

THEA 100 Introduction to Theater

Héctor Alvarez

Theater Studies | Emory University

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Statement:

My "Introduction to Theater" course provides students with rigorous exposure to the practice of theater-making—including acting, directing, playwriting, and design—alongside an engagement with deeper philosophical questions about theater's nature, purpose, and impact across diverse societies and cultures. The course also emphasizes the practice of collaboration, nurturing students to become gracious and proactive collaborators who understand when to lead and when to follow, arriving prepared with ideas yet willing to adapt for the collective good.

After participating in the Piedmont Project, my vision for integrating eco-consciousness into this course expanded dramatically. I now see greater potential for exploring principles of sustainability and addressing our societies' multiple environmental crises. For instance, we can draw parallels between collaborative relationships in nature, such as those between trees and mycelial networks, to illuminate concepts like interdependence, symbiosis, and resource sharing within our theatrical collaborations.

The updated syllabus now features a dedicated unit on Eco-Theater, examining the work of director Katie Mitchell, designer Tanja Beer, and the collective Superhero Clubhouse. I am also working to virtually bring Lanxing Fu, co-director of Superhero Clubhouse, into the classroom for a direct dialogue with students.

Furthermore, the final project has been reimagined. Student teams will now create an original 10-minute play or theatrical event—such as a nature walk, performance-lecture, or site-specific performance—that directly addresses an environmental or sustainability issue. This could range from local ecological concerns on campus to broader challenges like climate change, extinction, or environmental justice. Crucially, each team's design choices must incorporate eco-design principles, utilizing only recycled, repurposed, or found materials, fostering creativity within a framework of environmental responsibility.

THEA 100 Introduction to Theater

Fall 2025

Section 1 T-TH 2:30-3:45pm

Section 2 T-TH 4:00-5:15pm

Schwartz Theater Lab, Schwartz 203

Professor Héctor Alvarez (he/him)

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Office Hours: T-TH 1:00pm-2:00pm

and by appointment

“I regard the theatre as the greatest of all art forms, the most immediate way in which a human being can share with another the sense of what it is to be a human being.”

Oscar Wilde

“There are moments in a play when we feel that we have all been touched at the same moment. We’ve come in as hundreds of heads, with hundreds of different preoccupations. We’ve come off the street – that busy state of chaos of the world – and now, in a short space of time, through the work of a little group of actors in a play, we’re brought to a point where we sense a moment of truth.”

Peter Brook

“Theatre is the art of looking again, and in this process we magically move from passive looking to active seeing.”

Brian Kulick

“An ancient Sanskrit treatise on art, the Natya Shastra, suggests that all good theater accomplishes three tasks simultaneously:

1. it entertains the drunk;
2. it answers the question “How to live?”
3. it answers the question “How does the universe work?”

Anne Bogart

Theater takes place all the time, wherever one is; an art simply facilitates persuading one this is the case.

John Cage

WHAT IS THIS CLASS AND HOW DOES IT WORK?

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course offers a dynamic exploration of theater as a **collaborative art form**. Together we will investigate fundamental questions such as: *What is theater? What purpose does it serve? How have diverse societies and cultures throughout history answered these questions and shaped their theatrical traditions?* To ground our exploration, we will explore the field of Eco-Theatre as a contemporary response to these questions. We will also examine the unique phenomenon of artistic collaboration that lies at the heart of theater. You will gain insights into the creative roles of actors, directors, designers, playwrights, and the audience itself, all of whom contribute to the co-creation of the theatrical experience. Engaging in a series of hands-on assignments, you will have the opportunity to develop your collaborative and creative skills, and learn to effectively work within a group to devise and produce original theatrical experiences.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Develop an appreciation for and a deeper understanding of theater as a creative and social phenomenon.
- Demonstrate knowledge of basic theatrical terminology and concepts.
- Apply fundamental techniques in acting, designing, playwriting and directing in the creation and performance of scenes.
- Critically evaluate live theatrical performances, assessing artistic choices and their impact on the audience experience.
- Develop creative problem-solving and collaborative skills through active participation in group projects.
- Analyze and articulate how principles of Eco-Theatre can inform theatrical creation and engage with environmental themes, fostering a deeper understanding of theater's potential role in sustainability discourse.
- Nurture self-awareness and confidence when communicating in front of a group.
- Cultivate skills and mindsets conducive to the creative process such as comfort with ambiguity and frustration; the ability to generate, test, and discard multiple ideas; risk-taking, open-mindedness and experimentation.

