

DRAMA

MFA Theatre Practice Handbook

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Our Program

The **Master of Fine Arts in Theatre Practice** brings talented and motivated graduate students together with outstanding educators, active artists and theorists with local, national, and international perspectives in the performing arts.

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|---------------|
| Address from the Chair | Page 3 |
| Acknowledging Territory | Page 4 |
| Introduction | Page 4 |
| Objectives | Page 4 |
| Program Description | Page 4 |
| Course Requirements | Page 5 |
| Selecting and Registering | Page 5 |
| Typical Course Load | Page 5 |
| Year One | Page 5 |
| Year Two | Page 6 |
| Advising | Page 6 |
| The MFA Theatre Practice Thesis | Page 6 |
| Preparation | Page 6 |
| Written Component | Page 7 |
| The Oral Defense | Page 7 |
| Performance Opportunities and Residencies | Page 7 |
| Additional Information | Page 8 |
| Funding | Page 8 |
| Advice | Page 8 |
| Graduates | Page 10 |

Address from the Chair

Dear Students,

On behalf of the faculty and staff of Drama, I offer you a warm welcome to the department! You are each embarking on a new year full of anticipation and promise. Congratulations on making the choice to study here in the Department of Drama at the University of Alberta. Many have travelled this path before but none have been you in your present moment. You will bring new insight and lively interaction to our classrooms, studios, and creative atmosphere. You will engage in research and making in ways you have never dreamed. You will astound us and challenge yourself. I hope you have hours of enjoyment in pursuing your studies!

The most important element in the alchemy of a Drama Department is its community. Building a culture of care is a priority because we have hard work to do. We look to challenge norms, to ask questions that provoke thought and action, and to contemplate deeply the human condition today in our post-truth, eco-challenged, and tumultuous times. But first, we must build a community that is respectful and open-minded. As students, you are instrumental in building a community in which we can be our best selves and be our most responsive and creative. In every program, we are all students of Drama. We are one department and one university. You belong. Welcome!!!

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Professor, Theatre Design
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Acknowledging Territory

The University of Alberta acknowledges that we are located on Treaty 6 territory, and respects the histories, languages, and cultures of First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and all First Peoples of Canada, whose presence continues to enrich our vibrant community.

This statement is the [officially endorsed](#) U of A acknowledgement of Indigenous territory developed through the Provost Office in a broader consultation process with the Council on Aboriginal Initiatives, Town Halls and review by Indigenous faculty and staff.

In the Drama department, we are learning what it means to go beyond acknowledging territory to develop respectful, reciprocal relationships with Indigenous people and lands. We hope you can contribute to this process in your graduate studies.

Master Of Fine Arts In Theatre Practice Program

Introduction

As a student of the **MFA Theatre Practice** your own process is at the centre. There is room for cross-fertilization in your training program as well as specialization in a chosen area. In addition, you will be introduced to numerous theoretical and artistic projects, in both research and creation, in which our faculty are engaged. The Master of Fine Arts in Theatre Practice stimulates and deliberately challenges your activity as an artist working in the field of contemporary performance. Its graduates have gone on to make substantial contributions to the academic and professional performance environment locally, nationally, and internationally as teachers, directors, actors, dancers, playwrights, theatre activists, artistic directors, dramaturges, critics, arts administrators, communications and publicity directors.

Objectives

The Master of Fine Arts in Theatre Practice brings talented and motivated graduate students together with outstanding educators, active artists, and theorists with local, national, and international perspectives in the performing arts. The program is aimed at mature artists (with at least five years of professional practice) who are interested in deepening or redirecting an already existing practice. This is a project-based degree offering advanced training for artists in the field of performance and its practical and theoretical applications. The prospective student defines their area of specialization and designs an individual program of study based on their professional goals in consultation with Department of Drama faculty.

Program Description

One-on-one mentoring from faculty advisors who are working artists and scholars in an area related to the student's sub-specialty. Participation in existing graduate courses in specific areas of performance, critical theory, and dramaturgy. A two-year residency that culminates in the presentation of a performative thesis project, supplemented by a written document. This MFA is a sequential program; candidates enter in the Fall semester. While potential candidates must apply with a clear idea of the nature of their potential thesis project, the students' work in the

first year is exploratory and investigative, allowing for engagement in research, critical analysis and the refinement and development of these skills. It is expected that creative projects will be attached to existing department ventures or be located outside the department, developed in collaboration with other theatres/agencies. In consultation with their Supervisor and the Graduate Committee, students will plan their own program and submit a detailed proposal for their final graduating project.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Because MFA Theatre Practice enrolment is kept relatively low, our courses are small enough to allow students to get to know each other well and to receive good guidance and supervision from faculty. All students must complete 33 units of course weight (11 courses). All MFA Theatre Practice students must complete the Research Methods course (Drama 601) worth 3 units of course weight which prepares you for critical research and writing, including the thesis proposal. Thesis 903: (MFA Thesis Project) will bring total course credits to 36. Each student will propose a thesis project (903) which will require a supervisor in the candidate’s area of specialization. The thesis will consist of a major creative and practice-based project accompanied by a written component including research, documentation of the process, and analysis of results.

