

MFA in Theatre Directing Graduate Handbook

Program Director: Jessica Thebus
For the academic year: 2021-22
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Department of Theatre MFA in Directing Program 70 Arts Circle Drive Evanston, IL 60208

The MFA in Theatre Directing Graduate Handbook supplements:
The Graduate School's policies and procedures.
For an overview of TSG policies and procedures, please go to
<http://www.tgs.northwestern.edu/about/policies/index.html>.

The following pages contain information about program-specific policies, procedures, and regulations. Students are subject to the regulations in effect at the time of matriculation. It is your responsibility as a student to be aware of these and The Graduate School's regulations.

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Land Acknowledgement

Northwestern University sits on Native land that is the traditional homelands of the people of the Council of Three Fires including the Ojibwe, Potowotomi and the Odawa. We, the MFA Acting Program, acknowledge that for over 200 years Native Nations have been forcibly removed from this territory and that this land continues to be a site of gathering and healing for more than a dozen other Tribal Nations and remains home to over 100,000 tribal members in the state of Illinois.

The Rehearsal Dinner: Northwestern MFA Suite Anti-Racism (AR) + DEI Initiative

Conceived & developed by Cristal Chanelle Truscott and hosted by the Faculty team (Shana Cooper & Linda Roethke) and the MFA Student Council.

Anti-Racist Learning Culture: Braver, Safer Spaces

The Northwestern MFA Suite (Acting, Design, Directing) is committed to Anti-Racism and Diversity, Equality and Inclusion (DEI). The MFA Suite does not tolerate racism, anti-Blackness or identity-based discrimination of any kind between students, from faculty or guests towards students, nor from students toward faculty. We engage this commitment understanding that the work of anti-racism and dismantling of White Supremacy is not finite, but rather enacts a range of ongoing, dynamic practices and interventions that evolve, expand, respond to and build upon the wisdom and gains of previous generations of culture workers as well as the clarity and contributions of our times.

We invite and expect all members of our community to collaborate and contribute to the work of cultivating braver, safer spaces in our classrooms and throughout our program. We welcome feedback from and collaboration with students to continuously nurture an anti-racist program culture.

The Rehearsal Dinner: An Anti-Racism(AR) + DEI Initiative

The Rehearsal Dinner, an Anti-Racism (AR)+ DEI Initiative of the MFA Suite @ NU is a monthly gathering of all MFA students and available faculty to nurture our curricular, creative and collaborative culture by building knowledge and skills/practices that serve anti-racism, equity and inclusion in our programs, disciplines and field.

The intention is to offer MFA students and our community discipline-specific DEI & Anti-Racism Training as an ongoing, yearly requirement to matriculate through the MFA programs at NU. This training is tailored specifically to our community and it's needs. The ongoing nature of this training is essential: toward the goal of equipping our community across the MFA suite with a depth of understanding and real skill development that will take time and multi-layered reiteration. Of course, for this effort to be most successful, it needs to be augmented by a curriculum that addresses anti-racism not as an addendum, but in an integrated, foundational way throughout coursework.

These monthly sessions will be led by DEI thought leaders based on field/discipline specific case studies. The meetings will be co-facilitated by members of the Northwestern community as well as trained

facilitators from the larger Chicago area theatre and social justice communities as needed. Attendance is required. The Rehearsal Dinners have been designed around production and class schedules across the MFA Suite to make sure everyone can be available.

For the academic year 2021/22 our Rehearsal Dinners will be held on Wednesdays between the hours of 2:00-6:00pm on the following dates:

1. Oct 6
2. Oct 20
3. Nov 17
4. Jan 19
5. Feb 9
6. Mar 2
7. April 13
8. May 11

The Rehearsal Dinners will be held at the Northwestern downtown space, Abbott Hall, 710 N. Lake Shore Drive, Chicago, IL, 60611. We are closely monitoring the University Covid safety protocols, and will pivot to a virtual gathering if that becomes necessary.

The goals of our Rehearsal Dinners include but are not limited to, equipping and empowering the MFA Suite community with

- an increased, shared understanding of history, vocabulary and concepts related to understanding antiracism;
- increased awareness and skills to recognize and respond to classroom space and professional/industry space; and
- increased awareness for how antiracism and cultural competency applies to, impacts and serves our careers as working artists.

