

Samantha Hageman

Summer Fellows

Dr. Meghan Brodie

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## Syllabus Rationale

Theatre is not only an art form, but also a method of communication and community-building. The terms social justice and social change are oftentimes used interchangeably. I chose to use the term 'change' rather than 'justice' because my goal is to inspire and incite changes in our society, and the first sounds more active than the latter. Yes, of course we want justice, but to have justice, first we must make changes. Theatre can be used to exemplify the possibilities of social change and inspire people to pursue it.

College campus communities are made up of individuals from diverse backgrounds, meaning that we are bound to have different views and opinions of current events, but because everyone has differing beliefs, we must learn to respect each other's differences, and educate those who do not understand certain issues. Using theatre as a way to engage individuals and promote social change makes it possible to observe and comprehend social issues and teach students how to communicate in order to resolve conflicts despite students' differing perceptions. By analyzing the social culture on the college campus, it is possible to interpret how theatre can be used to promote necessary changes to our society. Beyond its artistic merits, theatre can be used as a tool for educational purposes. The materials chosen for this course have been selected due to their significance in comprehending and achieving theatre for social justice.

Excerpts from *Brecht on Theatre The Development of an Aesthetic* by Bertolt Brecht regarding theatre for social justice are useful in providing examples, methods, and analogies for those who may want to apply these theories to pursue social change. Essays such as "8. The Epic Theatre and its Difficulties," "24. Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting," and "29. The Street Scene: A Basic Model for an Epic Theatre" are the most useful theoretical works for social change. Brecht encouraged the idea of discussion and reflection in order to further engage his audience about the topic being brought to their attention.

"The Epic Theatre and its Difficulties" explains the limitations of epic theatre by claiming that one must try different things in the theatre and see how the audience reacts to certain themes in order to know if specific approaches are useful or not, and must be based off of our present society rather than an "artistic whim" (22-3).

“Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting” describes traditional Chinese acting, and how the actor never acts as if there is a fourth wall, meaning that s/he is aware s/he is being viewed by an audience. This is different from Western acting where the actor tries to convince the audience that s/he has been transported to a new setting where her/his energy has been expended to create a character. The alienation effect (A-effect) demands a natural and light way of acting where the actor maintains her/his own identity so that the audience cannot relate to the character, therefore they can focus on the social action (91-9).

“The Street Scene: A Basic Model for an Epic Theatre” is especially useful in considering how useful theatre is as a means of sharing information and perspectives on events. Without thinking about it, when people share stories, they are acting and emphasizing the points that help others see the event from the storytellers’ points of view. In the theatre, experiences are only partially communicated by the spectator based on how they see the actor portray her/his character, as well as how the spectator perceives that character (121-9).

In *The Exception and the Rule* by Brecht, a rich merchant must cross the Yahi Desert to close an oil deal with a guide and a porter. He is suspicious of everyone who is working for him as he believes that they want him to miss out on the deal and fail. As the merchant becomes increasingly paranoid, his brutality increases. The merchant fires his guide because he believes that he is sabotaging his journey, so the porter and the merchant continue the expedition themselves only to get lost with a depleting water supply. The merchant ultimately shoots the porter thinking that his worker was going to revolt against him when in reality the porter was offering the merchant water. When the merchant is tried for murder, the merchant is acquitted because the judge concludes that the merchant had every right to fear a potential threat from the porter, and that he was justified in shooting him in self-defense regardless of whether there was an actual threat or the merchant simply felt threatened.

*Mother Courage and Her Children* by Brecht shares themes that show the devastation of war while a mother of three tries to profit from the the Thirty Years War rather than care for her children. As a result, Mother Courage loses all three of her children, Eilif, Swiss Cheese, and Kattrin. This piece moves quickly so that there is no time for viewers to develop sentimental feelings and empathize with any of the characters, instead they see where characters could have made different choices in order to get a different outcome. Brecht expresses the downfalls of war and the idea that virtues are not rewarded in corrupt times, but actually punished. The epic structure forces the audience to focus on the issues and how they could have been avoided rather than invoking feelings of empathy toward characters.

