

# DRAMA

## MFA Directing Handbook

Revised August 2023



*Gabriel* by Moira Buffini, Directed by Amanda Bergen

**Program Coordinator:** David Kennedy (July 1, 2023- June 30, 2024)

**Graduate Program Advisors:** Rebecca Anderson, Dawn Hunter

## Our Program

The **MFA Directing Program** trains students to work as professional theatre directors through extensive practical work on challenging production projects in a range of venues and styles. The program is dedicated to students becoming collaborative leaders whose creative practice is informed by a thorough grounding in critical thinking.

**Note:** The Directing Committee conducts ongoing evaluation and review which may result in some changes to the program. Updates will be recorded in the online version and the Directing Coordinator will alert students to any significant changes by email.

# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>Page 3</b>
<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Page 3</b>
<b>Program Description</b>	<b>Page 3</b>
Course Requirements	Page 4
Selecting and Registering	Page 4
Typical Course Load	Page 5
Year One	Page 5
Year Two	Page 5
Production Component	Page 6
Advising	Page 6
<b>Production and Rehearsal Policy</b>	<b>Page 7</b>
Production Calendar	Page 7
<b>Proposals</b>	<b>Page 7</b>
Video Guidelines	Page 8
<b>Practical Directing Projects: Detailed</b>	<b>Page 9</b>
Play Choices	Page 9
First Year: Term One - Drama 683	Page 9
First Year: Term Two - Drama 684	Page 10
Second Year: Term One - Drama 685	Page 12
Second Year: Term Two - Drama 686	Page 13
<b>The Thesis Production</b>	<b>Page 14</b>
Thesis Proposals	Page 15
The Thesis Supervisor	Page 16
The Thesis Committee	Page 17
<b>The Written Thesis</b>	<b>Page 17</b>
Background Preparation & Research	Page 17
Directorial Analysis of the Play	Page 18
The Analytic Journal	Page 19
<b>The Oral Defense</b>	<b>Page 19</b>
<b>Additional Information</b>	<b>Page 19</b>
Rehearsal Policy	Page 19
Casting	Page 20
Royalties and Permissions	Page 21
Playbills	Page 21
Photocopying	Page 21
Highlighted Personnel	Page 22
<b>Related Documents and Appendices</b>	<b>Page 23</b>
<b>Checklist</b>	<b>Page 23</b>

# MASTER OF FINE ARTS IN DIRECTING PROGRAM

Directing students are responsible for knowing and adhering to the policies and deadlines outlined in this document. Contact the MFA Directing Coordinator, project supervisors, or seminar instructors wherever questions arise.

## Introduction

The education we offer prepares our students to work in professional theatres, create their own work and companies, use theatre as a tool in community-based projects, promote and develop new plays, and work as educators in various academic settings. Our program offers a thorough grounding in all aspects of the craft of theatre and an intensive orientation into the critical and theoretical areas of theatre, as well as serving to enhance the artistic vision of any prospective director.

The program is unique in the level of depth and breadth it attains. Initiated in 1972, the MFA in Directing was the first degree of its kind offered in Canada. It has always been responsive to the changing Canadian theatre landscape and seeks to adapt itself to the demands of current professional theatre practice. Its quality is attested to by the large number of our graduates who have and do play key leadership roles in theatres in Edmonton and across the country.

## Objectives

- to enhance artistic vision
- to graduate students who are imminently hireable; who will work and make their livings in the theatre
- to create an intense, immersive experience that combines practical work with academic study
- to impart specific skills and a complete grounding in the practical tools of directing across a broad range of theatrical styles
- to ensure a full academic basis of understanding so that the director is supported by the capacity for intensive theoretical study and critical analysis
- to connect our students with professional theatre practitioners, and to expose them to insight and criticism from working directors
- to expose our directors to a range of projects in size, space, aesthetic, genre and relation to its audiences
- to encourage our students to recognize the needs of the future of theatre through new play development and devised creation.

## Program Description

The program presents a series of discipline specific courses, practical workshops and directing experiences. These are combined with course work involving graduate students from other Drama programs and are intended to broaden the MFA Directing students' knowledge of theatre, drama and related fields. The emphasis of the program is on the development of creative solutions to the practical problems of directing for the stage.

You will direct four works in a variety of styles and spaces. Productions receive small budgets and technical support from the Department; three receive design support. You may cast professional actors, faculty members, community actors, and/or students. (See Casting section for important details)

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

It is a 2-year program of 36 credits, *plus* thesis (third year); while there are no summer courses and absence is feasible during the summer months, considerable work is required during that time. Make summer plans taking this workload into account.

- DR 683 (3) Essentials of Directing
- DR 684 (3) Approaches to Staging the Contemporary Play
- DR 685 (3) Approaches to Staging the Style Play
- DR 686 (3) Devised Theatre and Performance for Directors
- DR 601 (3) Methods and Tools of Research
- Thesis 903 (3) Thesis Prep.
- *18 additional course credits*, selected in consultation with the Directing and/or Grad Director. These courses may include graduate courses from any area of the Department of Drama, including:
  - » T DES 673 (3) Advanced Lighting Design
  - » DR 607/617 (3) New Play Dramaturgy and Production Dramaturgy
  - » DR 608/609 (3) Approaches to Dramatic and Theatrical Critical Theories (offered in alternate years)
  - » Special topics seminars (DR 621–626, 690): Each spring a list of the upcoming year's Graduate seminar courses and topics, with brief descriptions, is published and emailed to graduate students
- graduate courses from another department (selected in consultation with the Coordinator of MFA Directing and/or Graduate Director )
- DR 605 (Special Projects in Theatre)

**DR 605** allows you to pursue independent study in areas outside of the usual Graduate course offerings. The availability of special projects courses (605) is dependent on the willingness of qualified faculty who must agree to supervise these courses as an overload. ***It is not advisable to take any 605s in your first year.*** A good use of 605 is as Research preparation for the thesis.