Affinity Groups

The Northwestern University MFA Acting, MFA Directing and MFA Design programs share in offering support for affinity groups to activate coalition building and networking among students who share common interests, goals, and/or a self-identified background.

During Orientation, MFA Acting, MFA Directing, and MFA Design students are empowered to propose affinity groups, to update/rename existing affinity groups, establish group missions/descriptions and to govern when, where and how often their affinity groups meet.

Examples of possible Affinity Groups are

- Asian Student Group
- Black Student Group
- Dis/Ability Student Group
- International Student Group

- Latinx Student Group
- LGBTQIA Student Group
- People of Color Student Group
- Women Student Group

Students are asked to inform faculty about the year’s active affinity groups by the last Friday in October by submitting the group name and description. Once the groups have been determined by students, the Handbook will be updated accordingly.

Learning Objectives

Graduate Program Goals/Mission Statement:

We train the next generation of professional theater directors, by teaching each artist to develop a clear point of view, hone the craft of storytelling from the stage, and become a strong collaborative leader. The MFA program guides each director to discover, develop and apply their individual artistic voice with vision and integrity. The theater artists who complete this program are able to:

- Understand and define the work they want to make
- Develop their collaborations with other artists
- Explore their practice in a rigorously informed historical and critical context
- Articulate what they believe theatre should do in the world
- Build relationships with audiences and communities

Learning objective(s) Students should be able to...	Milestone/ Requirement /Capacity	Assessment Strategies and Criteria* How do we know this objective has been achieved? What criteria do we have to measure success?
Launch a theater production with a clearly articulated point of view, do necessary text analysis and supporting research, and clearly direct story events with actors	Successful completion of Year 1	Evaluation of coursework Evaluation of student 1st Year production Evaluation of Final Paper
Launch a theater production from the start of the design process, collaboratively lead a team of designers, use visual metaphor as a storytelling device, and articulate a directorial point of view in any production context	Successful completion of Year 2	Evaluation of coursework Evaluation of student 2nd Year production Evaluation of Final Paper

Launch and complete a professional-scale production through work with production, design, and actors. Teach an original syllabus in a university-level directing course	Successful completion of Year 3	Evaluation of coursework Evaluation of student 3rd Year production Evaluation of Final Paper
Articulate a defined artistic statement for past and future directorial work	Successful Defense of MFA Thesis	Evaluation of Thesis by committee Evaluation of Defense by committee

Personnel

Director of the Program

Jessica Thebus – Associate Professor

Ryan Center for Musical Arts (MA) 5-194

jessicathebus@gmail.com, j-thebus@northwestern.edu, 847-491-3170

Department Chair

Henry Godinez-Professor

hgodinez@northwestern.edu

Business Coordinator Arthur Murton

MA 5-160

amurton@northwestern.edu

847-491-3590

Program Assistant David Kleineick

Davidkleineick@northwestern.edu

847-491-3589

Program Assistant Caitlin Robb

Caitlin.robb@northwestern.edu

847-491-2576

Core Faculty

Shana Cooper – Assistant Professor

MA 5-192

shoshana.cooper@northwestern.edu

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MA 5-168
halena.kays@northwestern.edu
cell: 773-425-4856

Dassia N. Posner – Associate Professor
MA 5-172
d-posner@northwestern.edu
847-467-0469

Anna D. Shapiro – Professor MA 5-187
Anna-shapiro@northwestern.edu
847-491-3285

Affiliated Faculty

Andrew Boyce
Thomas Bradshaw
Stan Brown
Amanda Denhert
Marcus Doshi
Roger Ellis
Ana Kuzmanic
Sandra Marquez
Linda Roethke
Todd Rosenthal
Eric Southern
Cristal Chanelle Truscott
Mary Zimmerman

Production Facilities

The School of Communication’s classrooms, rehearsal and production facilities used by the MFA Directing Program are distributed across three buildings on the south end of Northwestern’s Evanston campus. Directors will also participate in course work and programming at Abbott Hall, part of Northwestern’s downtown Chicago campus and primary home to the MFA Acting program. The building names and addresses are:

Ryan Center for the Musical Arts
70 Arts Circle Drive Evanston, IL 60208

Wirtz Center for the Performing Arts
1949 Campus Drive
Evanston, IL 60208

Abbott Hall
710 N Lake Shore Dr
Chicago, IL 60611

The main office for the Department of Theatre is located on the 5th floor of the Music and Comm Building. Faculty offices are located on this floor, along with a conference room used by the program.