MAIN PROJECTS YOU WILL WORK ON

Open Scenes: This project is designed to give you hands-on experience with the collaborative nature of theater-making. I will provide you with the text for a very brief scene. You will work with a partner to bring that text to life, making creative choices about character, conflict and context. This project will help you develop basic acting and script analysis skills, and also explore the fundamentals of directing and design. We will workshop these scenes in class before you present them.

Theater Time Travel: This project offers a unique opportunity to delve into the rich tapestry of theater history through research and a creative approach to presentation. In groups of 4-5, you will work collaboratively to research a specific performance tradition, gaining a deeper understanding of its historical context, conventions, performance spaces, key figures, stories/texts, and artistic practices. Examples include Ancient Greek Tragedy, Medieval Mystery Plays, Commedia dell'Arte, Elizabethan Theater, Melodrama, Japanese Noh, etc. Each group will create and perform a 10-minute "exhibition of style" that delivers key information *and* dramatizes some of the major theatrical conventions in *the spirit* of the tradition. These presentations will be done in class.

Midterm Exam: This will be a 15 question quiz testing your knowledge of basic theatrical concepts, practitioners, and ideas explored in the class. Questions in the quiz will come from the lectures and in-class discussion. I strongly recommend that you take notes during class.

Engaging with Live Theater: This assignment aims to deepen your engagement with live theater by encouraging critical reflection and analysis of two productions: *My Foot My Tutor* by Peter Handke and *Peerless* by Jiehae Park, both presented at Theater Emory this semester. You will attend the shows and submit a response in which you articulate critical observations about the production and evaluate the artistic choices made by the artists.

Eco-Theatre Project: This culminating project is the equivalent of a "final exam," and it's your opportunity to synthesize and showcase the knowledge and skills you've acquired throughout the course. Working in groups of 4-5, you will collaboratively conceive, write, produce, and design an original 7-10 min theatrical event. This experience challenges you to integrate your understanding of playwriting, acting, directing, and design, ultimately resulting in a fully realized performance. For this assignment, **your theatrical event must address an environmental or sustainability issue**. This could involve anything from local ecological concerns on campus to broader challenges like climate change, extinction, environmental justice and sustainability. Furthermore, your design choices (sets, props, costume) must incorporate **eco-design principles**, utilizing only recycled, repurposed, or found materials.

These projects are complemented with assigned readings, viewings, in-class workshops and activities that will give you the tools and the confidence to succeed each step of the way.

GRADING BREAKDOWN

Open Scenes	15%
Midterm	10%
Theater Time Travel	20%
Eco-Theatre Project	25%
Engaging with Live Theater	5% (2.5% each)
Collaboration Grade	15% (5% per project)***
Participation Grade	10%

*****What's a 'Collaboration Grade'?** One of the goals of this class is to teach you how to be a gracious, inspired and effective collaborator, someone who carries their fair share of the workload, is reliable, comes prepared with good ideas, and treats fellow collaborators with respect. The three group projects (Open Scenes, Theater Time Travel, and Eco-Theatre Project) are set up to foster this kind of collaboration. For these projects you will receive two separate grades: one from me (primarily responding to the strength of the work you present) and one from your teammates (evaluating how well you collaborated with the rest of the group).

GRADING PHILOSOPHY AND RUBRIC

I understand that performing in front of others, especially knowing you are being evaluated, can be a source of anxiety. For this reason, I have designed the course and the progression of assignments in such a way that you can gradually build your confidence and skill set.