## SELECTING AND REGISTERING FOR COURSES

Registration for courses takes place prior to the beginning of term. A meeting will be set up with the Coordinator of the MFA Directing Program to review and discuss which courses (electives) are of interest to you. The Coordinator will relay this information to the Graduate Advisors, Rebecca Anderson and Dawn Hunter, and they will formally register you. If you are receiving a scholarship or a full-time GA<sup>1</sup> assignment, ***you must be registered as a full time student in each term***, or your monthly pay will be affected.

---

<sup>1</sup> GA refers to GTA (Graduate Teaching Assistantship) or GRA (Graduate Research Assistantship). These are often offered as part of a funding package for graduate students.

## TYPICAL COURSE LOAD

### Year One

Term One (9 credits)		Term Two (9 credits)	
DR 683: Essentials of Directing	Offered every year	DR 684: Approaches to Staging the Contemporary Play or DR 685: Approaches to Staging the Style Play	Each seminar offered every other year
DR 601: Methods and Tools of Research	Offered every year	DR 686: Devised Theatre and Performance for Directors or Option	Practice-based seminar or Seminar or Design Course; each offered every other year
Option	Normally a Seminar or Design Course	Option	Normally a Seminar or Design Course

### Year Two

Term One (9 credits)		Term Two (9 credits)	
Option	Seminar	DR 684: Approaches to Staging the Contemporary Play or DR 685: Approaches to Staging the Style Play	Each seminar offered every other year
Option	Normally a Design or Seminar Course	DR 686: Devised Theatre and Performance for Directors or Option	Practice-based seminar or Seminar or Design Course; each offered every other year
Option	Normally a course related to thesis prep	Thesis 903: Thesis Prep	

## THE PRODUCTION COMPONENT

The practical production component of the program consists of four directing projects. These projects range in size and scope, culminating in the thesis production after the completion of your second year. **Directors must be aware that each production is a practicum for a number of students in other programs and must accommodate a variety of training needs.** Acceptance of proposals will therefore depend in part on such considerations, as well as on the directing student's individual strengths, needs, and interests.

Specifics can be found on page 9 in the "Practical Directing Projects" section

## ADVISING

**Your Program Advisor is the Coordinator of MFA Directing.** They will work with you on your course selection, as well as respond to questions and issues that arise for you during your program. While you will have a supervisor for each of your directing projects and should work out most matters in the context of those production projects, the Coordinator will work with you on other aspects of your program plans. Normally you will meet with the Coordinator 1-2 times per term as well as by your request. Until a thesis supervisor is established, you will also work with the Coordinator as you develop thesis plans.

For each project you direct you are assigned a project supervisor who advises you as you prepare, direct, and reflect on your project.

The project supervisor may be involved in interpretive and design decisions and meetings, casting choices, rehearsal schedules, and all aspects of the production. Before rehearsals begin, a rehearsal schedule should be submitted to the supervisor for discussion. Production and interpretive choices will be discussed in depth.

Supervisors generally attend:

- the first reading of the play
- one rehearsal per week
- one run-through
- first cue-to-cue rehearsal
- a tech/dress rehearsal.

*After each rehearsal visit, the supervisor and the student director are expected to meet to go over notes. **It is the student's responsibility to schedule this meeting before the next rehearsal occurs.*** The supervisor will generally not give notes directly to the actors or the production personnel. During the rehearsal period the student may also be asked to submit a rehearsal log that includes the goals (set and accomplished) for each rehearsal, an evaluation of progress, and plans for future rehearsals.

Each practical project is connected to the subject of one of the directing seminars (essentials of directing, contemporary play, or style play). While the seminars address tools and methodology for each approach, the projects themselves are separate (except for DR 683) and may be scheduled either before or after you take the relevant seminar.

# Production and Rehearsal Policy

The productions during your term of residency are provided with a varying degree of technical and design support. The technical feasibility and level of support offered will affect play choices. It is imperative, therefore, that upon entering the program you read and discuss the UADD Production Guide with your supervisor and/or the ADM Production & Operations AND become familiar with the year's Rehearsal Policy, a document updated annually (normally by late August for the upcoming academic year).

***Please contact the Fine Arts ADM Production & Operations or your Coordinator for the Rehearsal Policy document as it is currently in revision.***

## Department of Drama Rehearsal Policy (Rehearsals Hours)

This document outlines rehearsal hours and is a very important document throughout your program.

## PRODUCTION CALENDAR

Please review as this calendar shows updated meetings, deadlines, and the production schedule for the academic year. ***This is accessed on the Google Calendar; arrange for access through the Fine Arts ADM Production & Operations in early September.***

# Proposals

***Planning and decision making for the subsequent terms require advance consultation with the upcoming supervisor, as well as the Directing Coordinator.***

For BLT shows, **3 proposals** are to be submitted in advance to the Directing Committee for approval. See Timeline Document for specific dates.

- submit an electronic copy of the proposal and scripts to the Directing Coordinator
- submit a hard copy of each play to Helen in the office which will be made available to the Directing Committee for signout.
- The Coordinator will then forward the electronic proposals and scripts onto the other members of the Directing Committee. They will review and sometimes request revisions.
- These proposals should be listed in order of preference.