Wirtz Center for the Performing Arts contains multiple rehearsal spaces, the Wallis Theatre, used for 2nd year directing projects, and the mainstage Louis and Barber Theatres, used in 3rd year productions. Offices for shop heads and Production Management can be found here, as well as the costume, paint, scene, lighting, and props shops.

Abbott Hall contains classrooms, meeting rooms, rehearsal space, and blackbox performances spaces. A free shuttle service between the Evanston and Chicago campuses is available to all students, more information available here: <https://www.northwestern.edu/transportation-parking/shuttles/routes/>

Advising

Students will have a variety of advisors over the course of the three years, rather than one primary advisor. The Director of the Program and the Directing Program Faculty are available throughout all three years to discuss student progress and work.

In the first year, students will have a faculty mentor on their first-year classroom projects, which take place in the Abbott Hall Blackbox. This person functions as the primary advisor on the project, with support from other faculty as needed.

In the second year, students will be assigned a primary faculty mentor for their second-year show. This person will function as an outside eye in occasional rehearsals and during the tech process.

In the third year, students will be assigned a primary faculty mentor for their third-year show. This person will fulfill a similar function as the faculty mentor in the second year.

Other Advisement Areas

For questions regarding programmatic issues about MFA Directing (vs. courses/classes, individual artistic progress, etc), contact the DGS.

For questions regarding financial allocations, contact David Kleineck at david.kleineick@northwestern.edu.

For questions regarding registering for classes, contact Caitlin Robb at caitlin.robb@northwestern.edu.

Required Courses

Courses for the MFA in Directing fall into the following categories:

Seminars: students take 2 seminars in their first year focusing on the research and development of point of view.

Collaboration: students take a series of 3 classes with their MFA Designer cohort that focus on the research and development of a design process on a given show or shows.

Performance/The Actor's Process: in their first year, students will join the first year acting cohort in portions of their acting class sequence.

Storytelling: students take a series of courses designed to focus the attention on key principles of storytelling in different approaches to theatre-making. These include courses such as Adaptation, Toy Theatre, and Devising, and others.

Master classes: Students will take a variety of classes from core faculty and visiting professors that focus on an area of that faculty's specialty. These may include: Rehearsal Techniques, Narration, Political Theatre, Physical Theatre, Devising, etc.

History and Criticism: Students are required to take 3 History or Lit/Crit classes. These may be assigned, such as History of Directing, or may be taken inside or outside the Department in areas like Performance Studies, English, and Art History.

Additional required classes: Students take additional core classes in areas like Text Analysis or may be assigned courses such as a New Playwriting Development class with the RTVF faculty in playwriting.

Electives: Students will have an increasing number of electives available to them over the course of the three years. These may be taken inside or out of the department.

590 Thesis classes: Students may use up to three 590 thesis writing courses in their third year. These are no credit classes and students may use up to two in one quarter. Students are not required to use all three, or any, in their third year.

Guidelines for which courses will count for graduate credit as well as enrollment information can be found here: <http://www.tgs.northwestern.edu/about/policies/general-registration-policies.html>

Registration

Required courses offered by the MFA Directing program will be communicated to students prior to the registration deadline for each quarter by the program's Director of Graduate Studies (DGS). Students are responsible for selecting their own graduate-level electives, when applicable, and for registering for all required classes each quarter.

Questions about registering for classes or scheduling should be emailed to Caitlin Robb (caitlin.robbs@northwestern.edu), Program Assistant, and copied/cc'd to the DGS.

Satisfactory Academic Progress

Guidelines for maintaining good academic standing can be found on the Graduate School website at: <http://www.tgs.northwestern.edu/about/policies/satisfactory-academic-progress.html>. Please note that having three incompletes or a GPA of below 3.0 will cause you to be placed on probation. It is the expectation of the Directing Program that you remain attentive to your academic progress. If you are in danger of failing or not completing a class, we expect that you not only work with the professor of that course to attempt to resolve the issue with your work, but that you also notify the Head of the Program and/or your other advisors or faculty as needed.

Satisfactory progress in the program includes successful completion of the coursework, sufficiently mature collaboration on artistic work, a minimum level of productivity, full participation in the program, and respectful and responsible conduct within the department. If the graduate faculty has concerns about your progress, we will bring them to your attention. In cases where a student's performance is egregiously inadequate or does not improve, they may be put on probation until there is sufficient

improvement or they may be asked to leave the program.

