THEA 230-1: Acting 1, Fall Semester 2026

Course Section I: T/R 12:30 PM- 1:45 PM

Instructor: Craig Ester, Assistant Teaching Professor of Acting

Course Description:

The purpose of the course is to introduce students to the art of acting through the exploration of *Seven Pillars Acting* Methodology as defined by practitioner Sonya Cooke. Students will learn to step into the perspective of a character and build their own acting processes. This class will explore the pillars which include: Contact, Circumstance, Meaning, Emotional life, Objective, Action, and Physical Life. Seven Pillars combines the work of Sanford Meisner, Declan Donnellan, and Jerzy Grotowski to help the actor become connected to the material on a visceral level that connects mind, body and voice. These objectives will be achieved through scene and monologue work along with written assignments which include journals reflecting on classwork, analysis of performances in production, and scoring scene work. **Outside class time must be appropriated for attending plays, reading, written work, scene rehearsals, etc. Students are cautioned against taking this course if they feel they do not have the requisite time to comply.**

Course Objectives:

1. Demonstrate understanding of acting terminology and principles.
2. Gain a visceral experience of our class slogan: *Acting is living truthfully under imaginary circumstances*.
3. Develop foundation in acting technique, centered on the Seven Pillars Acting methodology.
4. Comprehension of the rigors and discipline required by an actor in the industry today.
5. Practical skills in analyzing performance.
6. Building courage, taking risks, and making strong choices in performance.

NAST (National Association of Schools of Theatre) Credit/Time Statement:
This studio performance course is worth 3 credit hours. Each hour of credit requires 50 minutes of in-class work per week as well as an expected 97 minutes of out-of-class work per week (reading, rehearsing, researching, doing group projects, and individual work) by students.

Additional Time for Class: Out-of-class work should be expected for journaling, reading, research, rehearsal, and group projects, equating anywhere between 2-4 additional hours of work per week.
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University Statement

"We are committed to ensuring that all members of the community are welcome, through valuing the various experiences and worldviews represented at Ball State and among those we serve. We promote a culture of respect and civil discourse. If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, please contact the instructor of record as soon as possible. Ball State's ***Disability Services*** office coordinates services for students with disabilities; documentation of a disability needs to be on file in that office before any accommodations can be provided. Disability Services can be contacted at 765-285-5293 or ***dsd@bsu.edu***."

Attendance and Punctuality:

Your success is directly related to your presence in the classroom. Attendance is part of your PARTICIPATION GRADE. The departmental policies regarding attendance are as follows:

- **UNEXCUSED ABSENCES** A student can miss no more than one full week of classes (2 T/R classes, 3 M/W/F classes, or 1 class for courses that meet once a week.) This class meets M/W/F, so you are permitted three unexcused absences (which you may want to think of as "allotted" or "allowed.") **Colds, flu bugs, and other **common illness issues are not excused**, per departmental policy. Rather, they are part of your allotted absences for each course.*
- A fourth unexcused absence will result in a letter grade deduction for the semester; fifth and sixth unexcused absences will result in additional letter grade deductions. More than six unexcused absences will result in the student being asked to a) withdraw from the class, or b) failing the class.
- In addition, no grade of "W" will be given to a student after midterm, unless he/she is earning a grade of "C" at the time of withdrawal. No grade of "I" will be given to a student who is failing.
- **EXCUSED ABSENCES** are allowed for the following: religious holiday; death in the family (see University handbook re: amount of days); pregnancy, jury duty, active military duty; travel for University business as documented by an official Ball State Travel Notice; and an EXTENDED and DOCUMENTED absence related to illness or health issues. All EXTENDED illnesses require a note from a medical professional.
- If the category of EXCUSED absences causes your TOTAL absences from the class to rise above 6, you will be deemed unable to fully complete the work required to earn credit for this course, and you will be asked to withdraw from the course. The

instructor will be sure that such situations are remedied with solutions that do not impact your GPA (an Incomplete or, in rare cases, a late withdrawal). The instructor will work with you to lay out clear expectations regarding how the course work will be completed.

- **TARDIES** are not accepted, and three instances of tardiness to class will equal one absence. In the instance of an emergency, please email me to let me know (as soon as you are safe and able.)
- **Link to BSU Attendance Policies.**

Required Texts/Resources:

- It is *strongly recommended* that students additionally purchase *Seven Pillars Acting* by Sonya Cooke.
- Full scripts will be uploaded via Canvas for scene assignment research and can often be found in the on-campus library.
- Additional reading materials will be provided by the instructor.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. **Classroom Exercises**: Students will engage in various acting exercises, incorporating the exploration of improvisation, scene work. Work can be demanding, both emotionally and physically. Hence, you are expected to 'hold the space' adequately, even when you are not the one performing.