*Theatre of the Oppressed* by Augusto Boal examines how to communicate with audiences through improvisational theatre and the analysis of the practice of theatre to share political ideas as explained in “Poetics of the Oppressed” (119-56) and

“Development of the Arena Theater of São Paulo” (159-90). As evident through his methods, Boal adapted the work of Bertolt Brecht so that the spectators are active in the theatre production and will improve their culture. He argues that the performance must not end in equilibrium, but must show ways where society is at fault and how we can change society (105). Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) techniques combine practice and analysis, which are both useful for showing how theatre can serve and provide justice for the oppressed (121).

The Fringe Benefits theatre company explains their methodology to theatre for social change in *Staging Social Justice: Collaborating to Create Activist Theatre*. This book recommends collaboration and techniques for script-writing as well as the impact of their initiatives. This source has good sections that provide tips on how to write a play for social justice from a different perspective, including that of a victim, which may be useful when the students have to write their own script for their final (76). There are also examples of how much of an impact social justice organizations and social change performance make on their college campuses so that things can be adjusted as needed to suit the needs of another institution. For example, by using tools such as interactive educational workshops on LGBT issues, institutions have reported positive change in attitudes and behaviors toward LGBT populations and apparently decrease homophobia on college campuses (67). Such techniques that foster collaboration include increasing diversity as well as collaboration between organizations and university officials. This could be useful when applied to programs and other events to be produced at colleges so that the campus community can become a haven for civic debate and social change (108-35).

Hallie Flanagan’s memoir, *Arena: The History of the Federal Theatre*, recounts how she worked as the director of the Federal Theatre Project (FTP) throughout regions of the nation, adapting plays based on each region’s unique problems that needed to be addressed. Although it does not give specifics about certain performances of the Living Newspaper or the specific adjustments that had to be made based on the problems the region was having at the time, it is useful seeing Flanagan’s thought process and methods that led to the short-term, yet significant, success of the FTP. For instance, in *One-Third of a Nation*, unbearable living conditions were exposed and prompted the government to make changes and improve housing regulations (207-22).

By focusing on social political issues, including but not limited to racism, sexual misconduct, homophobia, bias against the arts and humanities, and drinking culture, we can analyze how such issues are presented and addressed on our campus, and use theatre to expose people to oppression that is caused by, exasperates, and/or results in issues that individuals may be unaware of. The point of a liberal arts education is to challenge traditional views in favor of more progressive ideas that will benefit yourself as well as the common good.

# THEA250: Theatre for Social Change

*Mondays & Wednesdays, 10:00 am-11:15 am, Kaleidoscope 215*

The structure and policies in this syllabus were adapted from Dr. Meghan Brodie's THEA210W Fall 2016 syllabus by Samantha Hageman.

The reading, assignments, and schedule are all original material.

*"We live in a changing world: man is whispering through space, soaring to the stars in ships, flinging miles of steel and glass into the air. Shall the theatre continue to huddle in the confines of a painted box set? The movies, in their kaleidoscopic speed and juxtaposition of external objects and internal emotions, are seeking to find visible and audible expression for the tempo and the psychology of our time. The stage too must experiment- with ideas, with the psychological relationship of men and women, with speech and rhythm forms, with dance and movement, with color and light- or it must and should become a museum product."*

*-Hallie Flanagan*

Instructor: Samantha Hageman

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Office Hours: By appointment

## **Catalog Description:**

This course is an exploration of theatre as a tool for social change and how to effectively use it to address social challenges. Students will study both texts and theatrical performances geared toward social change in order to reflect on social, political, and cultural ideas and movements. This course focuses on the work of Bertolt Brecht, Augusto Boal, and Hallie Flanagan among others. Prerequisite: THEA-100 or permission of instructor. Three hours per week.

