

Designing A BFA Musical Theatre Program

As a performance artist researching how to structure a Bachelor of Fine Arts for Musical Theatre degree program, I am pleased with the wealth of pedagogical avenues one can find in Musical Theatre University programs around the world. My first task is to pinpoint a pedagogical approach and theme for the course of study that speaks to my own values in education. No one avenue is more correct or better than another, and I highly value variety and the choices presented by having so many overarching themes. When I researched different BFA Musical Theatre programs I enjoyed the breadth of approach strategies spread out before me. Oklahoma City University, a famous University for its Music Theatre program, as well as other degrees in the arts, heavily emphasizes the music component and it's praxis, over any other component in their curriculum. For instance, the fall semester of a student's first year incorporates 6 music courses, including piano, 1 acting course and 1 dance course. Likewise, Shenandoah University also incorporates a wide variety of praxis courses in song and dance, but with little to no theory, history, or ethical analysis. For the 'Fine Arts' much of the bachelors degree is enhancing the skills required to execute one's artistry. For Musical Theatre, these skills are needed at an advanced level in three categories: singing, dancing, and acting. As a practitioner of dance, myself, I highly value the practical application courses in my genre. My hope, however, in forming a BFA that promotes students' further education and research, is to deliver practical courses alongside courses that promote critical thinking, cultural inclusion, Frier's idea for dialogics, relevant application, innovation, and creative collaboration. I want to facilitate studies that lead students on a discovery of the roots of our past, analysis of our present

day, and to encourage them and equip them to take an empowered stance as we design and cultivate our future through our medium.

Theme:

A BFA in the musical theatre genre should inspire our students to step out in their talents **creatively**, seeking a highly **collaborative** art expression that is constantly changing and evolving along side its audience with avenues of new and relevant **innovation**.

Values:

Underlying values for the department's over-arching theme of creativity, collaboration, and innovation are **respect, initiative community, and a life-long learning framework**.

Respect for one's self and ones own work as well as the personhood, culture, and works of others is important in beginning a collaborative context and allows for a safe space where creativity can flourish.

Initiative is an absolute necessity for leadership and action. Cognitive studies show that when students are given the ability to form their own goals and objectives, learning is greatly enhanced. Encouraging initiative in students and those around us produces other important qualities needed to sustain artistic work such as motivation, focus, and discipline. Discipline is expected and nurtured as a mode of fortitude and application in one's practice.

Community is essential in the development of new works and for longevity, support, and encouragement needed for the substantiation of the arts as a whole, and specific art works.

Students learn how to problem solve, set goals, and work in healthy relationships with one another.

A life-long learning framework is key to the direction of the program. I want to instill, equip, and empower students to find resources, ask critical questions, and pursue areas of interest on a practical level. Their 4 years in the BFA Musical Theatre Program should be a springboard and wealth of resource for life-long learning in this field. As Musical Theatre is a physically demanding genre, a practical part of life-long learning in the field is longevity both physically and mentally.

Objectives:

Inline with the over-arching theme and these values the BFA Musical Theatre Course Plan is built around a commitment to these five objectives:

- To enhance performance skills in a well rounded integration of all aspects of Musical Theatre, primarily singing, dancing, and acting.
- To develop resources and skills to feed creativity.
- To provide numerous collaborative opportunities.
- To further develop critical thinking and problem solving skills.
- To provide knowledge and application for maintaining and increasing both physical and mental health as performers.

Exposition of Objectives 1 and 5 in Application to the Course Plan:

1. I have implemented a 'One Voice, Integrated Studies' Lab to be taken in succession for 6 semesters. The One Voice course is an extrapolation of teachings by Joan Melton who has written such books as *Dancing with Voice: A collaborative Journey Across Disciplines*. Her teachings are inclusive of breath control techniques and physiological understandings between movement, and the speaking/singing voice. The Institute of American Musical Theatre, New York, NY, is a creative-collaborative based 2 year program that fosters an environment for generating new material. It too, has courses in integrative breathing studies and practices. The lab's purposes, as outlined in my BFA plan, are for each incoming class to begin a 3 year journey alongside one another in the discipline of breathing techniques and further technical or creative aspects of their genre..

5. While researching pedagogical themes carried out in highly ranked Musical Theatre programs One school stood out with a substantial initiative in healthy practice. Texas State University, San Marcos, TX. This school's incoming freshman are required to undergo a health examination including a vocal fold, stroboscopy exam. This exam helps the students, professors, and physicians know the student's particular physiological vocal structure, for the purpose of helping them specifically to flourish in their genre as well as inform them of the student's particular eccentricities in their vocal tract. I have taken up their practice for the incoming student exam. They also incorporated a mental health class into their curriculum. I have combined one lab course with studies in mental health for performers as well.