2. **Assigned Performances:** Assigned performances will be given out and discussed in class. For performances, you are expected to come prepared: memorized, rehearsed, and fully present in your work.
NOTE: You must not miss class on the day you are scheduled to perform a scene, whether performing solo or with scene partners. Missing performance dates will result in failing grades for that performance assignment. If an emergency arises that causes you to be absent, you must promptly inform both your scene partner and the instructor of the situation. Please dress for your character while presenting your scenes.

3. **Journal Expectations:**
Once a week, you will be asked to hand in Journal Notebooks. Journal entries must be at minimum 150 words, maximum 250 words. Journals should cover the information listed below.

- Reflection on work from the current class week.
- Recording rehearsals with scene partner outside of class.
- Any questions from class.
- Any concerns regarding your scene partner, and your working dynamic.

Only your instructor will read your journal entries, any concerns that come up may be shared and will be kept confidential between student and instructor.
Students are expected to bring their journal to every class to record their learning, observations, and reflections.
NOTE: Please do not mix notes for other classes in your Journal. Your Journal notebook should be exclusively for this class.

4. **Actor Score**
Over the course, students will create an Actor's Score near the end of the course, using the full Pillars Technique. The Score will be graded on a 100 pt scale, based on comprehensive application to the scene, artistic choice, formatting, thoroughness, and depth and thoughtfulness of work. Please see Canvas for the full description of the Score.

5. **Written Analysis of Ball State Production**
Students will choose one MAINSTAGE production from the current semester and write a 4 page paper in MLA format in which they will analyze the use of Seven Pillars Acting technique in the performance. Papers must include in text citations and a bibliography.

6. **Pillars Quizzes**
On the day that the assigned reading is due, students will be given a brief quiz on the reading. Quizzes will be graded on a 100-point scale, based on competency in the chapter's topics.

7. **Rehearsal Guidelines**
Rehearsal guidelines are expected to be followed…

- The rehearsal should be no less than an hour.
- A rehearsal should take place at least a day before the next class. Meeting right before class does not count as a rehearsal.
- Rehearsals should take place in the appropriate environment that ensures that actors can focus on the work: a reserved studio space or partner's private residence are both adequate. Phones, pets, and roommates should not be present. Dorm rooms are not acceptable.
- Have open conversation with your partner about the scene. Avoid telling your partner what to do or directing them. Instead, ask thoughtful and respectful questions to solve issues that come up and to sculpt the moments as you like.
- The work in rehearsals should reflect the work in class. Set practical goals for each rehearsal in accordance with the progression of the course.
- Rehearsal is an extension of the behavior and code of conduct expected in class. Always treat your partners with respect. Any physical contact made with partners should be clearly communicated and mutually agreed to.

- Our policy on sexual harassment/assault extends to your rehearsal in your private homes and off-campus locations. Any reported behavior during rehearsal will be treated as if it occurred on campus and will result in immediate action.

Attire and Classroom Policies (Etiquette):

All acting classes in the department have required attire so that students can move freely and take part in acting exercises and activities. Though I do not require all-black attire, the attire should adhere to the following standards:

- Students must wear sweatpants, athletic shorts, or exercise pants. **(No jeans, please!)**
- From the waist up students must wear a t-shirt or tank top. T-shirts and tank tops must be long enough so that when hands are raised above the head no skin is showing at the midriff. Sweatshirts or long-sleeved t-shirts are also acceptable.
- Please wear all black on scene performances days, or a rehearsal costume appropriate to the character you are playing.
- Make sure your hair is tied back, and that all watches, bracelets, and dangling earrings are taken off for movement exercises and scenework.
- **CELL PHONES/DEVICES:** Don't use them in class. Put them on airplane mode, or simply turn them off. Cell phone use in class prevents you from being fully present and from focused learning. Please remove Apple or Android watches at the beginning of class (or make sure they are on a setting where you will not be receiving alerts.) **You will be asked to leave class and be marked absent for that day if I need to ask you to put away your phone while others are working.**
- No eating during class. Please bring a water bottle.

Tactile Teaching Statement:

- Studio theatre courses often require the instructor to touch or be in close physical proximity to students in order to adjust/align the body and guide the student on how to best execute the material. The instructor will always verbally request (and confirm) student consent before touching them. If, for whatever reason, being touched or physically adjusted is not part of a student's learning process or makes them uncomfortable, please let the course instructor know as soon as possible so that accommodations can be made. If a student is uncomfortable speaking with the instructor, they should contact the departmental Associate Chair, Tyler Smith (tasmith2@bsu.edu).