## **Goals & Outcomes:**

Students will be able to:

- describe, analyze, interpret, and evaluate both written and performance texts.
- discuss social politics and address social challenges
- shape and create theatre/performance art to pursue social change
- develop effective written and oral communication to defend informed reflections and judgments about theatre for social justice

**Required Texts:**

- *Brecht on Theatre The Development of an Aesthetic: 1918-1932* by Bertolt Brecht
- *Theatre of the Oppressed* by Augusto Boal
- *Theatre for Change: Education, Social Action and Therapy 2012th Edition* by Robert Landy (Author), David T. Montgomery (Author) ISBN-13: 978-0230243668
- *Arena: The History of the Federal Theatre* by Hallie Flanagan
- *Power: A Living Newspaper* by Arthur Arent
- *Out and Allied: An Anthology of Performance Pieces Written by LGBTQ Youth and Allies Vol 1*
- *Out and Allied: An Anthology of Performance Pieces Written by LGBTQ Youth and Allies Vol 2*
- *Staging Social Justice: Collaborating to Create Activist Theatre (Theater in the Americas)* by Norma Bowles (Editor), Daniel-Raymond Nadon (Editor), Bill Rauch (Foreword), Flint (Contributor), & 28 more ISBN-13: 978-0809332380

**Attendance and Participation:**

Your presence, preparation, and participation are required in order to excel in this class. When you are not in class, not only do you miss our discussions, we miss your contributions to discussions. I expect you to participate in class discussion each day that we meet. If you are uncomfortable speaking in class, please see me so we can make other arrangements for making your voice heard. 15% of your final grade is class participation. Be prepared for each class by arriving on time with the proper assignment and/or texts in hand.

If you will not be in class, please email me in advance.

If you miss more than three classes, your semester grade will be dropped a full letter grade for each absence after the first three absences.

Three late arrivals to class constitute one absence, so please be on time.

I will not make exceptions to this policy. I strongly encourage you to save your absences for true illnesses and emergencies.

If you experience a prolonged illness, you will need to contact the college and take a medical leave. Beyond your three permitted absences, I cannot (and will not) make accommodations for illnesses of any kind—including mental health issues—without written accommodations from the College.

If class is cancelled due to severe weather, students will be notified via email at least an hour prior to the scheduled class meeting time.

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, please contact the Ursinus Center for Academic Support (484-762-4329).

### **Cell Phones, Laptops, & Tablets:**

The use of cell phones is strictly prohibited in class. If you are expecting an important call (e.g. a call from a doctor), please let me know at the beginning of class, put your phone on vibrate, and quietly excuse yourself to take the call in the hallway. Using your cell phone during class will result in an automatic failure of this course. Do not use your cell phone to access the reading.

You may bring and use a laptop or tablet only on days when necessary. Using your laptop or tablet for anything other than what class may require (i.e. Facebook and/or other social media sites) will result in an automatic failure of this course. #itcanwait.

### **Academic Integrity:**

Please familiarize yourself with Ursinus College's Student Academic Honesty Policy found in the Ursinus College Student Handbook. The academic integrity policy applies to this class (because why would it be an exception?). If you are unfamiliar with the code, please go to the following website and read it:

<https://www.ursinus.edu/live/files/150-2014-2015-student-handbookpdf>

I am required to report all instances of plagiarism to the Dean's Office. Plagiarism of any kind will result in a failing grade for this course, and repeated offenses can result in suspension or expulsion. Paraphrasing without proper citation is a form of plagiarism. Both intentional and accidental plagiarism carry the same consequences at Ursinus College.

Please remember to quote and cite material that is not your own (e.g. what I did with this syllabus).

If you have any questions about citation, please don't hesitate to ask me.

## Assignments:

All assignments must be turned in at the beginning of class. I will not accept late assignments or emailed assignments unless you have made advance arrangements with me because of exceptional circumstances. "Advance arrangements" means arrangements made a week in advance of a deadline since you have a full week to complete all of your assignments for this class and manage your work for other classes.