BFA Musical Theatre Plan (62 credits)

Based on a full time student plan of 16 credits per semester. A full time student must take at least 12 credits per semester.

BFA Musical Theatre Bedrock Courses (18 credits)

Applied One Voice integrative studies (6cr.) -taken in progression

Lab 1: Body & Vocal health and conditioning (taken with MSTH 2**) (1cr.)

Lab 2: Dance Body Conditioning cont, creativity and improvisation with voice (1cr.)

Lab 3: Vocal functions & Singing styles cont. - Belt/Legit in musical theatre (taken with MSTH 2**) (1cr.)

Lab 4: Use of the voice, dynamics, characterization for the actor, singer, dancer (1cr.)

Lab 5: Mental wellness for Performing Artists (coping, communication, time management, leadership, and goal setting) (1cr.)

Lab 6: Performance scenarios: Creative Experimentation through Integrative studies (1cr.)

History: (9cr.)

Culture and Performance 1: Dance, Theatre, and Music -global survey (3cr.) **FW**

Culture and Performance 2: Dance, Theatre, and Music History Overview (3cr.) **FGC**

MSTH 2**: Musical Theatre History (3cr.) **FGB**

Health (3cr.)

MSTH 2**: The Kinetic Body and Health: Anatomy: vocal functions & the moving body (3cr.)
(taken with Lab 1) **DB**

BFA Musical Theatre Participation Requirements (6cr.)

Tech (2cr.)

Technical operations position in a faculty or student show. ie. sound, lights, costumes, stage manager (1cr. per show)

Performance (3cr.)

Performance in a faculty or student show (1cr. per show)

Tri-Praxis Studies (26 Credits)

Music (8cr.):

(3cr.) MSTH 2**: Vocal Functions and Singing styles (Taken with Lab 3) **WI**

(3cr.) MSTH 4**: Music Theory, Improvisation, and Aural training for vocalists **DA**

(2cr.) Vocal elective

- MUS 3** : Classical Ensemble (1cr.)
- MUS 3** : Jazz Ensemble (1cr.)
- MUS 3** : Pop/Rock Acapella (1cr.)
- MUS 3** : Solo Vocals (1cr.)

Dance (9cr.):

(6cr.) Dance

- DNCE 2** : Musical Theatre Dance I -Period styles musical theatre Dance (1cr.)
- DNCE 2** : Jazz/Contemporary Modern Dance II (2cr.)
- DNCE 4** : Jazz/Contemporary Modern Dance III (3cr.)

(3 cr.) Dance Electives

- DNCE 1** , 2** , 3** : Tap I, II, or III (1cr.)
- DNCE 1** : K-pop (1cr.)
- DNCE 1** : hip-hop (1cr.)
- DNCE 1** , 2** , 3** , 4** : Ballet (1cr.)
- DNCE 1** : Afro-Haitian (1cr.)
- DNCE 1** : Bollywood, Tahitian, Filipino, etc. (1cr.)

Acting (9cr.):

(6cr.) Acting

- THTR 1** : Acting I Intro- Improvisation (1cr.)
- THTR 2** : acting II Foundations and Techniques (2cr.)
- THTR 3** : acting III Advanced Scene Study (3cr.) **OC**

(3cr.)THTRE 4** : script analysis/dramaturgy **WI, DL**

BFA Musical Theatre Electives (6cr.)

Must complete at least one (3cr.) in the Ethics category

Theatre Design & Production

Any Production Design course Intro to Advanced- Lighting, Sound, Set, Costumes, etc.

(3cr.) THTR ***: Lighting

(3cr.) THTR ***: Sound

(3cr.) THTR ***: Set

(3cr.) THTR ***: Costumes

Composition

(3cr.) DNCE 4** composition/choreography **DA**

(3cr.) MUS 4** music/song writing **DA**

(3cr.) THTR 4** playwriting **ETH, WI**

(3cr.) THTR 4** directing **WI**

Business

(3cr.) ***Business in the Arts: Creative Business Theory- Fads and Trends **FQ**

(3cr.) ***Arts Management **FQ**

Ethics electives

(3cr.) THTR 4** Hawaiian, Asian, and Pacific issues in theatre: a historical look, theory and criticism, praxis **ETH, HAP**

(3cr.) MSTH 4** Musical Theatre pedagogy **ETH, DS**

(3cr.) THTR 4** Ethics in Theatre: developing critical thinking and looking at theatre in the context of Freire's 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' **ETH, WI**

Senior Capstone (6cr.)

MSTH 4***: Creative Performance Think Tank. PreReq for Capstone (3cr.)