Physical Interaction (Physical Intimacy/Stage Violence) Between Students

- This class may contain scene work that involves stage violence or physical intimacy. This material will always be approached with the priority on clear communication of expectations, clear consent of all performers, and a respect for student safety. At the beginning of the semester you will be asked for your consent regarding stage violence or physical intimacy. If physical interaction with other students is not a part of your learning process or makes you uncomfortable, notify your instructor immediately so that accommodations can be made. Physical contact by anyone in the classroom should not and will not be used to demean you in any way and will only take place once clear and enthusiastic consent has been obtained. Any scenes involving violence or physical intimacy will be fully blocked / choreographed in class under instructor supervision. Any rehearsal of this material outside of class must follow the existing blocking / choreography exactly. If you are ever uncomfortable with a specific scene, exercise, or partner, notify your instructor immediately. If you are uncomfortable speaking with your instructor, contact departmental Associate Chair Tyler Smith (tasmith2@bsu.edu).

****Your consent and mental/emotional wellbeing are paramount. I recognize and respect your right to decline participation in scenes involving violence or physical intimacy, especially in cases of recent / short-term trauma, and you are not obligated to disclose the reason for declining. That said, please consider having a discussion with me before declining to act in an assigned scene.*

Attending Theatre and Dance Productions

You are expected to see all fall semester productions and dance concerts. Seeing theatre and dance is part of your education; I also encourage you to experience as many other performances as possible (music performances, museum exhibits, art shows, etc.) There will be in-class discussions regarding certain productions with advanced notice, and discussions are part of your PARTICIPATION GRADE.

Canvas and Email

You are responsible for any information and assignments disseminated for this course. This requires that you: (1) check Canvas daily for any announcements or postings; (2) check your BSU email account at least once per day. If you choose NOT to use your BSU account, then you must arrange to forward all BSU messages to your account of choice. Not receiving email because your account is not forwarded is not a valid excuse for missing announcements.

Class Cancellation Policy

If a class is cancelled or delayed, this will be posted on our Canvas page as an Announcement. Make sure to subscribe to Announcements. All replacement activities will be posted on Canvas.

Feedback Policy

• I will do my best to return email from your official BSU address, within 24 hours M – F and within 48 hours if sent on the weekend.
• I will make every effort to upload your grades to Canvas within ten days of submission/in class presentation.
• Please feel free to email me at any time if you have any questions or concerns about your work in this class.

Late Policy on Assigned Work

- Technical issues are not valid excuses for late work unless the problem stems from Canvas servers.
- Canvas will not accept assignments for grading after 11:59 pm on the final day of class.
- In some instances, and with at least 36 hours advanced notice, I will consider extending an assignment when a student has communicated clearly and agreed upon a new due date. I reserve the right to decline extension requests if received after the due date.

Minimum Grade Policy: The lowest acceptable grade in a course for credit toward a major or minor in Theatre or Dance is D. Any student receiving a D- or lower must retake the course in order to receive credit towards a major or minor in the department.

Grading

GRADING: To receive a letter grade of "A," a student must attend all classes, participate in classroom discussions and exercise and scene presentations, attend all the requisite theatre performances, and complete all reading and written assignments on time. Physical and written exercises must show original and creative thinking with an excellent grasp of the ideas and themes discussed in class. A letter grade of "B," "C," or "D" will be based on the degree to which the above requirements are met or not met.

Final grades will be determined as follows:

- **Attendance and Participation:** 20%
- **Journals:** 15%
- **Pillars Quizzes:** 20%
- **Written Play Response** 5%

- **Actor's Score:** 20%
- **Final Presentation:** 20%

Grading Scale: A, 100-95; A-, 94-90; B+, 89-87; B, 86-83; B-, 82-80; C+, 79-77; C, 76-73; C-, 72-70; D+, 69-67; D, 66-63; D-, 62-60; F, 59 and below

Please see detailed assignment handout for grading breakdown.

Student Academic Ethics Policy

Honesty, trust, and personal responsibility are fundamental attributes of the university community. Academic dishonesty and other forms of academic misconduct threaten the foundation of an institution dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and will not be tolerated. To maintain its credibility and reputation, and to equitably assign evaluations of scholastic and creative performance, Ball State University is committed to maintaining a climate that upholds and values the highest standards of academic integrity. Visit the VPAA's ***academic integrity website*** *(Students tab) for resources on understanding academic integrity, citing sources properly, and avoiding inadvertent academic dishonesty. To learn about BSU's academic integrity expectations and students' rights, please read the University* ***Student Academic Ethics Policy****.*

Academic integrity violations include giving or receiving an unfair academic advantage (cheating), presenting someone else's ideas or work as your own (plagiarism), and falsifying academic records. Unless otherwise indicated, you must work independently by yourself. Check with me if you are unsure whether something constitutes academic dishonesty. Examples of academic integrity violations include but are not limited to:

- *Using resources not authorized by the faculty member (including devices, AI tools, hidden notes, and open books)*
- *Using commercial study websites to find answers to graded assignments (Chegg, Course Hero, StudyPool, OneClass, etc.).*
- *Without the instructor's written permission, giving away, buying, or selling graded assignments class notes, exams, study guides, or other course*

materials to other students or to third-party vendors (Course Hero, Chegg, 24HourAnswers, etc.).