Proposals should be brief and specific, while addressing the relevant elements in the following table. ***Proposals must take into account the capacities and confines of the production slot and make a positive case for how a compelling version can be mounted, yet within the restrictions of budgets, casting and other capacities.***

<b>Justification</b>	Why should the play be done? Why now? What is its significance? What opportunities and challenges does it create for you and for your development?
<b>Feasibility</b>	Address directorial AND production challenges as well as your approach to solutions.
<b>Consider</b>	<b>Casting:</b> Numbers? Gender? Age considerations? Possible doubling? Cuts? Available casting pool? <b>Note:</b> The size of the cast has a substantial impact on budgets, and project

proposals may have to be rejected if unaffordable; discuss this closely with the program coordinator before you develop your proposal.

### **Production and Technical demands**

**Note:** Refer also to UADD Production Guide to determine resources and address how you will produce within these conditions. Do not hold anything back, as this is a central consideration when determining the feasibility of the production.

**Text:** Length, translation, cuts, other.

**Note:** Rights must be obtained to finalize approval; See “Rights and Royalties” section in this handbook for important details.

<b>Approach</b>	<b>Directorial Concept, Period, Stylistic Approach (concept) and Rationale?</b> Effects on casting, rehearsal and acting approach? <b>Why do you want to do it?</b> Personal development and needs?
<b>Set</b>	Size and scope (list and describe locations, specify interior or exterior)
<b>Costume</b>	Essential and critical elements and elaborateness, how many looks per character?
<b>Lighting</b>	Special effects and important and essential elements, requirements, moods, day, night, any projections? – if so describe
<b>Challenges</b>	Directorial considerations? Specific problems and proposed solutions? List all production challenges (gunshots, someone falls, fights, etc), i.e. to avoid surprises once the play is chosen.
<b>Resources</b>	Necessary areas of investigation? Personal inventory and preparation, specific research plan (include a list of resources available)? Can the show reasonably be achieved given the financial and technical resources of the BLT?

After submission of your proposal, a meeting will be arranged with the program coordinator, where you will defend your choices. You should come prepared to discuss the play, your concept and the above aspects of your production in an articulate manner. The Directing Committee has final approval on these projects.

## **VIDEO GUIDELINES FOR BLT SHOWS**

Where use of video is contemplated:

1. A workshop is required in advance of a production involving video to give designers and directors the information necessary so that they will know what is required of them and an awareness of the commitment needed. **Fine Arts ADM Production & Operations** or **Designate to arrange**.
2. One minute of Video requires at a bare minimum three hours of preparation. This does not include setting up and adjusting the equipment as required.
3. If a designer is doing their first practical lighting design, a separate person must be responsible for video design and the coordination of that design element into the show.



4. If video is to be used in a BLT production, the video storyboard and thumbnails are due on the same day as final set designs and are to be presented at the first production meeting. Any video that is to be recorded (filmed) must not exceed 5 minutes in length.
5. All video shooting must be scheduled in advance with the full awareness of all members of the production team.
6. All video must be in place in every respect before the lighting hang begins. There is no time to troubleshoot the video while the lighting hang and cue-to-cue process is happening. There are not sufficient resources at this level of production to do both processes simultaneously – our experience in the past indicates that both processes are likely to suffer.

## PRACTICAL DIRECTING PROJECTS: DETAILED

This section outlines major creative projects by term. See [MFA Directing Timeline](#) and [Production Calendar](#) for additional details.

### PLAY CHOICES

Students should arrive into the program with a long list of possible play choices of varying styles, as you will find that you have very little time for lengthy play searches during your program. Specifically, incoming students should arrive with **at least 3 - 5** titles that could work for **each** of the first three FAB production slots (1, 2 & 3):

1. **DR 683:** one short play or excerpt from a full length play (chosen by instructor) and one short play or excerpt from a full length play (chosen by the student in consultation with the instructor).
2. **BLT - Contemporary Full Length:** a contemporary full length play (modest cast size and production needs);
3. **BLT - Style:** a play with extended language, physicality and/or non-naturalistic elements
4. **Thesis Production:** a play produced on the Timms mainstage in the year following a student's second year. (see Thesis section)

**During the program:** Directors are encouraged to work with a range of seating configurations, stage-to-audience relationships, and genres. Play titles will be negotiated according to your needs as a director, the needs and limitations of the department (including those of other students in design, technical and stage management programs), cast availability, and budget restrictions.

### FIRST YEAR: TERM ONE

#### DRAMA 683 – Two Directing Projects

Each director produces two short directing projects in conjunction with the 4th Year BFA Acting students. The choice of the first play (or excerpt from a full length play) will be made by the instructor based on your training needs. The choice of the second play (or excerpt from a full length play) will be made by you in consultation with the instructor. These projects also need to provide excellent training opportunities for the BFA actors involved.

Your DR 683 course instructor will contact you prior to the course commencing regarding cast size and gender breakdown, which is impacted by the composition of the acting class. Casting will be done in consultation with your DR 683 instructor.

Variations in this practice will be communicated by the specific instructor.

The DR 683 project is presented in one of the acting studios (Fine Arts Building Room 3-121 or 3-125). The initial emphases are on:

- text preparation
- working with actors
- composition and staging

Stage configuration and lighting plot is negotiated between the two MFA Directors in consultation with the FAB Technical Director, and other students in the course, where relevant.

Rehearsals are typically held during the late afternoon/early evening, based on the BFA Acting schedule. **See Rehearsal Policy document.** The run will normally follow the standard FAB performance schedule: a Thursday evening dress, a Friday evening performance, a Saturday matinee and a Saturday evening performance.