If I do not receive an assignment at the beginning of class, you will receive no credit for the assignment. I don't just take away points per day the assignment is late.

Why don't I accept late work? Because in theatre, opening night cannot be postponed; in the professional workplace, deadlines are non-negotiable. Time management is one of the most important skills you need to master in college, so I'm helping you by enforcing due dates. You're welcome.

If you are not in class (and only if you are not in class), I must receive your assignment by email (attached as a Word document and cut and pasted into the body of the email) by the time the class commences on the day the assignment is due.

If you have an emergency that prohibits you from sending your assignment to me and attending class, please email me your assignment as soon as possible and inform me of the emergency; exceptions will be made for true emergencies only.

## Formatting

For all writing assignments, please adhere to these guidelines:

- Word-process all work, MLA format-
  - 12pt. Times New Roman font
  - Double space
  - Use a one-inch margin on all sides
  - In the top left hand corner, list the following each on a separate line (single-spaced):
    - Your name
    - the name of the class
    - the professor's name
    - the date
- Staple your pages together
- Proofread your paper for spelling errors and grammatical mistakes

## Assignment Instructions

### Class Performance

- Each student will give one class performance on a social issue of her/his/their choice. This performance serves as your midterm exam.
- Your performance must include an informative playbill—please make enough copies for each of your classmates and me. The playbill should not be your presentation, but should include complement your performance and provide resources as well as discussion questions for your topic.
- The playbill should include a properly formatted bibliography of all of the sources you used to create your performance. You must include at least three scholarly sources. If there is a particular internet source you believe would be useful, you may plead your case, and we'll see.
- If you do not submit this playbill at the time of your performance, you will not be allowed to perform, and will receive a failing grade.
- You must exercise your creative muscles. Compose a song, write a scene, invent an interactive piece, perform a monologue, etc. You are welcome to include fellow classmates and/or friends in your performance as long as they are only assisting you.

### Informal Writing Assignments (Mantle of the Expert Response, Final Play Description, Article & Response to Theatre for Social Justice on a College Campus)

- 2-3 pages following the formatting guidelines previously mentioned
- thoughtful, original, and engaging
- must show comprehension of the material
- includes reflection and critique of the material

### Peer Review

- You should pay attention to the detail in your writer's piece
  - Do you understand it? What is unclear, and how can they fix it?
  - What do they do well? What could they improve on?
  - Does it flow well?
  - Is it organized?

### Script

- This script will serve as your final exam.
- Be certain that your script has a theme based on at least one social issue, a plot, and more than one character. I want you to think critically about addressing

social challenges (what, how, why, etc.) and consider the kinds of characters that will best suit your script.

- Your audience consists of people who are not familiar with your particular topic-just regular people, but they are not looking to be lectured.
- Your script should be a minimum of 12 full pages in length. You must include a bibliography, but this does not count toward the final length of the paper. If you do not submit a bibliography, you will receive a failing grade (because you need to acknowledge the sources that informed your playwriting).

*If you have questions for any assignment, please do not hesitate to contact me well in advance (not the night before it is due).*

### **Student Perceptions of Teaching Questionnaire (SPTQ) Assessment:**

The course will be evaluated by students using the SPTQ Assessment. This assessment provides feedback to the professor that allows for future course development and provides feedback to the Department Chair and the Dean for faculty evaluation purposes. Please participate in this important assessment process.

### **Grades:**

25% Midterm Performance Project

5% Mantle of the Expert Response

5% Final Play Description

5% Article & Response to Theatre for Social Justice on a College Campus

10% Peer Review

25% Final Script

25% Attendance/Participation

*100% TOTAL*

### **Notes:**

1. This is a discussion-based course. I encourage the lively exchange of ideas. All are welcome to share their opinions and likewise all are expected to respect others' right to express their opinions.
2. It would be helpful for you to take notes on class discussions to help you develop your own ideas and write papers.
3. There are no tests/quizzes included because I do not believe that they are effective teaching methods, especially in the case of how to approach social issues using theatre. Instead of memorizing facts and dates, you are asked to think critically about this subject matter and demonstrate your ability to analyze,

interpret, and approach social issues. If, however, students do not come to class prepared by having read the material assigned for each class period, I reserve the right to implement graded quizzes and tests.

