposure to these theater practices.
3. to gain the skills to design and execute several tailored performance projects that will meet community needs and make a difference.

**MAIN TEXTS:**

- Selections from *Documentary Theatre in the United States* by Gary Fisher Dawson
- *Fourteen Propositions for a Documentary Theater* by Peter Weiss
- *Fires in the Mirror*, a play by Anna Deavere Smith
- *Execution of Justice*, a play by Emily Mann
- Selections from *The Ethnographic Interview* by James P. Spradley
- Selections from *Gathering Voices* by Jonathan Fox, co-founder of Playback Theater
- Selection of writings about Theatre of the Oppressed by Augusto Boal

**EVALUATION:****Class Participation and Studio Work****10%**

Students are not expected to have any prior theatrical, acting or production experience. Grades will be determined by enthusiasm and effort in applying lessons, and willingness to contribute, in thoughtful and creative ways, to studio exercises and classroom discussion.

**Oral Presentation 1****10%****Oral Presentation 2****10%**

Since this course introduces students to alternative and community-based theatrical forms of performance, students are encouraged to be creative and original in the format and style of their oral presentations. Grades will be determined by students' thoroughness of research, and the content and form of their presentations.

**Civic Engagement:**

- **MLK Performance** **5%**
- **Documentary/Verbatim Performance(s)** **20%**
- **Playback or Boal-Inspired Performance(s)** **20%**

Modeled after the work of a variety of artists studied in this course, students will identify communities with which to work, being mindful of using theater to give voice to under-represented communities or to help communities in conflict. For the unit of documentary and verbatim theater, students will gather raw material from their chosen communities, will edit and shape the material into performance pieces, write scripts, rehearse and perform. The finished performance pieces will be performed for the communities chosen and for the Ursinus community. For the unit on Playback and Theater of the Oppressed, students will identify communities, work on skills necessary to create improvisational performances, and will work with the communities in building meaningful and helpful performance events. Grades will be determined on thoroughness of research and gathering of materials, the collaborative process, as well as the written and performance aspects of each project.

- **Service work** **5%**

At some point in the semester, each student is required to spend at least one day/shift of volunteer work to any community event which employs theater in order to service the needs of a particular community. For example, students may volunteer at Gay Bingo in Philadelphia (which employs theater to raise money each month for the AIDS Fund) or students may work with H.O.P.E. Players (a local theater company that matches its performances to specific charities). Students may also choose to create an Ursinus event (perhaps for a sorority or other campus club) or work an Ursinus event (such as Airband or its chosen charity) which employs theater for the betterment of the community.

**Reflective Responses****10%**

After each of the civic engagement projects (listed above) is completed, students must reflect on the experience in written form. The instructor will provide the students with prompts and questions to help focus reflection and to foster students' growth. Grades will be determined by the student's effective and thoughtful integration of studied lessons and actual practice.

**Final Exam****10%****COURSE ATTENDANCE POLICY:**

Attendance is mandatory. Each student's participation is essential in creating a sense of ensemble with fellow classmates and in building bridges to the wider community that will be served this semester.

- Students missing more than 3 class meetings (the equivalent of one week of classes) will receive a written academic warning, which will also be sent to the Dean's Office.
- Final grades will be lowered by 5 points per absence after the 4<sup>th</sup> absence.
- If a student is late for class on 3 occasions, this will be considered the equivalent of 1 absence.

**SCHEDULE & READING REQUIREMENTS:****Week 1: INTRODUCTION and PERFORMANCE**

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| <b>M</b>   | <b>Jan. 17</b>        | <b>Introduction to class</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share personal involvements with civic engagement</li> <li>• Discuss plan of action for semester</li> <li>• Assign work for MLK performance project</li> </ul>                                                                   |
| <b>[Tu</b> | <b>Jan. 18 at 5pm</b> | <b><i>The Diversity Monologues performance</i></b><br><i>Students of THEA 350 are required to attend ‘The Diversity Monologues’ in the Lenfest Theater, an event where Ursinus students will perform monologues about their experiences of diversity and difference.]</i>                              |
| <b>W</b>   | <b>Jan. 19</b>        | <b>“What is Documentary Theater?”</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bring in written work for MLK performance project</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>F</b>   | <b>Jan. 21</b>        | <b>Rehearse MLK performance project</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read prior to class: <i>Documentary Theatre Through the Years</i> by Gary Fisher Dawson</li> <li>• <i>[in the evening: available students will perform at Ursinus’ MLK ‘Substance of Our Souls’ event]</i></li> </ul> |