Please **see UADD Production Guide** for technical support details. See course outline (provided by your instructor) for additional detail or variations.

## FIRST YEAR: TERM TWO

### BLT – Contemporary Full Length

A full length production in the Bleviss Laboratory Theatre (BLT) aka “Media Room” in late February/early March and late March/early April. Normally this is a contemporary play and the MFA Directing Coordinator will discuss the criteria with you during the term. **The BLT-Contemporary Full Length Proposal Deadline (3 plays) is September 30 (or October 1 if September 30 falls on a weekend)** and students should have a number of plays selected and available for discussion when they arrive in the fall.

The MFA Directing Coordinator in consultation with the Directing Committee and the two first year MFA Directors decide who will go first (late February/early March) and who will go second (late March/early April). This decision should be made early in term one; the order of these productions (first or second) will normally be dictated by the order of the thesis productions.

Casting is the responsibility of the directing student, as is finding additional members of the artistic team beyond those students assigned. (eg. choreography, fight, vocal or dialect coach, etc), as are understudies for each role, in the case of illness.

**RUN DATES:** See **Production Calendar**. Standard FAB performance schedule.

**CASTING:** These productions are cast from the community. This includes Equity and non-Equity actors as well as BA students. **Please see guidelines under Casting for use of Equity actors and the Administrative Info for Department of Drama Productions 2016 document.**

- REHEARSAL:** Begins approximately 6 weeks before performance. See **Production Calendar or Timeline for specific dates**. Rehearsal time beyond that allocated in the department production schedule and as spelled out in the **Rehearsal Policy** document is not readily available. ***Only in extraordinary circumstances are adjustments allowed, and they need written approval from the MFA Directing Coordinator and the department's ADM Production & Operations.*** Rehearsal space is assigned. Currently this is in SAB (South Academic Building, 3 buildings West of HUB)
- TECHNICAL:**
- Technical support is available and will be outlined in the first production meeting. If you have questions prior to this please contact your supervisor and/or the Fine Arts ADM Production & Operations.
  - See **Production Calendar** for timing of meetings and consult with the ADM Production & Operations in advance with production questions.
  - Stage configuration is flexible.
  - Seating is normally set and limited by the stage and seating system configurations.
  - Video use is not advised for this unit.
- Contacts**
- Joshua C. McIntosh, Fine Arts ADM Production & Operations
  - Lee O'Reilly, Technical Director Advisor
  - Student TD (TBD) for project organization.
- DESIGN:** BFA and/or MFA Designers will be assigned to the show. Directors should consult early and often with the assigned designers, recognizing the other students' other deadlines and commitments.
- STAGE MGMT:** Stage managers from the BFA Stage Management Program will be assigned.
- BUDGET:** **The budget is approximately \$2000** These are slightly revised each year and are subject to minor changes. Check with the TD for details.
- MEETINGS:** The director's attendance at all scheduled production meetings is required. *It is the responsibility of the MFA directors to notify the TD regarding your class schedule, in order to avoid production meeting times conflicting with your class times.*
- PUBLICITY:** Admission to FAB productions is free. Signup sheets for FAB productions are posted outside the Drama Office the Monday before the run. Book your team's comps before the sheets go up. *The director is responsible for front of house and any wider publicity.*
- Shows may be publicized outside the university if the director wishes and has time to pursue. The department's publicity staff does not publicize these shows. Please see "Social Media Policy" and "Playbill" sections for details and responsibilities surrounding promotion.

## ROYALTIES and PERMISSIONS:

These are negotiated by **Iain Graham, the Venue Operations Manager (Fine Arts Production and Operations)**. Refer to “Rights and Royalties” Section for important details. The Director must be familiar with the constraints and requirements of all royalty agreements and permissions. **It is important that the MFA director contact the Venue Operations Manager as soon as possible to see if rights can be obtained.**

**PLAYBILLS:** These are created by the Director and *should use the department template*, including cast and crew considerations, Drama staff lists, as well as the Drama Emergency Bursary Fund statement. Request template from Stage Management or your advisor.

## SECOND YEAR: TERM ONE

### BLT – Style

A full length production in BLT in mid-to-late October and late November/early December. The order of these productions (first or second) will be dictated by the order of the thesis productions. The BLT - Style Proposal Deadline (3 plays) is the first day of classes of the Winter Semester.

**RUN DATES:** See Production Calendar. Run is standard for all FAB shows.

**CASTING:** Cast from the community. ***Please Note: Equity actors in BLT productions MUST be either alumni of the University of Alberta or faculty. See Casting*** on page 20 of this handbook

**REHEARSAL:** Begins approximately 6 weeks before performance.

**TECHNICAL:**

- Technical support is available and will be outlined in the first production meeting. If you have questions prior to this please contact your supervisor and/or the Fine Arts ADM Production & Operations.
- See **Production Calendar** for timing of meetings and consult with the ADM Production & Operations in advance with production questions. Stage configuration is flexible.
- Seating is normally set and limited by the stage and seating system configurations.
- Video use is not advised for this unit.

#### Contacts

- Joshua C. McIntosh, Fine Arts ADM Production & Operations
- Lee O'Reilly, Technical Director Advisor
- Student TD (TBD) for project organization.

**DESIGN:** BFA and/or MFA Designers will be assigned to the show. See design/director timeline, noting that the design processes and costing are to be completed before the spring/summer break.

