Theatre Arts, MFA

Learning Outcomes

Acting Subprogram
Graduates must demonstrate:

• the ability to employ a broad range of acting knowledge and skills in the creation and presentation of roles;
• the ability to perform in plays and roles of various types, and from various periods;
• the acquisition of advanced understanding and capabilities in voice and speech, movement, and play analysis;
• a working knowledge of historical, critical, and theoretical content and the ways they inform playwriting and dramatic writing, the creation of roles, and other aspects of production;
• the ability to utilize digital media as a creative platform for self-promotion and in live performance;
• a working knowledge of skill sets and business-related tools to manage a professional acting career; and
• the ability to collaborate at a professional level with actors, directors, designers, playwrights, dramaturgs, and stage managers in the processes of production.

Design Subprogram
Graduates must demonstrate:

• development of new work and new artists through a creative, collaborative process; and advanced abilities in the unification of all design elements used in professional production through effective collaboration with diverse groups of artists and technicians with a range of life experiences and perspectives;
• thorough knowledge of health and safety practices associated with theatre production;
• with respect for the great global traditions, the ability to push the boundaries of theatre, using sophisticated tools and technologies; the ability to exhibit advanced knowledge in and to integrate the history of décor/fashion and cultural modes; skills drawing, color theory, lighting; analog and digital facility in 2D and 3D design in tactile, lighting and audio arts; and aesthetic, theoretical, and/or technical approaches to creating compelling stories and experiences that incorporate new technologies and digital art-making practices in live performance, interactive art installations, and user-based live events;
• creative and technical ability to develop the design of a production from concept to finished product, and produce full design packages for at least two realized productions;
• the capacity to provide space for diversity and foster social responsibility and change through a working knowledge of script analysis, which includes the ways that historical, critical, cultural, and theoretical perspectives and content inform playwrights, actors, stage managers, directors, and designers; and
• the ability to work with theatre professionals in their processes of production.

Directing Subprogram
Graduates must demonstrate advanced professional competence in directing including, but not limited to:

• the ability to integrate advanced understanding and capabilities in play analysis, performance, and design in creating the concept of a production;
• the ability to develop and guide fully mounted productions of a wide variety of performance styles and plays from statement of concept through public performance;
• a broad knowledge of dramatic literature and/or theatre history, including a demonstrated ability to undertake inquiry, investigation, or research associated with various aspects of performance and production;
• the ability to work with collaborators (actors/performers, playwrights/dramaturgs, and designers) in the processes of production, including the ability to conduct rehearsals effectively;
• an understanding of basic design principles and of aural and visual comprehension in the theatre and other dramatic media;
• an understanding of all the theatre arts and crafts at a sufficient level of knowledge to communicate with other artists and producers and to make informed critical judgments in all areas of the theatre;
• a basic understanding of the aesthetic, theoretical, and/or technical approaches to create compelling stories and experiences that incorporate new technologies and digital artmaking practices in live performance, interactive art installations, and user-based live events;
• the ability to develop and direct various forms of new work that engage diverse writers with multiple life experiences and perspectives; and
• directing at least two full-length, public productions, one of which must receive full technical support.

Dramaturgy Subprogram
Graduates must demonstrate:

• a broad knowledge of the various elements of theatrical production;
• a broad knowledge of theatre history, theory, criticism, and performance studies;
• awareness of current issues and developments in the fields of theatre, playwriting, and dramaturgy;
• advanced skills in the practice of production dramaturgy, including dramaturgical research and writing, and script analysis;
• advanced skills in the practice of new play dramaturgy, including awareness of the creative and dramaturgical potential of digital media in the making of new work; and
• advanced competence in theatrical collaboration, including evidence of collaborating successfully with playwrights, directors, actors, designers, and stage managers in the development and production of new work; an understanding of professional ethics and practice; and awareness of issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion as they relate to collaboration.

Playwriting Subprogram
Graduates must demonstrate advanced professional competence in playwriting and dramatic writing including, but not limited to:

• advanced technical skills in dramatic construction;
• the ability to employ and integrate a broad range of knowledge and skills in the various elements of theatrical production;
• the acquisition of advanced understanding and abilities to use theories and methods of script analysis, criticism, and dramaturgy in the development of theatrical and dramatic works;
• the ability to develop a work from concept to finished product and working knowledge of theatre history and theory, as well as of the creative and dramaturgical potential of digital media and various ways each may influence the creative process;
• an original full-length or equivalent work for their MFA thesis; and
• advanced competence in theatrical collaboration, including evidence of collaborating successfully with directors, dramaturgs, actors, designers, and stage managers in the development and production of new work: an understanding of professional ethics and practice; and awareness of issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion as they relate to collaboration.

Stage Management Subprogram

Graduates must demonstrate:
• advanced knowledge of all production elements and the ways they can be combined and integrated, including digital media;
• advanced ability to coordinate multiple aspects of production both in rehearsal and in performance, including digital media;
• an understanding of stage management for a broad range of genres including drama, musical theatre, dance, opera, and special events;
• the ability to collaborate with actors, designers, directors, musical directors, dramaturgs, choreographers, and special events planners (all other artists) in their processes of creation, performance, and planning; and provide space for diversity and foster social responsibility and change; and
• an understanding of union rules and industry polices and procedures relevant to the field.

Requirements

The Master of Fine Arts program in theatre arts requires various minimum graduate credit hours based on the student's area of study. Students typically must complete six semesters in residence (internships may be substituted).

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The graduate program is dedicated to the creative development of theatre artists. Graduates have a solid background in major performance theories, dramatic literature, and practices of the past and present as well as in the craft of their chosen specialties.

Special attention is given to understanding the role and importance of live theatre in society. Interactions among the various theatre disciplines are emphasized, both in classes and through the department's extensive production program.

Particular emphasis is placed on the development of new works for the theatre.

Students must make consistent progress toward completion of the degree requirements to remain in the program: they must maintain a grade-point average of at least 2.75 overall and 3.00 in all coursework within the primary area of concentration, they must receive no letter grade in their primary area below B-minus and no grade of U (unsatisfactory) in the primary area, and they must build a record of substantial creative work of high quality. Students who fail to make this progress are placed on academic probation and given one additional semester to demonstrate their qualifications for earning the degree.

Contact the Department of Theatre Arts for specific information on any of the MFA specialty areas.

Admission

Students who demonstrate exceptional ability in acting, directing, dramaturgy, playwriting, design, or stage management may apply for admission to the graduate program of study and production leading to the MFA degree. Admission is based on an interview, audition, and/or a portfolio of relevant work, the undergraduate record or other proof of artistic accomplishment, and letters of recommendation.

Submission of playscripts is the most important element in gaining admission to the Playwrights Workshop.

Applicants must meet the admission requirements of the Graduate College; see the Manual of Rules and Regulations on the Graduate College website.

Career Advancement

The graduate program in theatre develops not only talent but discipline, self-confidence, and personal vision. Through their work in courses and productions, through teaching and production assistantships, and through the intensive, individual mentoring they receive from faculty, graduate students prepare themselves to contribute to the nation’s culture. They can then enter the profession, joining hundreds of other University of Iowa graduates who have made their mark in theatre, film, television, and the entertainment industry.

Academic Plans

Sample Plan of Study

Sample plans represent one way to complete a program of study. Actual course selection and sequence will vary and should be discussed with an academic advisor. For additional sample plans, see MyUI.

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Acting Subprogram
This sample plan is being reviewed and will be added at a later date.

Design Subprogram
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Directing Subprogram
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Dramaturgy Subprogram
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