Through its Special Projects option (Drama 605) the Department also allows you to pursue independent study in areas outside of its usual course offerings. The availability of special projects courses , however, is dependent on the willingness of qualified faculty who must agree to teach these courses. DRAMA 605 is normally only taken in your second year, and you develop your proposal in conjunction with a supervisor before registering in order to complete your registrations as a full-time student.

DRAMA 606 is an undergraduate course that may be used to attain greater knowledge or expertise in an area related to your research. Students are normally allowed to take only ONE 606 class during the course of this program. The student will arrange together with the instructor of the course extra assignments to make it compliant with graduate course work.

Finally, because theatre by its very nature is both international and interdisciplinary, you may consider taking a course in another department or program such as History, Music, Art and Design, Classics, English, Romance or Germanic Languages, Film Studies, Women’s Studies, Canadian Studies or Slavic and East European Studies, Sociology, Anthropology, or Comparative Literature.

Only graduate-level courses may count towards the MFA Theatre Practice degree, but undergraduat courses may be completed on an audit or non-credit basis. For special arrangements, (DR 606) see the MFA Coordinator.

SELECTING AND REGISTERING FOR COURSES

It is your responsibility to set up the consultation with the Coordinator in a timely fashion. The Coordinator needs to sign off your course choices, normally before September 1. You can arrange this with Rebecca Anderson or Dawn Hunter by September 7th, at the latest, and they will register you in your courses and keep the signed form in your file. If you are receiving a scholarship or a full-time GA¹ assignment, you must be registered as a full-time student in each term, or your monthly pay will be affected. Usually, courses are laid out like this.

TYPICAL COURSE LOAD

| Year One | | | |
|----------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------|----------------|
| Term One (9 credits) | | Term Two (9 credits) | |
| Option | Seminar Course | Option | Seminar Course |
| DR 601 | Methods and Tools of Research | Option | Seminar Course |
| Option | Seminar Course | Option | Seminar Course |

Year Two

| Term One (9 credits) | | Term Two (6 credits) | |
|--------------------------|--|--------------------------|--|
| DR 605/or Seminar Course | One course: in either the fall/winter term/relating to thesis prep | DR 605/or Seminar Course | One course: in either the fall/winter term/relating to thesis prep |
| Option | Seminar Course | Option | Seminar Course |
| Option | Seminar Course | Thesis 903: Thesis Prep | |

¹ 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.

ADVISING

Your Program Coordinator can help with these decisions. They will work with you on your course selection, as well as respond to questions and issues that arise for you during your program. Normally you will meet with the Coordinator 1-2 times

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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.

The Thesis

The MFA Theatre Practice is a two-year program that culminates in the presentation of a creative thesis project (performance, script, installation, dance, etc.) addressing your research questions and accompanied by a written component. This can take time and we encourage students to take this time. During the first term of the program, you should think about performance/and research topics which you might wish to pursue within the scope of your MFA thesis.

The MFA Theatre Practice Performance and Written Thesis

PREPARATION

Drama 601 will help you with the preparation of your thesis proposal. Normally over the course of your first term your research topic will be chosen and in a continuing dialogue with the MFA Coordinator and your Supervisor. Once a full-time continuing faculty member has agreed to be your supervisor you must briefly outline:

- Performance schedule/including workshops.

- Research importance and scope, its relationship to previous research in the field, the research procedure(s), and the performance protocols.
- the tentative timetable for the creation of the performance.

By the end of your first year, the proposal should be submitted to your MFA Supervisor (s)

NOTE: If your research involves human subjects an ethics review is required. This should be started in your first term because it may take some time to get it approved. See your advisor or coordinator for more details.

WRITTEN COMPONENT

An MFA thesis should normally not exceed 100 pages. (there are exceptions, this is a recommendation) The written document accompanies the performance research and is a companion document. The written document style can vary reflecting each student's research, combining academic rigor with their own discoveries and expertise in their chosen area of exploration.

THE ORAL DEFENSE

When the members of the MFA supervisory committee feel that your thesis is ready to go forward to the **oral defense**, your supervisor will schedule it, in consultation with the Grad Coordinator. This will also include making sure the members of the committee will be present at your performative thesis project, which will then be supplemented by a written document. The committee is created in consultation with the student.