More importantly, please know that you are not graded on 'talent' in this class. Rather, you are graded on your willingness to engage with the course material and assignments, your ability to effectively collaborate with others, your capacity to take risks and make bold choices, and your willingness to generate, test, and discard multiple ideas as you look for ideas that “work onstage.”

In order to make the grading process as transparent as possible I have developed the following general rubric. Please be aware that whatever grade you receive in this class is an assessment based on your performance as it relates to the standards and guidelines outlined in this syllabus.

In this class, a final **grade of A** is given to students who not only exceed expectations but also meet the following criteria:

- You are ambitious, creative, and innovative when developing creative and written work.
- You demonstrate an enthusiasm for and commitment to the course subject matter.
- You move beyond basic ideas and clichés, pushing your peers and instructor to see, think and feel in fresh and unexpected ways.
- You contribute constructively and thoughtfully to course and group discussions, you foster a

collaborative learning community by connecting your ideas to those of others.

- You adhere to the **Electronic Use Policy** outlined below at all times.

B Grades will be awarded to those whose work and participation is effective yet not exceptional.

C Grades will be awarded to those whose work and participation is average.

D and F grades will be awarded for work that is incomplete, late, off topic, or missing components, and/or for a lack of participation, low engagement, unclear communication, plagiarism, etc.

CLASS SCHEDULE

This schedule is subject to change

WEEK 1

August 28 Introduction to the class and the syllabus.

WEEK 2

September 2 Collaboration and Theater. Group Composition.
Read: 'Four Steps for Collaboration' by Anne Bogart.
'What I Mean When I Talk About Collaboration' by Deborah Stein.

September 4 What is Theater?
Listen: *Fiasco!* In This American Life podcast

WEEK 3

September 9 The Actor's Craft. Acting Exercises.
Open Scene Assignment
Watch: [Tom Hanks gives the Oxford Union an acting lesson](#)
Add/Drop Period ends tomorrow, September 10.

September 11 Raise the Stakes! Open Scene Workshop
Memorize: Open Scene Text.
Book: your free tickets for *My Foot My Tutor* and *Peerless* at [Theater Emory](#)

WEEK 4

September 16 Open Scenes workshop: adding The Event.
Rehearse: work on your scene with your partner over the weekend

September 18 Open Scenes Presentations.
Rehearse: work on your scene with your partner over the weekend.

WEEK 5

September 23 Theater Time Travel Assignment.

September 25 In-class rehearsal Theater Time Travel.
Bring: research materials for Theater Time Travel.

WEEK 6

September 30 Theater Time Travel Dress Rehearsal (Groups 1, 2, and 3).

October 2 Theater Time Travel Dress Rehearsal (Groups 4, 5, and 6).
***My Foot My Tutor* at Theater Emory playing Oct 2-5**

WEEK 7

October 7 Theater Time Travel Final Presentation (Groups 1, 2, and 3).

October 9 Theater Time Travel Final Presentation (Groups 4, 5, and 6).
***My Foot My Tutor* Response due on Canvas by 11.59 pm.**

WEEK 8

October 14 **No class—Fall Break!**

October 16 What is theatricality?/*My Foot My Tutor* class discussion

WEEK 9

October 21 Eco-Theatre 1: Katie Mitchell. Eco-Theatre Project Assignment.
Read: Katie Mitchell On Making Sustainable Theater

Watch: *A Play For The Living At A Time of Extinction*

October 23 Eco-Theatre 2: The Living Stage—Tanja Beer’s Sustainable Design
Read: Theater in the Age of Climate Change (selected essays)
In-class rehearsal for Eco-Theatre Project

WEEK 10

October 28 Midterm. Eco-Theatre 3: Lanxing Fu and Superhero Clubhouse
Watch: *Climate Artists: Superhero Clubhouse* | ALL ARTS TV
Read: The Eco-Theater Manifesto
In-class rehearsal for Eco-Theatre Project