**STAGE MGMT:** Stage managers from the BFA Stage Management Program will be assigned.

- BUDGET:** The budget is approximately \$2000 These are slightly revised each year and are subject to minor changes. Check with the TD for details.
- MEETINGS:** The director's attendance at all scheduled production meetings is required. *It is the responsibility of the MFA directors to notify the TD regarding your class schedule, in order to avoid production meeting times conflicting with your class times.*
- PUBLICITY:** Admission to FAB productions is free. Signup sheets for FAB productions are posted outside the Drama Office the Monday before the run. Book your team's comps before the sheets go up. The director is responsible for front of house and any wider publicity.
- Shows may be publicized outside the university if the director wishes and has time to pursue. The department's publicity staff does not publicize these shows. Please see "Social Media Policy" and "Programs" sections for details and responsibilities surrounding promotion.
- ROYALTIES and PERMISSIONS:**
- These are negotiated by Iain Graham, the Venue Operations Manager (Fine Arts Production and Operations).** Refer to "Rights and Royalties" Section for important details. The Director must be familiar with the constraints and requirements of all royalty agreements and permissions. **It is important that the MFA director contact the Venue Operations Manager as soon as possible to see if rights can be obtained.**
- PLAYBILLS:** These are created by the Director and should use the department template, including cast and crew considerations, Drama staff lists, as well as the Drama Emergency Bursary Fund statement. Request template from Stage Management or your advisor.

## SECOND YEAR: TERM TWO

### DRAMA 686 – Devised Theatre and Performance for Directors

DR 686 is a practice-based seminar combining both theory and practice in the creation of new work.

#### Shadowing in Studio

As part of your preparation for directing your thesis project in the Studio Theatre at the Timms Centre for the Arts, you will shadow a Studio production in the second semester of your second year. Shadowing consists of observing a minimum of six key moments of mounting a Studio Theatre production (ie. first rehearsal, a blocking rehearsal, follow-up scene rehearsal, run for lights, cue-to-cue and tech/dress with notes).

**Please Note:** Shadowing in Studio is separate from assistant directing on a Studio Theatre production, which must be negotiated with the faculty or guest director **only if** the director is open to having an assistant director (ie. it is not a requirement and the decision rests with the Studio Theatre director).

# The Thesis Component

The thesis component of the program consists of two major elements:

- a fully mounted theatrical production
- a written document about that work

## The Thesis Production

This production enjoys an eight-day run (including a matinée) and receives full technical and design support within the limits of the budget. The thesis production should represent the culmination of your work in the program, provide significant challenges to you as a director, and fit appropriately into the Studio season. The direction of a public performance of a full evening of theatre, normally produced within the Department's Studio Theatre season at the Timms Centre for the Arts. The thesis production is mounted in a student's third year, after you have completed your two years of course work.

- RUN DATES:** Opens Friday and runs for 8 nights (Sunday dark) plus a matinée on the second Thursday. There is a Preview performance the Thursday before Opening.
- CASTING:** **The two thesis slots are cast using a combination of the 4th Year BFA actors (in conjunction with the BFA Acting Program) and 2 Equity actors per thesis show from the community.** If additional actors are required, they will be drawn from the community. There is no provision for payment of any volunteer non-equity actors.
- REHEARSAL:** Begins approximately 4 and 1/2 weeks before performances. The entire contract cannot exceed 6 weeks, which includes the run of the play.
- TECHNICAL:** Full technical support is available, within the limits of the budget. The Fine Arts ADM Production & Operations will oversee production meetings and production issues. The Timms Main Stage is a proscenium theatre with a seating capacity of 289.
- DESIGN:** Usually either an MFA Design student or faculty member will design the show. A Stage Manager will be provided by the department. Unlike FAB shows, the building of the show is not done exclusively by students. **Most labour and materials involved (sets, costume, lighting hang, etc.) in producing the thesis show must come out of the budget.** It is essential that all design elements are carefully considered and costed.
- BUDGET:** The budget will be provided by the ADM Production & Operations.
- MEETINGS:** The director's attendance at all scheduled production meetings is required.
- PUBLICITY:** As part of the Studio Theatre season, the thesis production receives normal Studio Theatre publicity, poster design and production, programs, etc. The Fine Arts Information & Outreach Coordinator is responsible for PR decisions. The director will be called upon for playbill notes, discussion of images and themes that may inform poster design and other publicity, and possibly media interviews or other information about the playwright and play.

In communication with the MFA Directing Coordinator, the two MFA candidates will discuss who will do the first thesis slot and who will do the second at the beginning of their first year, as the decision

impacts the order of BLT productions. The outcome of this discussion will ultimately be approved by the Directing Committee.

MFA Candidates will not finish their degree requirements until the fall. Therefore, finances must be considered over the spring and summer months. The Department offers a TA (teaching) or GRA (research) over the summer to help support the candidate, however, this amount is limited.

**Deadline for thesis proposals is September 1 of the second year of the program (or the following Monday if September 1 falls on a weekend).** This allows time (over the summer months) for reading and preparation of proposals.

Casting of BFA actors will be coordinated between the MFA Directing Program and BFA Acting Program.

An MFA or BFA design student may not be available to design the show. A faculty designer or a designer from outside the department may need to be found. This is the Department's responsibility.

## THESIS PROPOSALS

For the thesis production, there are two steps to the process:

### Proposal #1: 5 Title Proposal

**Proposal #1: 5 Title Proposal** with minimal description (1 page proposal for each play). The proposal should list the titles in order of preference. **Proposal #1 & its accompanying scripts** should be sent via both **a hard copy AND an electronic copy** to the **MFA Directing Coordinator**. In addition, **electronic copies (ONLY) of the proposal & scripts should be sent to each committee member** and **one hard copy of each script should be submitted to Helen** in the Drama Office available for signout by the Directing Committee.