Attending are your Thesis Committee (Supervisor, Internal and External examiners and Chair). It is an opportunity to discuss, critique, explain, analyze and defend project choices. A typical format consists of the candidate making an opening statement about the project, 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 revisions as requested. The Committee may request to see these, or they may leave it to the Supervisor to approve the final document.

The Drama Department requires that you submit one bound copy to the Guberman Reading Room, in addition, it is customary for you to offer a copy of your thesis to your supervisor. Please speak with your supervisor for more information about this topic.

PERFORMANCE OPPORTUNITIES AND RESIDENCY STUDIO SPACE

The MFA Theatre practice program normally provides opportunities for practical engagement with performance through dramaturgy, workshops of your research with undergraduate students, teaching, residencies and DR 605/606 courses in movement, physical theatre and directing. Due to limited rehearsal and performance space in the department, candidates may at times be required to access resources outside of the university. The theatre/dance/art community in Edmonton is a huge resource. Connect with people through attending openings, asking people to introduce you and taking classes. Here are links to residencies offered in Edmonton to theatre and dance artists.

- Mile Zero Dance admin@milezerodance.com
- L'UniThéâtre <https://www.lunitheatre.ca/en/lunilab>
- Azimuth Theatre <https://azimuththeatre.com/about-us/>

- Good Women Dance Collective <https://goodwomen.ca>

For other useful content such as the Student Code of Behaviour, Mental Health and Wellness Resources and Quality of Graduate Supervision Recognition / Awards see the [Graduate Handbook](#).

See here for a [list of continuing Faculty](#).

Additional Information

FUNDING

We try to fund our students as best as we can. Funding sources include Assistantships (GRA) and Graduate Teaching Assistantships (GTA), Tuition differentials, national, provincial, and institutional scholarships. We encourage applicants and students to fervently pursue their own funding opportunities.

IMPORTANT TIPS FROM PAST MFA THEATRE PRACTICE STUDENTS

- For scholarships, stay in contact with Dawn and Rebecca in the office. Give them a list of your research interests and qualifications and she can pass along any opportunities.
- Paid Internships are available through the GSA.
- Residencies are available to apply for. Past examples have been l'UniTheatre and Mile Zero (on an application basis). Or you can make your own residency by booking space for a week and asking people to work with you
- The GSA provides great benefits for dental, vision and chiro/massage. Take advantage of these.
- The University Club (formerly the Faculty Club) is a lovely quiet lounge for unwinding on campus. Searching it in Google maps will show you how to get there!
- Classes outside the Drama department can be difficult to find out about but are worth the effort in terms of diversifying exposure to faculty, students, and approaches. Rather than searching through Bear Tracks, I recommend looking up each department's website online as it's often the clearest route to knowing what is being offered in the coming term.
- U of A students receive free entrance to the Art Gallery of Alberta downtown
- Theatre Alberta has an excellent "Classified" section on their website where you can learn about events and opportunities, as well as posting your own for free
- Set up social gatherings with your cohort outside of campus. Arranging a potluck once a term can be tricky to schedule but very restorative!
- Connect early (around January of first year) with potential supervisors, and reach out to senior grad students/recent alumni for recommendations
- If teaching is of interest now or in the future, the GTL Program on Campus Bridge is an excellent resource
- The Edmonton Fringe Festival, Nextfest, Found Festival, and Expanse Festival are all great places to see exciting performances
- The Department often has visiting distinguished scholars and guests throughout the year, carving out time to see these speakers is valuable