MSTH 4***: Capstone (3cr.) -Senior Showcase-

Senior Capstone for Musical Theatre (3cr.):

After completion of the Creative Performance Think Tank Course recommended during their third year of studies,

Each student is responsible for directing a capstone project their final year in the BFA program. The goal of the capstone is to give the performer a chance for praxis, to perform a creative work illuminating their integrated studies within their field of study.

- Each student will work one on one with a chosen faculty member for mentorship and authorization.
 - Senior Capstones are each approx. 25-30 minutes running time and will be combined with other capstone projects as 1 act of up to 4 in a single production.
 - The project can be a solo work or collaborative event so long as the BFA student is in a primary role for the performance.
 - Works performed can be from a repertoire of produced musicals, from any time period, copyrights obtained and respected, as well as creative independent, or student works.
 - As the director for their own capstone it is up to each performer to procure crew members for the production: i.e. sound, lights, props if needed, musicians, cast. They will also work in tandem with fellow BFA Capstone students to schedule marketing for their amalgam of senior projects.
 - Deadlines for marketing, title, and program information will be given during the first week of the semester.
 - Senior capstones cannot contain previously performed materials during their BFA education.
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Incoming BFA Students will undergo a physical and vocal evaluation:

Including a postural exam, TMJ exam, hearing exam, allergy testing, and a stroboscopy of vocal folds in cooperation with medical professional volunteers.

Vocal folds are unique physiologically in each student. The purpose of the stroboscopy of vocal folds and tract is to gain an understanding of the student's particular set, in order to help further educate the student within their own physiology as well as, serve the teacher in their guidance of any particular student. Should there be any physical development in question with a student's voice a physician will have the resources to know what the student's folds looked like at the start of their studies in order to better evaluate and treat them.

Students are also encouraged to acquire private vocal coaching during their training at university, in addition to fulfilling the BFA requirements.

General Education Requirements Fulfilled by the BFA Musical Theatre Plan as Modeled on University of Hawaii- Manoa Core Requirements

UH MANOA Core Requirements

Rules:

The *Language* requirement cannot go toward your major (it can coincide with a *Focus* requirement)

Classes fulfilling *Foundations* can only be fulfilled on their own or coincide with a major requirement

Diversification can coincide with a *Focus* fulfillment

Foundations Requirement (12cr.):

FQ - Quantitative Reasoning - math (3cr.)

FW- written communications (3cr.)*

FGA, FGB, FGC- Global and Multicultural Perspectives (6cr. from two different groups)**

9cr. covered in plan

Diversification Requirements (19cr.):

DA, DH, DL- Arts, Humanities, and Literatures (6cr. from two different groups)**

DS- Social Science (6cr. from two different departments)

DB, DP, DY-lab Biological Science, Physical Science, Lab (7cr. must have one of each)*

9cr. covered in plan

Focus Requirements (21cr.):

HAP- Hawaiian, Asian, and Pacific Issues (1 course)

ETH- Contemporary Ethical Issues (1 course 300-400 level)*

OC- Oral Communication (1 course 300-400 level)*

WI- Writing Intensive (5 courses including at least two at the 300-400 level)**

12cr. covered in plan

Second Language Requirement (up to 12cr.):

30cr. of Core Requirements covered in BFA Musical Theatre Plan

(* per course fulfilled through the BFA Musical Theatre Plan

Core Requirements that may be fulfilled in BFA Musical Theatre Electives:

Foundations

FQ - Quantitative Reasoning - math (1 course) (3cr.)**

Diversification

DS- Social Science (1 course) (3cr.)*

Focus

HAP (1 course) (3cr.)*

WI- Writing Intensive (3 courses) (6cr.)***

15cr. of Core Requirements covered in BFA Musical Theatre Electives

(* per course offered in BFA Musical Theatre Electives

Core Requirements not offered in the BFA Musical Theatre Plan or Electives:

Diversification

DS- Social Science (1 course) (3cr.)

DP, DY- Physical Science plus Lab (1 course plus lab) (4cr.)

Second Language Requirement (up to 4 courses, 12cr.):

SAMPLE 4 YEAR PLAN

	Course Required in BFA Musical Theatre plan
	Courses that can be taken in BFA Musical Theatre electives for Core Req.
	Core Req: Course fulfilling Core Req. not in dept.
	Minor Studies: Courses reserved for Minor Studies
	Enrichment: Courses in the dept. taken for the student's own interest above and beyond what is required to fulfill the BFA plan.