**Week 2: VERBATIM THEATER**

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| <b>M</b> | <b>Jan. 24</b> | <b>Verbatim theater</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>[Reflective Responses to last week’s performance due]</i></li> <li>• Read prior to class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Forward to <i>Fire in the Mirror</i> by Cornel West</li> <li>• Introduction to <i>Fires in the Mirror</i> by Anna Deavere Smith</li> <li>• Excerpts from <i>Fires in the Mirror</i> by Anna Deavere Smith</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
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[Note: from **Jan. 26 to 30**, Prof. Scudera will be in San Francisco at a meeting of the American Association of Colleges and Universities. He will be sharing ideas about this course as part of a panel about Periclean civic engagement courses. While he is away, students still must attend class and view a recorded performance of Anna Deavere Smith’s *Fires in the Mirror*]

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| <b>W</b> | <b>Jan. 26</b> | <b>Start viewing: <i>Fires in the Mirror</i> performance on DVD</b>  |
| <b>F</b> | <b>Jan. 28</b> | <b>Finish viewing: <i>Fires in the Mirror</i> performance on DVD</b> |

**Week 3: DOCUMENTARY THEATER**

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| <b>M</b> | <b>Jan. 31</b> | <b>History of Document Theater</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read prior to class: <i>Fourteen Propositions for a Documentary Theater</i> by Peter Weiss</li> <li>• Discuss: <i>Fires in the Mirror</i> performance</li> <li>• Lecture: History of Documentary Theater</li> <li>• Assign Oral Presentations</li> </ul>    |
| <b>W</b> | <b>Feb. 2</b>  | <b><i>Execution of Justice</i></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read prior to class: <i>Execution of Justice</i>, a play by Emily Mann</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>F</b> | <b>Feb. 4</b>  | <b><i>Execution of Justice</i></b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read prior to class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• You, the Jury: Emily Mann’s <i>Execution of Justice</i> by William Kleb</li> <li>• Review of <i>Execution of Justice</i> from <i>Washington Post</i> by David Richards</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |

**Week 4: DOCUMENTARY THEATER**

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| <b>M</b> | <b>Feb. 7</b>  | <b>Historical Drama vs. Documentary Theater</b>                                                                                    |
|          |                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read prior to class: <i>Defining Documentary Theatre</i> by Gary Fisher Dawson</li> </ul> |
| <b>W</b> | <b>Feb. 9</b>  | <b>Student Oral Presentations</b>                                                                                                  |
| <b>F</b> | <b>Feb. 11</b> | <b>Student Oral Presentations</b>                                                                                                  |

**Week 5: CREATING WORK / Working with community partners**

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| <b>M</b> | <b>Feb. 14</b> | <b>Getting Started</b>                                                                                                                                                                               |
|          |                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students divide into groups and begin work on Documentary Theater-style performance piece</li> </ul>                                                        |
| <b>W</b> | <b>Feb. 16</b> | <b>Effective Interviewing</b>                                                                                                                                                                        |
|          |                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read prior to class: Selections from <i>The Ethnographic Interview</i> by James P. Spradley</li> <li>• Studio work: putting theory into practice</li> </ul> |
| <b>F</b> | <b>Feb. 18</b> | <b>Effective Interviewing</b>                                                                                                                                                                        |
|          |                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Studio work continues</li> </ul>                                                                                                                            |