- Set up meetings with advisors and coordinators regularly - do not wait for the perfect time (or once you are in distress!)
- In the TP program, it's especially important to seek out artistic and performance opportunities outside of the Department as well as within it.
- It's important for TP students in particular to get involved in the Edmonton arts community, especially if you are new to town. The Edmonton Arts Council (EAC) is a fantastic resource for doing so, as are the festivals. Any extracurricular activities like joining a choir, taking dance classes, etc. are a great way to make local connections and friendships and stave off the isolation of grad school.
- Talk to your professors in a proactive manner about your artistic goals and ambitions, as they relate to your thesis work but also beyond. They are excellent resources who can help you to make connections locally, nationally, and internationally, and to introduce you to ideas and opportunities you wouldn't previously have known about.
- The Arts Graduate Scholarship offered directly through the Government of Alberta Student Aid website isn't featured on any U of A websites, but it's a great scholarship to apply for if you are eligible.
- Most importantly of all, don't be afraid to ask for what you want/need, and don't wait for an opportunity to come to you. You are your own best advocate and, in the TP program, will be best served if you take proactive ownership of your artistic practice and education. Only you can make it what you want it to be. Seek out connections and opportunities and make the most of your two years, as they will fly by.
- For your final project, the department will allot \$1000 for your use.
- All Students wishing to be considered for SSHRC awards will submit completed application forms early in the fall term of their incoming year. Consult your academic advisor (MFA Coordinator) for this fall deadline.
- Get to know the undergrads...they are a tremendous resource to learn from and with and will often be the people working on your projects later.
- The daylight hours in Edmonton in the summer are about 20 hours, in the winter it's about 8 hours. Make sure to get outside in the winter while the sun is up.
- Share resources you find with your fellow students. There is a thriving community that will support you.
- If you're interested in Playwriting, there is often a weekly playwright's circle on Sundays through the department
- There is a writer in residence through the English department who you can make appointments with.
- You can volunteer as a production dramaturg on basically any studio show.
- The New Works Festival is often run by a grad student and provides many opportunities
- The dance department is through the Phys. Ed department. There are performance companies such as Cripsie and MOD that you can perform with. Dance classes are offered through the Gym (Ballet, Contemporary, Modern, Jazz, etc.)
- Remember that a practice takes TIME so don't feel pressured to know everything all at once. Your ideas will change, your project will change, your practice will change. Work with what you have, and the rest will be there when you need it.
- You will have a desk in the grad office for your use. Ask a current grad student or Helen in the office to let you in as soon as you arrive at the U to claim a spot.

GRADUATES OF THE MFA THEATRE PRACTICE PROGRAM

- Tai Amy Grauman MFA Theatre Practice 2023. *Embodying the Sacred Feminine in Métis Theatre Praxis*
- Louise Casemore MFA Theatre Practice 2023. *Scripting Immersive Theatre: Where Structure and Spontaneity Collide*
- Liam Monaghan MFA Theatre Practice 2023. *Strange Familiar: Adoption, Queer Belonging and Autofictional Theatre* *SSHRC recipient
- Deneh'Cho Thompson MFA Theatre Practice 2022. *Toward an Anti-extractive Decolonial Indigenous Theatre Practices and Pedagogies*
- Kate Sheridan 2022 MFA Theatre Practice. *When Life Gives You Melons. A Multidimensional Performance Highlighting the Superpowers of Dyslexia*
- Patrick Howarth MFA Theatre Practice 2022. *Anabasis and The Way of Body and Place*
- Charlie Peters MFA Theatre Practice 2021. *Building the Container of the Room: Ethics, Power, Enacted Values, and Production Dramaturgy*
- Minggao Zhang MFA Theatre Practice 2021 *W.E: A Dialogue Between Two Bodies Acceptance, Integration, and Resistance of the Body*
- Leda Davies MFA Theatre Practice 2020 *Fish at the Bottom of the Sea* *SSHRC recipient
- Alyssa Bartlett MFA Theatre Practice 2018 *HANGWOMAN: Devised Dance Theatre in Process and in Performance*
- Stacey Murchison MFA Theatre Practice 2018 *Elements Solo: Practice, Performance, and Philosophy*
- Cristian Paul Badiu MFA Theatre Practice 2017 Stage reading of *The Time Merchant* by Matei Visniec
- Maryam Zarei MFA Theatre Practice 2017 *The Whisper of the Sea*
- Joelle Prefontaine MFA Theatre Practice 2017 *Huh?! Social Change Through Plurilingual Immersive Theatre for Young* * SSHRC recipient
- Cristine Lesiak MFA Theatre Practice 2016 *The Object of Constellations*
- Joshua Clendenin MFA Theatre Practice 2016 *Cabareacht in Babel*
- Nancy Sandercock MFA Theatre Practice 2015 *frost flowers/arctic death machine: a passage to elsewhere* *SSHRC recipient
- Mia Van Leeuwen MFA Theatre Practice 2014
- Valerie Planche MFA Theatre Practice 2014 *Coniunctio Oppositorum: The Alchemy of Presence*
- Tatiana Duque Valencia MFA Theatre Practice 2014
- Tara Brodin MFA Theatre Practice 2013
- Priscilla Yakielashek MFA Theatre Practice 2013
- Nikki Shaffeeullah MFA Theatre Practice 2013
- Michelle Rios MFA Theatre Practice 2013
- Michele Fleiger MFA Theatre Practice 2012 *Teaching the Large Ensemble*
- Gerry Morita, MFA Theatre Practice 2012, *CHASM: the spaces between: In Aesthetics and Practice*
- Joshua Wickard MFA Theatre Practice, 2011
- Caroline Howarth, Co-Artistic Director of Concrete Theatre. MFA Theatre Practice, 2010