The initial **5 Title Proposal** should offer significant directorial challenges, fascinate you as an artist, and fall within the realm of the possible, given your areas of strength and the Department's resources. You must take into account casting the play with a combination of 4th year BFA actors and 2 Equity actors (casting additional actors is possible, but should be kept to a minimum).

The 5 Title Proposal should include a **1 page sheet** for each play consisting of the following elements: title (order of preference), playwright, plot synopsis, themes, why you want to do the play, characters and casting considerations (gender, age, description - ie. "daughter of...") design elements (set - list of locations, interior/exterior; costumes - list of 'looks'; lights; sound), other elements (ie. does it require a fight director?), production challenges, research.

After submission of **Proposal #1: 5 Title Proposal**, the Directing Committee will meet to discuss the merits, feasibility and suitability of each title and will then request a more developed proposal of two of the titles. If needed, the Directing Committee may request additional titles at this time.

**NOTE:** Consideration for anything other than a published play script **must** be discussed with the Directing Committee during the first term of your first year.

### Proposal #2: Fully-Developed Proposal

**Proposal #2: Fully-Developed Proposal (2 titles)** is to be submitted as follows: **Send a hard copy AND an electronic copy of Proposal #2: Fully Developed Proposal (2 Titles) to the Directing Coordinator** AND an **electronic copy to each of the committee members. One hard copy of each script should be**

**submitted to Helen** in the Drama Office for sign-out by the Directing Committee. No additional scripts need be submitted at this time, unless the Directing Committee has asked you to find another play outside of the five plays proposed in Proposal #1 (5 Titles). Once Proposal #2: Developed Proposal (2 Titles) has been reviewed and discussed by the Directing Committee, a play will be selected to go forward to the Artistic Director of Studio Theatre.

The Studio Theatre Committee will evaluate the projects for technical, budgetary and production feasibility as well as for their 'fit' with the rest of the season. The committee also consults with Design regarding 'fits' with MFA Design Theses and student assignments, the BFA Acting Committee, which reviews the opportunities the plays provide for BFA actors, as well as how the balance of the two MFA thesis projects provide sufficient and feasible casting opportunities for the full graduating class as well as Production.

In general, proposals should be brief but specific. Follow the BLT approach for proposals, keeping in mind the different production conditions and the expanded readership. Your proposals should be realistic (include all production/design requirements needed to tell the story - i.e. 3 locations – 2 exterior, 1 interior, elephant appears, etc.), specific, and inspiring. You are advocating for a feasible and compelling project.

While in process, proposals should be discussed or reviewed with your thesis supervisor or, where one is not yet assigned, with the MFA Directing Coordinator. Proposals should go to the Directing Committee in well-developed/finished form. They should indicate the director's order of preference, but keep in mind that any of the proposed scripts may be selected for production.

If, for some reason, the proposals are deemed inappropriate, the student may be asked to submit additional proposals. The Graduate Committee must also give final thesis approval (this administrative aspect is normally handled by the MFA Directing Coordinator or Thesis Advisor).

Upon final approval, work should begin on the preliminary preparation of the written thesis and the production. By this stage, a thesis supervisor and designer(s) should be selected. Where possible, directors are encouraged to consider forging director-designer teams in the proposal and preparatory stages of a thesis production.

## THE THESIS SUPERVISOR

The choice of a thesis supervisor is a key component of the thesis production. **All full-time Directing Faculty are eligible.** Students may request a specific supervisor; where possible faculty will oblige (this decision is often dependent upon the number of thesis assignments any one instructor may have underway, their affinity for the style of the piece and schedule).

Primarily, the supervisor is available as a resource for the student, both in terms of the production, and the written thesis. ***It is the Thesis Supervisor who puts together the Thesis Committee.*** While students are encouraged to request people that they feel are particularly suitable for their particular project, students should not directly approach faculty in this regard.

In the thesis production process, the student director should demonstrate capacity for *independent* work as they pursue leading and realizing their (and their team's) artistic goals for the piece. They should demonstrate excellent communication processes with the production team (staff, students, faculty, guest artists). The primary role of the thesis supervisor is to ask questions based on an understanding of the artistic goals, without interfering in the artistic vision, but including observations and questions which encourage the director to take their vision as far as possible. The supervisor



assists the director with issues and strategies on request. The supervisor is also responsible for protecting the reputation of the Department so far as it is tied to the production.

The supervisor works with the student as the written portion is designed and pursued.

## THE THESIS COMMITTEE

The thesis supervisor is responsible, in consultation with the student, for putting together the thesis committee for the thesis defense. The committee normally consists of:

- **the thesis supervisor**
- **one internal member (from the Drama Department)**
- **one external member (from another department)**
- **the Committee Chair, who cannot participate actively in the examination and is normally from among the Drama faculty members.**

Their roles are to see the performance (usually twice), read the written document, and participate in the oral defense, which is based on the production and the written document.

## The Written Thesis

The written thesis concerns itself with three stages of work:

1. Background preparation and research\*
2. Directorial analysis of the play to be produced\*
3. An edited journal of the directorial process: reflection and analysis of the production process and production

**\* The first two stages must be completed prior to the design consultation and *rehearsal period*.**

Using the above as an outline, the initial parts of the written thesis should record a journey of discovery and decision making in relation to the practical and creative work for which you are preparing. The specific individual needs of the play and the director will determine the particular nature and content of the written thesis.