### **Schedule/Due Dates:**

#### Unit 1: What is theatre for social change?

Week 1:

Due Monday-

Introduction to Class. Review the syllabus In class, and if time permits: Discuss an issue that you believe is a problem in our society to class and answer:

- Who does it affect, and why?
- Why does it matter that we address it/fix it in our society?

Due Wednesday-

- *Brecht on Theatre The Development of an Aesthetic: 1918-1932* by Bertolt Brecht

Bertolt Brecht was a German poet, playwright, director, and theatre theorist of the twentieth century who conceived of epic theatre as a social and ideological arts forum for making change. These essays explain his theories regarding theatre:

- “8. The Epic Theatre and its Difficulties”
- “24. Alienation Effects in Chinese Acting”
- “29. The Street Scene”

Week 2:

Due Monday-

- *Theatre of the Oppressed* by Augusto Boal (p. 95-125)

Augusto Boal was a Brazilian director, politician, and writer. He adapted Brecht's theories and founded the Theatre of the Oppressed.

Due Wednesday-

- *Theatre of the Oppressed* by Augusto Boal (p. 126-156)

In class: Mantle of the Expert exercise

- Write a response to our time in case- i.e. what you expected it to be versus what/how it turned out, how you feel about how it ended, what you would have liked to happen, etc. due next class (do not handwrite it)

We are about to read a book that uses this technique, but before you read about it, I want you to experience what it is/how it feels.

## Unit 2: How can I use theatre for social change?

Week 3:

Due Monday-

Mantle of the Expert response due!

*Theatre for Change* by Landy and Montgomery

- Chapter 2: Educational Drama and Theatre in the Middle and Secondary School (p. 37-80)

We see how theatre can be applied in middle school, but in class, we will discuss how we can use theatre to approach older individuals (i.e. college students), and what issues they would engage them to incite social change. We will discuss techniques described in this book, and how to change them to suit students on a college campus.

Due Wednesday-

*Staging Social Justice: Collaborating to Create Activist Theatre*

- “What Comes Next? A Guide to Organizing, Activating, and Rallying the College Campus” by Amanda Dunne Acevedo and Lindsey Barlag Thornton (p. 108-119)

This chapter talks about how to approach social change on a college campus in an effective way. We’ve studied theories and how they have been applied in elementary school settings, but now we want to make them relevant to college students.

Week 4:

Due Monday-

*Theatre for Change* by Landy and Montgomery

- Chapter 3: Theatre for, by and with Young People (p. 81-119)

This is assigned to review epic theatre and its effectiveness before reading an example of epic theatre for next class.

Due Wednesday-

*Mother Courage and Her Children* by Bertolt Brecht

This play shows a mother prioritizing making a profit from the Thirty Years War rather than caring for her children. It is an example of epic theatre.

## Unit 3: Theatre does *what*?

Week 5:

Due Monday-

*Theatre for Change* by Landy and Montgomery

- Chapter 4: Applied Theatre (p. 127-166)

Applied Theatre is the practice of drama in non-traditional settings, sometimes within a marginalized community.

Due Wednesday-

*Learning Through Theatre: The Changing Face of Theatre in Education 3rd Edition*

- Part IV: TIE [Theatre in Education] in the twenty-first century- issues and challenges (p. 267-300)

This chapter of the book addresses how theatre may not be a useful approach to some issues due to technological developments and/or the new culture of our society.

Week 6:

Due Monday-

*The Exception and the Rule* by Bertolt Brecht

This is a learning play by Brecht about a rich merchant who accidentally murders his porter. We will talk about how this play can relate to current issues regarding police brutality.

Work on your midterm performances (NEXT WEEK!)