Year 1

Fall Semester		Spring Semester	
MSTH 2**: The Kinetic Body and Health DB	3cr.	DNCE 2**: Musical Theatre Dance I - Period styles musical theatre Dance	1cr.
Lab 1: Body & Vocal health and conditioning	1cr.	Lab 2: Dance Body Conditioning cont, creativity and improvisation with voice	1cr.
Culture and Performance 1: Dance, Theatre, and Music -global survey FW	3cr.	Culture and Performance 2: Dance, Theatre, and Music History Overview FGC	3cr.
THTR 1**: Acting I Intro-Improvisation OC	1cr.	Performance	1cr.
DNCE *** Dance Elective	1cr.	MUS 3**: Vocal Elective	1cr.
DP, DY- Physical Science Course (1 course 3cr. plus lab 1cr.)	3cr.	BFA Elective THTR ***: Lighting	3cr.
DP, DY- Physical Science Lab (1 course 3cr. plus lab 1cr.)	1cr.	<i>Second Language Requirement (up to 4 courses)</i>	3cr.
<i>Second Language Requirement (up to 4 courses as necessary)</i>	3cr.	DS- Social Science (1 course)	3cr.
	16cr.		16cr.

Year 2

Fall Semester		Spring Semester	
MSTH 2** : Vocal Functions and Singing styles WI	3cr.	***Business in the Arts: Creative Business Theory- Fads and Trends FQ or ***Arts Management FQ	3cr.
Lab 3: Vocal functions cont. Singing styles- Belt/Legit in musical theatre	1cr.	Lab 4: Use of the voice, dynamics, characterization for the actor, singer, dancer (1cr.)	1cr.
MSTH 2** : Musical Theatre History FGB	3cr.	THTR 4** playwriting ETH, WI	3cr.
Crew	1cr.	Performance	1cr.
THTR 2** : acting II Foundations and Techniques	2cr.	DNCE *** Dance Elective	1cr.
DNCE 2** : Jazz/Contemporary Modern Dance II	2cr.	<i>Second Language</i> Requirement (up to 4 courses)	3cr.
MUS 3** : Vocal Elective	1cr.	Course for Minor	3cr.
<i>Second Language</i> Requirement (up to 4 courses)	3cr.	MUS 3** : Vocal Elective	1cr.
	16cr.		16cr.

Year 3

Fall Semester		Spring Semester	
MSTH 4** : Music Theory, Improvisation, and Aural training for vocalists DA	3cr.	MSTH 4*** : Creative Performance Think Tank. PreReq for Capstone.	3cr.
Lab 5: Mental wellness for Performing Artists (coping, communication, time management, leadership, and goal setting)	1cr.	Lab 6: Performance scenarios: Creative Experimentation through Integrative studies	1cr.

Fall Semester		Spring Semester	
THTR 3** : acting III Advanced Scene Study OC	3cr.	DNCE 4** : Jazz/Contemporary Modern Dance III	3cr.
Performance	1cr.	Crew	1cr.
DNCE *** Dance Elective	1 cr.	THTR 4** : script analysis/ dramaturgy WI, DL	3cr.
BFA Elective THTR 4** Ethics in Theatre: developing critical thinking ETH, WI	3cr.	Course for Minor	3cr.
Course for Minor	3cr.	MUS 3** : Vocal Elective	1cr.
MUS 3** : Vocal Elective	1cr.	DNCE *** Dance Elective	1cr.
	16cr.		16cr.

Year 4

Fall Semester		Spring Semester	
THTR 4** Hawaiian, Asian, and Pacific issues in theatre: a historical look, theory and criticism, praxis ETH, HAP	3cr.	MSTH 4*** : Capstone -Senior Showcase	3cr.
THTR 4** directing WI	3cr.	MSTH 4** Musical Theatre pedagogy ETH, DS	3cr.
MUS 3** : Vocal Elective	1cr.	MUS 3** : Vocal Elective	1cr.
DNCE *** Dance Elective	1cr.	DNCE *** Dance Elective	1cr.
Performance	1cr.	Performance	1cr.
Course for Minor	3cr.	Course for Minor	3cr.
	3cr		
	12cr.		12cr.

References

Books

Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Penguin Education, 1972.

Melton, Joan. *Dancing with Voice: A Collaborative Journey Across Disciplines*. CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015.

Websites

Institute of American Musical Theatre

<https://www.iamusicaltheatre.com>

National Association of Schools of Theatre (NAST)

<https://nast.arts-accredit.org>

Oklahoma City University BFA Music Theatre

<https://www.okcu.edu/music/academics/degree-programs/undergraduate/music-theater/>

Shenandoah University BFA Musical Theatre (4 Year Plan)

https://q8rkuwu1ti4vaqw33x41zocd-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/conservatory/files/2019/07/Track19-BFA.MST_.pdf

Texas State University BFA Musical Theatre

<https://www.theatreanddance.txstate.edu/Undergraduate-Degrees/BFA-Musical-Theatre.html>

University of Hawaii- Manoa General Education Requirements

<https://manoa.hawaii.edu/catalog/undergrad/undergrad-requirements/>