October 30 In-class rehearsal for Eco-Theatre Project

WEEK 11

November 4 **No class**—*I will be presenting at a conference*
Assignment on Canvas: What is theater for?
Work with your group on Eco-Theatre Project

November 6 In-class rehearsal for Eco-Theatre Project

WEEK 12

November 11 In-class rehearsal for Eco-Theatre Project

November 13 In-class rehearsal for Eco-Theatre Project
Script or production concept due

WEEK 13

November 18 In-class rehearsal for Eco-Theatre Project
Groups 1, 2, and 3 present “work in progress” and receive feedback

November 20 In-class rehearsal for Eco-Theatre Project
Groups 4, 5 and 6 present “work in progress” and receive feedback

WEEK 14

November 25 Eco-Theatre Project dress rehearsal (All groups)

November 27 **No class—Thanksgiving Break!**

WEEK 15

December 2	Group Presentations: Eco-Theatre Project (Groups 1, 2 and 3)
December 4	Group Presentations: Eco-Theatre Project (Groups 4, 5, and 6)

WEEK 16

December 9	Final Reflection. Course Evaluations Peerless response due?
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I look forward to getting to know you and supporting your learning this course.

CLASS POLICIES AND OTHER FINE PRINT

ATTENDANCE AND PUNCTUALITY

Class attendance and enthusiastic participation is the foundation of your success in this class. Both your presence and your punctuality are crucial for building an ensemble, engaging with the material, and respecting your fellow collaborators and the work of theater itself. **You are allowed 2 absences** during the semester. I do not make a distinction between 'excused' or 'unexcused' absences. After 2 absences, one-third of a letter grade will be deducted from your final grade for each additional absence. If you find yourself in this situation, reach out and we'll discuss a plan of action. If you need to miss class, please email me as soon as possible and BEFORE THE CLASS to let me know. If you are absent, you are responsible for finding out all the information given in class.

Do not be late; tardiness is a disruption to you and your classmates. **Three tardies equal an absence**, and therefore a lower grade. A tardy is defined as not being in the classroom at the scheduled start of the class. If you are coming from a different class across campus that will prevent you from arriving on time, please reach out to me to make alternative arrangements. Should you arrive 15 minutes or later from the beginning of class, you will be given a full absence for the day.

ELECTRONIC USE

No cell phones, laptops, watches, tablets, e-readers or other electronic devices are allowed to be used during any class, unless otherwise specified by the instructor or authorized as an accommodation of disability. Please silence all electronic devices and put them away before the start of class. If you are dealing with an emergency and need to take a call during class please talk to me before we start the class.

CHATGPT AND OTHER AI

When used critically and judiciously, AI can be a powerful creative tool. Many artists are beginning to incorporate large-language models into their practices and these technologies will revolutionize art-making in the coming years. If you use AI in any assignments you will need to disclose it to me and the class. Failure to disclose the use of AI, like failure to cite sources, constitutes a breach of academic integrity and can have serious repercussions like an F grade in the class and disciplinary action at the University level.

DEADLINES, LATE WORK AND MISSED WORK

Homework, readings, projects and group presentations are due on assigned days which are listed on the calendar. **Late work will not be accepted** unless you secure an extension before the due date by talking to me. A missed in-class performance or presentation may be made up only at the discretion of the instructor, as time allows.

CLASS ETIQUETTE

Eating is not allowed so please refrain from bringing food into class. You are welcome to bring water or coffee in a bottle or closed container, but please take out empty cups/bottles with you at the end of class. On most days we will start class by playing a game or doing a warm so wearing clothes that you feel comfortable moving in is recommended. Similarly, many classes will include time for rehearsal and other “up-on-your-feet activities.” You are welcome to use the props and furniture present in the space, but the classroom needs to be restored back to its original state at the end of each class, so you will be expected to put things you have used back to where they belong. I can assist with this.

