

Syllabus (revised as of Jan 23, 2012) Acting I – 70059 – THR 210 - 005  
PAB Black Box; Tuesday and Thursday, 1:30 – 2:45pm

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Office Hours: None. Available after class, and by appointment. I will answer emails and phone messages in as timely a manner as possible.

**Text:** “The Stanislavski System – Growth and Methodology” by Perviz Sawoski, (second edition).

Also: “Respect for Acting” by Uta Hagen. I understand this book may also be available online.

### **Course Objectives:**

- To examine the process of acting and performance on stage and in life.
- To develop an awareness of and facility with the process, tools, and principles of clear communication and interaction - in theatre and in life.
- To encourage creative imagination.
- To practice the art of acting.

Also, please note that the mission of George Mason University's General Education Program is to educate, liberate, and broaden the mind, and to instill lifelong love of learning. In conjunction with each student's major program of study and other electives, minors, or certificates, this program seeks to produce graduates with intellectual vision, creative abilities, and moral sensibility, as well as the skills to assure a well-rounded and useable education. The General Education Program seeks four specific goals:

- Ensuring that all undergraduates develop skills in information gathering, written and oral communication, and analytical and quantitative reasoning.
- Development of knowledge by emphasizing major domains of thought and methods of inquiry.
- Enabling students to attain a breadth of knowledge that supports their specializations and contributes to their education in both personal and professional ways.
- Encouraging students to make important connections across boundaries (for example: among disciplines; between the university and the external world; between the United States and other countries).

We hope and expect that among the outcomes of your experience in this course will be:

- An ability to identify and analyze formal elements of acting (i.e. space, event, rhythm, tension, quality of movement, etc.) using appropriate vocabulary.
- An understanding of the relationship between performing technique and the intention and/or effect of a theatrical production.
- A satisfying experience of engaging in the artistic process, including conception, creation and ongoing critical analysis.
- An ability to perform with an engaging presence, clarity, and competence.

**Course Overview:**

Week 1	Introduction; context; preparation for physical work	Read assigned Stanislavski material
Week 2	Body shape and its use	Read "Respect for Acting"
Week 3	Space and its use	
Week 4	The Bench (Doing nothing well)	Receive Scene #1 assignment.
Week 5	The Bench (Level II) Interaction; interpersonal dynamics. Realistic interaction.	Scene #1 rehearsal and presentation
Week 6	Presenting Scene #1	See "This Is Our Youth"; write paper #1
Week 7	Normal behavior in real life. Basic character.	Paper #1 due ("This Is Our Youth"); Mid-term exam.
Week 8	Spring Break	Observe people in real life for character study
Week 9	Playing a character; Character in Action	Find a character to explore. Acting in character.
Week 10	Monologues	Character speaking.
Week 11	Tell us a story - Enact story you wish to tell, with character(s), detail, and event.	See "Galileo"; write Paper #2. Receive Scene #2 assignment; write mono-scene with action for final project.
Week 12	Develop Scene #2 and final mono-scene project	Paper #2 due ("Galileo").
Week 13	Perform Scene #2. Work on final mono-scene project	Rehearse Autocours#2. Develop your mono-scene. Write action script for it.
Week 14	Perform Scene #2; Perform final mono-scene project.	Prepare final mono-scene exam.
Week 15	Perform final mono-scene project	Submit final assessment/paper.

Written work must be handed in by 5:00 pm on the due date to avoid dropping one letter grade. Papers more than one week late will not be accepted.

Final self-assessment papers (exams) must be submitted electronically (by email) any time after the last class and before noon on May 10<sup>th</sup>. This final paper (assessment) **WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED AFTER 12 PM (noon) May 10, 2012.**

### Academic Calendar to be Aware Of:

Last day to drop with no tuition penalty\*\* January 31, 2012

**Last day to add classes**—all individualized section forms due\*\* January 31, 2012

**Last day to drop\*\*** February 24, 2012

Selective Withdrawal Period: February 27 – March 30, 2012

Spring Break: March 12 – 18, 2012

### Course Guidelines:

The material covered in this course necessitates your active and open participation.

- Attitude will be considered as part of your participation.
- The experiences are learning tools.
- Exercises build upon each other and vocabulary is built sequentially.
- You must be in class.
- You must be available to work with your classmates outside of class (though time will be allowed for you to accomplish many tasks during the course).

You will be required to see and write about the acting choices in GMU plays (as assigned). You are encouraged to see the studio shows as well, and I will accept one extra credit paper from one of the studio shows, but note that this paper may not be substituted for the original assignment. [Extra credit is just that and these papers may not replace one of the assigned papers.]. Papers are due the next class after the performance closes its run, and should be approximately three (3) pages. Papers must be handed in by 5:00 pm on the due date to avoid dropping one letter grade. Papers more than one week late will not be accepted. Papers should be typed in a 12 point font.