## BACKGROUND PREPARATION AND RESEARCH

There are many possible directions the background preparation and research segment of the thesis may take. Directors will select the specific emphasis that will work for them in consultation with their thesis supervisor. Elements which are often appropriate include:

### The Playwright

- biography
- personal, social and political influences
- theatrical/artistic influences
- transitions and progressions

- writing process
- how has your play been influenced by the above?

### **The Playwright's Works**

- development
- themes
- styles
- productions
- audience and critical responses
- where does your play fit into the playwright's body of work?

### **The Play**

- what is it about?
- production history
- what are the key or dominant aspects of this play?
- how does/has it challenge(d) directors?
- how does it challenge you?
- why/how is it relevant now?
- how do these affect your approach to the play in the current context?

### **Additional Areas of Research (examples; each project will require variations here)**

- specific performance styles
- specific rehearsal methods
- study of a specific director or other theatre artist
- study of a specific theatrical theory or approach
- study of a theme or concept central to the play
- study of a culture or historical period central to the play and/or your production

## **DIRECTORIAL ANALYSIS OF THE PLAY**

You may wish to weave your directorial analysis into the background work described above or you may wish to develop a separate section. Any of the various methods for analysis may be used. Minimally, you should analyze the story, structure, theme, setting, style, major characters, key transition points, etc., but the format of this investigation is up to you. ***A clear statement of your theatrical intent for the production concept and objectives should emerge from this research and analysis.*** This section represents an expression and justification of your intentions for design, casting and rehearsal methods, and your overall goals for the theatrical production. The written thesis records a process and is a living document, one meant to be of use to you as a director.

## **THE ANALYTIC JOURNAL: REFLECTION AND ANALYSIS DURING AND AFTER EACH PHASE OF THE PRODUCTION PROCESS**

The journal portion of the thesis, written over the preparation, rehearsal and production period, presents the opportunity to discuss, evaluate and reflect on the choices you make. It is a record of the entire process. It is your opportunity to reflect as you go on 'what worked' and 'what didn't work' and why. The journal will ideally encourage questions during and after the various production processes, such as:

- What am I learning about the play that I didn't know before rehearsals?
- What did I plan to do and what am I/did I actually do? Why?
- How can I respond during a process to adapt, in-process, to experiences within reflection, design consultations or rehearsals?
- What would I change/keep about the director-designer process and outcome?
- What would I change/keep about the rehearsal process?
- How did the audience respond? How did I expect the audience to respond? What does this tell me?
- What have I learned about myself as a director? What are my future challenges?
- What would I advise another director were he/she to choose to direct a similar/the same piece?

### **OTHER**

In addition, the written thesis should contain a summary section (reflecting on the production once it is up and running), a public response section (copies of reviews or letters that you receive about the show), and a resource section (bibliography).

## **The Oral Defense**

Normally held shortly after the production closes, the oral defense is based upon the written thesis and the production itself. Attending are your Thesis Committee (Supervisor, Internal and External examiners, and Chair). The oral defense is an opportunity to discuss, explain, analyze, critique, and defend your production choices. A typical format consists of the candidate making an opening statement about the production, then Thesis Committee members asking a series of questions to the candidate. Normally the process takes 90-120 minutes.

Following the defense, the candidate completes any revisions requested. The Committee may request to see these, or they may leave it to the Supervisor to approve the final document.

## **Additional Information**

### **DEPARTMENT OF DRAMA REHEARSAL HOURS POLICY**

This document governs all rehearsal hours. It recognizes several groups of students and has been worked out in consultation with the various programs in the department, and is based on extended experience. Directors are responsible for working within this policy.

**Please note: It is not advised that you make any changes to the rehearsal hours that are outlined in the document and the start dates established on the Production Schedule. If you wish to do so, it must be approved by the Coordinator of Directing and the ADM Production & Operations.**

## CASTING

It is crucial for the director (especially if you are coming into the program from out of town) to see as many productions in the community as possible in order to familiarize yourself with the acting pool in the city. As a resource, first year directors should seek help in casting from second year directors and faculty.

### Important Notes:

- **Equity members cannot be used without permission of Canadian Actors Equity Association (Equity);** therefore, you must provide the department's Venue Operations Manager (Fine Arts Production and Operations) with a list of the Equity actors as soon as they are cast. Once submitted, you will be advised of any additional information required. This must be done at least 2 weeks prior to rehearsal start.
- Equity actors in BLT productions MUST be either alumni of the University of Alberta or faculty.
- You must notify the Venue Operations Manager (Fine Arts Production and Operations) regarding the play (for rights and royalties) you intend to do and the information regarding your cast (as Equity members must be approved)
- Cast size restrictions may apply, given budgetary constraints for both costumes and transport/parking and Equity members' insurance. **BLT productions should be relatively small in size**, as normally only one production per student can be larger in cast size and these are normally required for Fall BLT shows in Year Two.

**For information on casting Thesis productions, see page 14, as it differs from BLT.** For the thesis production, Equity actors are paid. Due to budget constraints, a limited number of Equity actors may be used. Currently the budget allows for **two Equity actors per production.** Our agreement with Equity does not allow us to pay non-equity actors. PLEASE NOTE: Equity actors for thesis productions MUST be approved by the thesis supervisor prior to offers being made.