Attendance

On-time attendance at scheduled classes, production assignments, rehearsals, AR+DEI Initiative, Director's Circle, and MFA Director meetings and advisory sessions are required to remain in "Good Standing."

Unexcused absences are not permitted. Requests for absences must be made in advance. Persistent lateness (2 or more) and/or unexcused absences (1 or more) to classes, and/or any other MFA Director meetings and events are considered unprofessional behavior and will result in disciplinary action leading to probation or dismissal from the program.

Resolution of Scheduling Conflicts

The administration attempts to avoid conflicts between the requirements of various departments and activities. From time to time, such conflicts do occur. Should such a conflict arise, students are responsible for discussing the conflict with the DGS as early as possible.

Teaching Requirements

In your first year, your Graduate Assistantship is fulfilled by two run crew head assignments for shows in the Mainstage of the Wirtz Center season. These assignments will be made by Heather Basarab, Production Manager for the Wirtz Center, in conversation with the Directing Program.

In the second year, you will assist one of the third-year students as a TA for Fundamentals of Directing. In addition, the production of your second-year show counts toward your assistantship.

In the third year, students will teach one quarter of Fundamentals of Directing for the undergraduates.

As teachers, students are expected to comply with university policy, including university policy on sexual harassment and misconduct. Northwestern University prohibits all forms of sexual misconduct, including but not limited to, sexual assault, stalking, dating or domestic violence, and sexual harassment. Such conduct violates the community values and principles of our institution and disrupts the living, learning, and working environment for students, faculty, staff and other community members. In furtherance of this policy, Northwestern University has adopted standards of conduct for all members of our community – students, faculty, and staff, as well as University vendors, contractors, visitors, guests, and third parties – with respect to sexual misconduct. These standards apply equally to all regardless of the sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression of any of the individuals involved.

University policies can be found at: <http://policies.northwestern.edu/>. The site for sexual misconduct response and prevention can be found at: <http://www.northwestern.edu/sexual-misconduct/>

Thesis Committee

In the course of their third year of study, students will identify, in consultation with the Director of the Program, a chair for their Thesis Committee. This person should be selected and asked by the end of year three and must be a member of the full-time Directing Faculty. In addition, students will identify two other members of the Northwestern Faculty to sit on the committee. These need not both be from the Theatre Department, but they must be Northwestern full-time faculty in good standing.

A Committee must be chosen and approved by September 1 following their third year of course work.

Thesis Writing and Defense

At the end of each academic year, at a deadline determined by the DP, students will hand in 20 pages of writing about their year, that can serve as raw material for the thesis.

A thesis question and outline are developed in conversation with Committee Chair, and a full draft of the thesis is expected by the September following the completion of coursework. Students have no more than two years to complete and defend the thesis, with the strong expectation that they defend by the end of the calendar year in which they complete their coursework.

Theses are between 60-80 pages and are expected to address work completed throughout the three years of graduate study.

Degree Completion and Graduation

The Application for Degree must be filed with the Graduate School by students expecting to receive their degree in a given year. As a graduate student at Northwestern, it is your responsibility to read correspondence from the Graduate School and meet such deadlines; you should not rely on the department to remind you of your responsibilities. Deadlines are published on the Graduate School's academic calendar.

In order to receive the Masters of Fine Arts degree, the student must:

Complete the Application for a Degree form via TGS Forms in [CAESAR](#) by the date specified in the [Academic Calendar](#).

Complete the Masters Degree Completion form via TGS Forms in [CAESAR](#) and receive program approval of the form by the date specified in the [Academic Calendar](#).

Complete the required number of credits with at least a B average and no X or Y grades. All grades must be entered and Change of Grade forms submitted by the grade deadline specified by the Office of the Registrar.

Successfully defend their completed thesis.

Overview: Timeline of Program

In their first year of study, students will take mostly assigned courses, including Seminar in fall and winter, Text Analysis in the fall, Scenic design in the winter, Collaboration: Realism and Naturalism in the spring, and other Master classes, Acting classes, and History/Crit classes as assigned, depending on what is being offered.

In spring quarter of the first year, students will direct a classroom project in Abbott Hall. This project will be chosen in winter quarter and guidelines for the project will be disseminated in the fall quarter.