REHEARSAL OUTSIDE OF CLASS

I have structured the course so that there is ample time for you and your team to work together during class. To make these sessions productive you will need to come in prepared with ideas you want to test. For instance, this might include bringing props, sound, or costume pieces you want to try out in a scene, or three different ideas for what the conflict between the characters is. From time to time (and especially for the final project) you will need to meet outside of class with your teammates to work on and rehearse your project. I know it’s hard to coordinate schedules and I understand that you will be busy with other coursework for your other classes, internships, jobs, etc. To help you with this, I have kept reading assignments to a minimum in this course. I ask that you are proactive and flexible with your teammates when looking for times to meet, and prioritize getting together.

SUPPORTING YOU IN THIS COURSE

I am committed to your success in this class and I’m here for you. In addition to my regular office hours I’m happy to schedule meetings in person or on Zoom at other times. If you encounter difficulties during the class, have questions, want to follow up on something, or just want to say hello and talk about theater, please reach out. It usually takes me 24-48 hours to respond to emails.

HONOR CODE

This class adheres to Emory’s Honor Code which includes “plagiarizing ... seeking, using, giving, or obtaining unauthorized assistance in any academic assignment or examination” as forms of academic misconduct. Students who violate the Honor Code may be subject to a written mark on their record, failure of the course, suspension, permanent exclusion, or a combination of these or other sanctions. Academic policies and regulations of the Honor Code are found [HERE](#).

TITLE IX

We all deserve to be in spaces free from discrimination on the basis of sex, gender, sexuality, race, nationality, religion, and disability. You also deserve a space free from sexual misconduct including but not limited to sexual harassment, interpersonal & sexual violence. I am always a resource, should you need me. I also want to be as transparent as possible so please know that I am a mandated reporter. This means that in some

instances I would not be a confidential resource for you. Additionally, here are some campus resources:

Title IX Policy

Office of Respect: Main Office: 404-727-1514 & Crisis Line: 470-270-5360

Day League Crisis Line: 404-377-1428

Student Intervention Services (SIS) Phone: 404-430-1120, sisteam@emory.edu

INCLUSIVE STUDENT LEARNING

Your success in this class is important to me. We all learn differently and need different support. If there are aspects of the course that prevent you from learning or make you feel excluded please let me know right away. Together we can develop strategies to meet both your needs and the requirements of the course.

OFFICE OF ACCESSIBILITY SERVICES

If you have a documented disability and are in need of accommodations for this semester, I encourage you to contact the Office of Accessibility Services (OAS) to learn more about the registration process and steps for requesting accommodations. If you are a student that is currently registered with OAS and have not received a copy of your accommodation notification letter within the first week of class, please notify OAS immediately. If you are a student who has an accommodation in place please coordinate sometime with me during the first week of the semester, to communicate your specific needs for the course as it relates to your approved accommodations. For additional information regarding OAS, please visit the website: accessibility.emory.edu

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Emory University acknowledges the Muscogee (Creek) people who lived, worked, produced knowledge on, and nurtured the land where Emory's Oxford and Atlanta campuses are now located. In 1821, fifteen years before Emory's founding, the Muscogee were forced to relinquish this land. We recognize the sustained oppression, land dispossession, and involuntary removals of the Muscogee and Cherokee peoples from Georgia and the Southeast. Emory seeks to honor the Muscogee Nation and other Indigenous caretakers of this land by humbly seeking knowledge of their histories and committing to respectful stewardship of the land.

INSTITUTIONAL STATEMENT ON DIVERSITY

The Emory community is open to all who have a commitment to the highest ideals of intellectual engagement, critical inquiry, and integrity. We welcome a diversity of gender identities, sexual orientations, abilities, and disabilities, as well as racial, ethnic, cultural, socioeconomic, religious, national, and international backgrounds, believing that the academic and social energy that results from such diversity is essential to advancing knowledge, addressing society's most pressing issues, and attending to the full spectrum of human needs in service to the common good.