Your assigned papers will ask you to examine a performance, and discuss the successful, unsuccessful, or otherwise interesting aspects of the performance, from the point of view of the concepts (and using the vocabulary) of the class. **Do not summarize the story of the play!** You may presume the reader is familiar with the play. Do not simply tell the reader that you liked some aspect or didn't. Tell us why it is interesting, and convince us with your argument and your examples. Be specific in detailing the acting, directing, or choreographic choices. These papers should reflect your grasp of performance concepts **as discussed and explored in the course** and be examples of positive criticism. There is great professional work in the area. I will accept extra credit for a paper regarding a professional show [amateur and other educational shows do not count].

Aspects of this class may prove athletic in nature. Attire for the class must allow for movement. Heels, platform shoes, boots, and sandals are, in general, unacceptable. The exception to this rule is for scene work, for which you are encouraged to dress the part. If you are not comfortable tumbling or doing a cartwheel in your attire, it is not appropriate for the class. [Note: if you have physical limitations, simply make me aware of them and Take Care of Yourself!]

Some of the work we do will necessitate human contact. Touch raises issues for some people. Classmates will be asked to make safe physical contact with each other over the course of the semester. The instructor may use touch to clarify and test the understanding of concepts and vocabulary. You will be allowed to step out of any exercise that raises significant discomfort (with the mutual understanding that the work is designed to benefit a deeper understanding of the acting process). If you have problems with touch or with individuals in the class, please communicate this to me outside of class. You may also feel free to address such issues with the Department Chair.

You may be photographed and/or your presentations may be videotaped for the purposes of the class. Such photos and/or videos will be made available only to the teacher and the students involved, and only by their consent. If you would prefer not to be photographed or videotaped, please let the professor know, and no photos or videos of you will be taken. The unauthorized taking of photos or videos during class is forbidden.

Communication and trust is important to the collaborative process. You will be removed from class if you impair either. You will be expected to conduct yourself in a mature and professional manner. Treating each other with respect and consideration is of paramount importance in this class.

Assignments will occasionally necessitate your work outside of class, particularly on group assignments (“auto-cours”). You are responsible for meetings outside of class, and any unreliability in this area will be reflected in your grade: preparation is visible; better work gets higher grades; and absences and cancellations outside of the classroom will be considered with equal weight under the absence policy. Do your part, support your scene partner(s), rehearse seriously, and all will prosper.

I will grade you holistically. I will assign a letter grade based on your work in several areas, and the average of these grades will determine your final grade. A necessary mix of subjective and objective analysis will be applied to the quality of your participation, preparation, critical thinking and improvement overall.

Each of the in-class presentations is worth one letter grade, as is each paper and any test. In addition to averaging these grades, attendance, attitude, and improvement over the course of the semester will be considered in arriving at your final grade.

Grading attendance: Attendance is expected and your grade will be lowered as a result of absence. Each absence lowers your grade approximately five percent (5%) or half a single letter grade. Two late arrivals equal one absence.

Finally, as the class grows together we may stray from the course outline. Academically worthwhile tangents and more advanced work may be explored if warranted. Be flexible and try to respond before you react.

**ETHICS, UNIVERSITY POLICIES, HONOR CODE:**

*As a courtesy to others in the class, and in accordance with George Mason University policy, please turn off all beepers, cellular telephones and other wireless communication devices at the start of class. Also, please refrain from using Instant Messenger or email during class.*

**Copyright Law**

Each student is individually responsible for his or her own work on assignments and creative projects. A willingness to learn from and share ideas with other students is important and equally important is that students do their own work. The use of other artists' images, videos, sounds, music is allowed as long as your inclusion of these creative works falls within the realm of "fair use" as described by copyright law. Students should always cite their sources. Try to use original source material as often as possible.

**Honor Code**

The Honor Code, as stated in the George Mason University Undergraduate Catalog, applies to all students in this class. The Honor Code requires that the work you do be your own. As a university faculty member, I have an obligation to refer the names of students who may have violated the Honor Code to the Student Honor Council, which treats such cases very seriously.

Using someone else's words, ideas, music or art without giving them credit is plagiarism, a very serious Honor Code offense. It is crucial to understand how to avoid plagiarism when using material from other sources. No grade is important enough to justify cheating, for which there are serious consequences. If you feel unusual pressure about your grade in this or any other course, please talk to me or a member of the Counseling Center staff.

**Disruptive Behavior**

Faculty, staff, and students have the right to be treated with respect and professionalism by students and peers in all classes and activities sponsored by the Theater department. Disruptive behavior will not be tolerated. If, in the opinion of the responsible faculty member, a student becomes disruptive in class or rehearsal, faculty may exercise their judgment on how best to address the situation, be it by requiring the student to leave, calling Campus Police, or taking other steps deemed necessary for the safety and well-being of the class, rehearsal or group. Such action may affect the student's final grade and standing in the University.