In the second year of study, students will take Collaboration: Contemporary Drama in the fall, where they will work on the design process for their second-year show. Students will also take Toy Theatre in winter quarter, Collaboration: Shakespeare in the spring quarter, and other Master classes as assigned. Students will have more electives in year two.

In the winter or spring of year two, students will direct a show in the Wallis Theatre. This show is chosen

by August 1 between first and second year, and directing slots are assigned the spring quarter of the first year. Design teams will be assigned by the Design Faculty.

In the third year of study, students will take Master classes and Design Theory classes as assigned. Students may take mostly electives and use their 590s as needed.

In the third year, students will direct a show in the mainstage season of the Wirtz Center. These titles are chosen in conversation with Al Heartley, Managing Director of the Wirtz Center, by the end of the fall quarter of the second year.

Design teams are assigned by the Design Faculty. Show slots are programmed by the Wirtz center. Production deadlines may begin as early as spring quarter of the second year, depending on the slot assigned.

Financial Support

Financial support in the form of production assistantships is given to all students in the MFA programs. Assistantships include a full tuition waiver for all three years and a stipend. Students fulfill requirements for assistantships through the work listed under Teaching Requirements above, as well as participating in recruitment weekend for prospective students in late February or early March.

Conflict Resolution

In the event that you find yourself in a dispute with the MFA Directing faculty, and you do not feel comfortable discussing the issue within the program,, you should contact the department chair to discuss the issues.

If a student wishes to appeal a probation decision, you should contact the DGS or the department chair to discuss the issues. If you do not feel comfortable contacting someone within the department or feel that this route has not produced acceptable results, you may file a petition through the Graduate School's regular petition process.

Students may appeal an exclusion decision to The Graduate School. Students should submit a request in writing to the attention of the Director of Student Services within ten days of the date of the program's final written determination of exclusion to the student and include any supporting materials at that time.

Visit the Graduate School's web site for further information on these appeals processes.

Essentials and Resources

For complete Graduate School Policies and Procedures, please go to:

<http://www.tgs.northwestern.edu/about/policies/index.html>

Writing Support

The Writing Place is a free tutoring service available to Northwestern students and provides assistance to students who need help writing papers. More information can be found here:

<http://www.writing.northwestern.edu/>

English as a Second Language (ESL)

Classes and tutoring are available at no fee through Northwestern's ESL department:

<http://groups.linguistics.northwestern.edu/esl/index.html>

Student Life

Student Life Resources Division of Student Affairs 601 University Place, Rm 36

(847) 491-8430

www.northwestern.edu/studentaffairs

Multicultural Student Affairs

African-American SA; Asian/Asian-American SA; Hispanic/Latino SA; LGBT Resource Center

1936 Sheridan Road

(847) 467-6200

<http://www.northwestern.edu/msa/index.html>

Office of Diversity and Inclusion

<https://www.tgs.northwestern.edu/diversity/>

<https://www.northwestern.edu/diversity/about/index.html>

1800 Sherman Ave.

Floor 5, Suite 5-200

Evanston, IL 60208

Email: diversity@northwestern.edu

Phone: 847-467-3488

You can also complete an online request to [include your event in our quarterly email](#), [sign up for our listserv](#) or just [send feedback](#).

Graduate Housing

1915 Maple Ave

(847) 491-5127

<http://www.northwestern.edu/gradhousing/>

Living Off-Campus

601 University Place, Rm 6

(847) 491-8430

<http://www.northwestern.edu/offcampus/>

Health Services, Evanston Campus

633 Emerson Street

(847) 491-8100

<http://www.nuhs.northwestern.edu/evanston/default.aspx>

Counseling & Psychological Services (CAPS)

CAPS staff are available on both the Evanston and Chicago campuses. CAPS promises confidentiality unless there is a safety concern:

633 Emerson Street

(847) 491-2151

<http://www.northwestern.edu/counseling/about-us/faqs.html>

Norris University Center (including WildCard Office)

1999 Campus Drive
(847) 491-2300
<http://www.norris.northwestern.edu/>

Office of Religious Life
1870 Sheridan Rd
(847) 491-7256
<http://www.northwestern.edu/religious-life>

Parking & Transportation (including Shuttle Service and SafeRide) 1801 Maple Ave, Suite 2300
(847) 491-7569
<http://www.northwestern.edu/up/parking>