**Week 6: SHAPING WORK / Working with community partners**

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| <b>M</b> | <b>Feb. 21</b> | <b>Gathering and Sorting Material</b>                                                                                       |
|          |                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Studio work</li> </ul>                                                             |
| <b>W</b> | <b>Feb. 23</b> | <b>Shaping Material</b>                                                                                                     |
|          |                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Studio work</li> </ul>                                                             |
| <b>F</b> | <b>Feb. 25</b> | <b>Raw Material</b>                                                                                                         |
|          |                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Groups share raw material from their field work with community partners</li> </ul> |

**Week 7: WORKSHOPPING PERFORMANCE PIECES**

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| <b>M</b> | <b>Feb. 28</b> | <b>Rehearsal</b> |
| <b>W</b> | <b>March 2</b> | <b>Rehearsal</b> |
| <b>F</b> | <b>March 4</b> | <b>Rehearsal</b> |

**Week 8: SPRING BREAK**

No classes

**Week 9: PRESENTING WORK / Performing for Ursinus and community partners**

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| <b>M</b> | <b>March 14</b> | <b>Rehearsal</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>W</b> | <b>March 16</b> | <b>Rehearsal</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|          |                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finished written scripts are due</li> </ul>                                                                                                                             |
| <b>F</b> | <b>March 18</b> | <b>Performance of Documentary Style-Theater Pieces</b>                                                                                                                                                           |
|          |                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Note: Times and places for these presentations may be chosen to better accommodate a wider audience at Ursinus and to provide options for community partners</li> </ul> |

**Week 10: PLAYBACK THEATER**

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| <b>M</b> | <b>March 21</b> | <b>Playback Theater</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|          |                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>[Reflective Responses from last week's performance due]</i></li> <li>• Read prior to class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What is Playback Theatre?</i> and Introduction to <i>Gathering Voices</i> by Jonathan Fox</li> <li>• <i>What is "Good Playback Theatre?"</i> by Jo Salas</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |

- W     **March 23**     **Playback Theater**
- Read prior to class:
    - *A Ritual for Our Time* by Jonathan Fox
    - *How Playback Theatre Works* by Heinrich Dauber
    - *Using Theater to Address Bullying* by Jo Salas
- F     **March 25**     **Oral Presentations on form and practice of Playback**
- Week 11: THEATER OF THE OPPRESSED**
- M     **March 28**     **Oral Presentations on form and practice of Playback**
- W     **March 30**     **Theater of the Oppressed**
- Read prior to class: Selection of writings about Theatre of the Oppressed by Augusto Boal
- F     **April 1**     **Theater of the Oppressed**
- Read prior to class: *The Theatre as Discourse* by Augusto Boal
- Week 12: THEATER OF THE OPPRESSED**
- M     **April 4**     **Oral Presentations on Boal's theories and practices**
- W     **April 6**     **Oral Presentations on Boal's theories and practices**
- F     **April 8**     **Launch Final Project**
- Students divide into groups and start work on pieces inspired by Playback Theater and/or Boal's community-based theaters
- Week 13: PUTTING THEORY INTO PRACTICE / Working with Community Partners**
- M     **April 11**     **Studio Work: practicing techniques studied**
- W     **April 13**     **Celebration of Student Achievement (COSA) day – NO CLASS**
- This day of academic achievement and sharing provides students of THEA 350 with the ideal opportunity to share their process and products with the Ursinus community.
- F     **April 15**     **Studio Work: practicing techniques studied**
- Week 14: BUILDING SKILLS FOR PERFORMANCE / Working with Community Partners**
- M     **April 18**     **Rehearsal**
- W     **April 20**     **Rehearsal**
- F     **April 22**     **Rehearsal**
- Week 15: PRESENTING WORK / Performing for Ursinus and community partners**
- M     **April 25**     **Rehearsal**
- W     **April 27**     **Rehearsal**
- F     **April 29**     **Performance of Playback or Boal-Style Theater Pieces**
- Note: Times and places for these presentations may be chosen to better accommodate a wider audience at Ursinus and to provide options for community partners
- Week 16: WRAPPING UP**
- M     **May 2**     **Conclusions**
- Reflective Responses to last week's performances due
  - Take-home Final Exam handed out