**GRADING:**

Letter grades will be assigned based on the George Mason University undergraduate grading system in which a letter grade of "A" is equal to 4.00 grade points, "A-" equals 3.67 grade points, etc. See the Academic Policies section of the *University Catalog* (available online at [www.gmu.edu](http://www.gmu.edu)) for more information.

Grading Standards: What makes a project or other assignment an “A”? (B, C, D, F)

### **Grading Standards:**

- A grade of “A” is given for superlative work that demonstrates a profound commitment to the course material, and further, employs this material as a springboard for independent thought and work.
- A grade of “B” is given for very good work that completely fulfills all the requirements of the course in a conscientious and dedicated manner, and that demonstrates mastery of the course content.
- A grade of “C” is given for work that fulfills all the requirements of the course in a satisfactory manner, but that falls short of demonstrating rigor and mastery.
- A grade of “D” is given for work that is unsatisfactory in content, but meets the standards of submission.
- A grade of “F” is given for work that fails to fulfill the requirements of the course.

To be more specific:

Score of A: Superior

Meets most or all of the following criteria:

- Finds a visually and intellectually interesting approach to the assigned topic
- Goes beyond what was covered in class and shows serious thought
- The work demonstrates an excellent understanding of formal and conceptual concerns
- The work is well-crafted and has no distracting errors in mechanics

Score of B: Strong

Meets most or all of the following criteria:

- Clearly addresses the topic as assigned and explores it thoroughly
- Shows a mastery of what was covered in class and may pull in some ideas and techniques from beyond class
- Is well developed, with strong artistic content.
- Has no more than a few minor mechanical errors

Score of C: Competent

Meets most or all of the following criteria:

- Adequately addresses the topic and covers the major points required
- Sticks with ideas covered in class and does so accurately
- Has artistic qualities but is not particularly creative.
- Shows competent craftsmanship, but may have many small flaws and/or a few major flaws

Score of D: Weak

Shows any of the following problems:

- Doesn't cover all of the topic as assigned
- Doesn't show an adequate understanding of what was covered in class
- Serious problems in artistic content, may be cliché, or unimaginative
- Contains distracting technical flaws. Lacks serious effort

Score of F: Inadequate

**Shows any of the following problems:**

- Doesn't address the topic as assigned and/or doesn't show an understanding of what was covered in class
- Very little (if any) creative effort
- Very little (if any) thought behind the work.
- Is severely flawed mechanically.

All communications regarding this course must occur via Mason email accounts.

**GMU Add/Drop Policy:** The last day to drop this class with no tuition liability is **January 31, 2012**. The last day to drop this class without Dean's permission is **February 24, 2012**. The selective withdrawal period is February 27 – March 30, 2012. It is the student's responsibility to check to verify that they are properly enrolled, as no credit will be awarded.

**ADA Compliance:** If you have a diagnosed disability or learning difference and you need academic accommodations, please inform us at the beginning of the semester and contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), (SUB I room 234, 703-993-2474, or [ods@gmu.edu](mailto:ods@gmu.edu)). You must provide us with a faculty contact sheet from that office outlining the accommodations needed for your disability or learning difference. All academic accommodations must be arranged in advance through the ODS.

**Writing Center:** Students who are in need of intensive help with grammar, structure or mechanics in their writing should make use of the services of the Writing Center, located in Robinson A116 (703-993-1200). The services of the Writing Center are available by appointment, online and, occasionally, on a walk-in basis.

**Other GMU resources:** <http://www.gmu.edu/departments/freshman/resources.html>  
University Policies: University Catalog can be accessed [catalog.gmu.edu](http://catalog.gmu.edu)  
University Libraries "Ask a Librarian" <http://library.gmu.edu/mudge/IM/IMRef.html>

**Honor Code, Copyright, & Computing Policies:** *To promote a stronger sense of mutual responsibility, respect, trust, and fairness among all members of the George Mason University community and with the desire for greater academic and personal achievement, we, the student members of the university community, have set forth this honor code:* Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, or lie in matters related to academic work.

You are expected to adhere to all University policies and guidelines during your participation in this course. All work must be your own. Inappropriate use of the work of others is a George Mason University Honor Code violation. Please review the University's website for information on the following: Honor Code and Judicial Procedures; Copyright/Fair Use; and Responsible Use of Computing.

### **GMU Email Accounts**

Students must activate their GMU email accounts to receive important University information, including messages related to this class. The GMU email accounts are the official accounts for this class.

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) caps.gmu.edu or (703) 993-2380

**It is not possible to receive an incomplete grade in this class.** If you anticipate difficulty in completing this course see your instructor immediately to discuss your options.

**You are encourage to sign up for the Mason Alert System** by visiting the website <https://alert.gmu.edu>. An emergency poster exists in each classroom explaining what to do in the event of crises and that further information about emergency procedures exists on <http://www.gmu.edu/service/cert>.

**NOTE:** Cell phones, pagers and alarms must be turned off in class. Exceptions will only be made in advance and for emergencies.