### **When contacting the Venue Operations Manager (Fine Arts Production and Operations) concerning Equity members you must provide the following:**

1. production name and project (e.g. play and author, BLT production - ie BLT-1)
2. the actor or actors' name(s)
3. Equity number(s)
4. address and telephone number(s)
5. rehearsal dates
6. first day of rehearsal
7. performance dates, times and number of performances
8. full cast list

The Venue Operations Manager (Fine Arts Production and Operations) will then contact Equity for permission to use the actors. Although there is no remuneration offered for Equity or Non-Equity actors in FAB productions, Equity actors receive some benefits such as parking, insurance etc. Please inform the Theatre Administrator (TBD) immediately of any changes to your Equity cast so Equity can be updated.

**All Equity negotiations are handled by this department representative.**

**See also “Administrative Info for Drama Department Productions” link in Related Documents Section of this handbook.**

No videotaping of any production with Equity actors may be done without permission of Equity. Please contact the Venue Operations Manager (Fine Arts Production and Operations) at least two weeks prior to a proposed video date.

## ROYALTIES AND PERMISSIONS:

These are negotiated by the department’s Venue Operations Manager (Fine Arts Production and Operations). Refer to “Rights and Royalties” section for important details. Permissions for presenting modern/contemporary plays usually include clauses forbidding adaptation and rewrites. The Venue Operations Manager (Fine Arts Production and Operations) can assist in preliminary research and will make all contact with agents and playwrights on behalf of the department.

The Director must be familiar with the constraints and requirements of all royalty agreements and permissions. ***It is important that the MFA director contact the Venue Operations Manager (Fine Arts Production and Operations) as soon as possible to see if rights can be obtained.*** See *Administrative Info for Drama Department Productions (2016)* document.

## PLAYBILLS:

For all FAB productions, these are created by the Director and *should use the department template*, including cast and crew considerations, Drama staff lists, as well as the Drama Emergency Bursary Fund statement. Request template from Stage Management or your advisor.

## PHOTOCOPYING:

### Scripts

The Department will pay for a basic set of script copies provided the office is given a text in time to order these as required by the royalty agreement and/or where legal to use Printing Services. Further copies are the responsibility of the Director.

### General

Each production will also have 500 copies for incidental use.

## **Posters and Playbills (excludes Studio Theatre):**

1. Posters and playbills for non-revenue generating productions are optional and at the discretion and expense of the director or other creative team members. However, should such be produced, the following guidelines must be observed.
2. Poster Designs: check the rights agreement for billing requirements. As a general rule, the work's title should appear before the name of the playwright or anyone else on the production's creative team. **Remember to include dates, times, location of the performances, information for ticket sign-up, and the Department's logo on all posters.**
3. The playwright's name is typically no less than half the type size of the play's title.
4. Should you wish to include the director's name on the poster, we ask that you also include the names of the designers.
5. Should you wish to include the actor's names on the poster, we ask that you include the stage managers.
6. Playbills: always recognize the rights holder as well as the playwright and creative team – e.g. "Rights for this production courtesy of Samuel French".
7. Rights agencies may request copies of posters and playbills so keep extra copies just in case you are asked to forward them.

\*\*\* BLT Productions have a grad student who serves as the theatre's FOH Manager; it is a GA appointment. It is that person's job to proof all posters and playbills before they go to print to ensure that the above-stated rules and regulations have been followed.

## **HIGHLIGHTED PERSONNEL**

These are some of the faculty and staff that directors are likely to come across through the production elements of the program. They do many duties within the department but noted below is where you are likely to run into them. Introduce yourself!

**Joshua C. McIntosh** - Fine Arts ADM Production & Operations (meetings for BLT and Timms)

**Lee O'Reilly** - TD for Fine Arts (including BLT) and SPS productions

**John Raymond** - Stage Management Supervisor (BLT and Timms)

**Jon Price** - Technical Theatre (BLT)

**Jane Kline** - Props

**Larry Clark** - Technical Director for Timms

**Julie Davie** - Costumes (cutter)

**Kathryn Neuman** - Costumes (BLT & FAB)

**Joanna Johnston** - Costumes (Timms)

# Related Documents and Appendices

The following documents are referred to in this Handbook, and should be obtained, read in detail, and referred to throughout the program:

## From the MFA Directing Coordinator

- Department of Drama Rehearsal Policy Document
- BLT Director/Designer Collaboration Schedule
- Directing Program Timeline
- MFA Directing Faculty List

## From Venue Operations Manager (Fine Arts Production and Operations)

- Department of Drama Production Calendar  
*Please also check the [Department Calendar](#) often for updates.*
- “Administrative Info for Drama Department Productions”  
Found here <https://www.ualberta.ca/drama/resources/policies>  
*Note: Please also follow up with the Venue Operations Manager (Fine Arts Production and Operations) for questions or clarifications.*

## From the Graduate Program Advisors

- Department of Drama Graduate Seminars  
*Published each Spring for the coming academic year*

# Checklist

- Read: Department of Drama General Handbook
- Read: MFA Directing Handbook
- Read: Graduate Student Handbook
- Read through “Related Documents” listed on pg 26
- If you are teaching, read: Contract Instructor Handbook
- Choose your “options” or “elective” courses for the year
- Make a plan to familiarize yourself with the local acting pool
- Gain Access to the Production Google Calendar via the Fine Arts ADM Production & Operations
- Get to know the Faculty and start considering thesis ideas and advisors
- Crowdsource plays to read. You will need at least 15-20 plays you want to direct.
- You’ll reject some, your advisors will reject some and proposals go as follows:
- 3 contemporary play selections
- 3 extended style/language play selections
- 5 thesis options
- READ MORE PLAYS! There are so many projects and assignments based on scenes, playwrights, etc that you will need to have a pile to choose from. See General Handbook for resources in and outside of the UofA.
- Funding Opportunities: APPLY! (more information in the Graduate Handbook)