- *Working with another person on any assignment other than authorized group projects.*
- *Sharing or allowing others to access your files, whether done with permission or not.*
- *Reusing your own work from another semester, course, or section.*
- *Sharing answers with others during exams (passing notes, texting, whispering, gesturing)*
- *Discussing exam questions and answers with students who have not taken the exam.*
- *Soliciting others to complete work for you.*

No Use of Generative AI Permitted

- *All work conducted and/or submitted in this course must be your own, completed in accordance with the Ball State University's **Student Academic Ethics Policy**. You may not collaborate with or make use of ChatGPT or any other generative AI applications at any time to develop materials submitted in this course, unless discussed with instructor prior to submission.*

FULL TITLE IX POLICY for BSU

Tentative Weekly Breakdown and Important Dates: All Dates Subject to Change

Week 1: Introductions and Pillar 1: Contact

Tuesday, 8/25: Introductions, Syllabus, Just Be, Seven Pillars Introduction

Thursday, 8/27: Warm Up, Contact Introduction to Contact, Meisner Repetitions

Sunday August 30th: Last Day to Add/Drop Classes for the Term

Week 2: Contact/Physical Contact

Tuesday, 9/1: Meisner Repetitions Continued/Impulse Game Scene Partners chosen

Thursday, 9/3: Repetition Exercises Continued Impulse Game/Trading Fours

*Assignment: Journal 1 due 9/3 by the start of class

Reading: Circumstance

Week 3: Circumstance

Tuesday, 9/8:Contact Quiz/Introduction/Discussion of Circumstance

Thursday, 9/10: Circumstance Improv pt.1 and 2

*Assignment: Journal 2 Due 9/8 by the start of class

Week 4: Circumstance Continued

Tuesday, 9/15: Circumstance Improv pt. 3/4

Thursday, 9/17: Circumstance Improv Wrap Up/Circumstance Quiz

* Assignment: Journal 3 Due 9/15 by the start of class

Reading: Meaning

Week 5: Meaning/Emotional Life

Tuesday, 9/22: Meaning

Thursday, 9/24: Emotional Life Introduction, Journey Through Life Pt.1

* Assignment: Journal 4 Due 9/22 by the start of class

Week 6: Emotional Life

Tuesday, 9/29: Journey Through life Pt.2/3

Thursday, 10/1: Emotional Preparation Pt. 1 and 2

* Assignment: Journal 5 Due 9/29 by the start of class

*Quiz: Meaning

Week 7: Emotional life Wrap Up

Tuesday, 10/6: Emotional Preparation Pt. 3 and 4

Thursday, 10/8: No class, Faculty Retreat

* Assignment: Journal 6 Due 10/6 by the start of class

Week 8: Midterm Prep

Tuesday 10/13: No Class Fall Break

Thursday, 10/15: Midterm Scene Performances

* Assignment: Journal 7 Due 10/13 by the start of class

*Quiz: Meaning

Reading: Objective

Week 9: Objective

Tuesday, 10/20: Objective Introduction/New Scene Assignments

Thursday, 10/22: Objective Cards

* Assignment: Journal 8 Due 10/20 by the start of class

Week 10: Objective Continued

Tuesday, 10/27: Objective Improv

Thursday, 10/29: Audition Prep for Spring Shows

Spring Production Auditions 10/30

* Assignment: Journal 9 Due 10/27 by the start of class

Reading: Action

Week 11: Action

Tuesday, 11/3: Action Introduction

Thursday, 11/5: Action Cards/Improv

* Assignment: Journal 10 Due 11/3 by the start of class

Week 12: Action Continued

Tuesday, 11/10: Actor Score Introduced/Action Continued

Thursday, 11/12: Action Improv Continues

* Assignment: Journal 11 Due 11/10 by the start of class

Reading: Physical life

Week 13: Physical Life

Tuesday, 11/17: Physical Life Introductions/Plastiques

Thursday, 11/19: Plastiques/Wizard Wars

* Assignment: Journal 12 Due 11/17 by the start of class, Written Response to BSU Production Due 11/19

Week 14: Thanksgiving!

No Class this week!

Week 15:

Tuesday, 12/1: Final Scene Rehearsals

Thursday, 12/3: Final Scene Rehearsals

* Assignment: Journal 13 Due 11/10 by the start of class

***Please note that the Instructor reserves the right to edit assignments and due dates with advanced notice.**