Due Wednesday-

Work on your midterm performances (NEXT WEEK!)

Week 7:

Monday and Wednesday- Perform a piece on any social issue(s) of your choice for your midterm.

#### Unit 4: Learn it and live it

Week 8:

Due Monday-

*Staging Social Justice: Collaborating to Create Activist Theatre*

- "Do Not Try This at Home!" by Michael Ellison (p.84-91)

This chapter mentions how theatre for social justice (TSJ) has to approach tough, sensitive topics in order to initiate change, and is broken into subdivisions to talk about ideas to better approach these kinds of topics.

Due Wednesday-

*Out and Allied: An Anthology of Performance Pieces Written by LGBTQ Youth and Allies* Vol 1

- "A guide to producing performances" (p. 140-156, 159-160, 162)
- "I'm Not Gay, But Thanks!" by Meredith Lamothe (p. 65-68)

This guide briefly explains how to safely produce social justice pieces, and there are plenty of examples, but we will only have one required for class.

*Arena: The History of the Federal Theatre*

- “Danger: Men Not Working” (p. 1-47)

This is a memoir written by Hallie Flanagan, the director of the Federal Theatre Project (FTP), and the first chapter explains the efforts that made the project possible.

Week 9:

Due Monday-

*Staging Social Justice: Collaborating to Create Activist Theatre*

- “Creating a Safe Space and a Great Show” (p. 154-166)

*Power: A Living Newspaper* by Arthur Arent

Some topics in theatre for social change may make some individuals uncomfortable due to the past trauma or the fact that some areas are ‘taboo’ to discuss. This chapter explains how to approach sensitive topics in a safe space while maintaining the intended message. After reading about the FTP, we will read a Living Newspaper to understand the techniques they used.

Due Wednesday-

*Out and Allied: An Anthology of Performance Pieces Written by LGBTQ Youth and Allies* Vol 2

- “Opening True Dialogue” (p. 20-22, 26-27)
- “Introduction and Storytelling: Gayrilla Theatre Troupe” (p. 213-222)
- “Into Action” by Anonymous Teachers (p. 223-225)

These tips and examples will help you write your play for your final!

Week 10:

Due Monday-

*Staging Social Justice: Collaborating to Create Activist Theatre*

- “Ripples over the Great Barrier” by Rod Ainsworth and Jude Phippen (p. 196-205)
- “The Wisdom of Us: Reconstructing Identities and Affinities through Theatre for Social Justice” by Brooke Kiener (p. 233-243)

These chapters help to showcase how effective theatre for social change can be, and how it can help reform society.

Due Wednesday-

You’ve had plenty of time to think about a social issue that matters to you. Come in with a typed description of what your final play will be about (what social issue you want to address, how the play will address it, etc.). We will share our ideas in class.

## Unit 5: Write it and love it

Week 11:

Due Monday-

*Staging Social Justice: Collaborating to Create Activist Theatre*

- “Voicing Your Gender, Gendering Your Voice” by Rebecca M. Root (p. 206-211)

This entire book will be useful to help you write your play for your final. This chapter will help you see that you can write for roles to represent other individuals, and acts as a preliminary guide for doing so.

Due Wednesday-

*Out and Allied: An Anthology of Performance Pieces Written by LGBTQ Youth and Allies Vol 1*

- “Liquid Gender Form” by Stephen M. Feest (p. 96-98)

This is an example of a piece investigating gender identity after reading a short essay on how-to write from another person’s perspective, and may help you write your play.

Week 12:

Due Monday-

*Staging Social Justice: Collaborating to Create Activist Theatre*

- “Sympathy vs. Stigma: Writing the ‘Victim’” by Daniel-Raymond Nadon (p. 76-83)

*Out and Allied: An Anthology of Performance Pieces Written by LGBTQ Youth and Allies Vol 1*

- “Getting Started Writing A Production-Worthy Piece” (p. 165-168)

The guide and the example piece will help you write your final play.

Due Wednesday-

Complete a draft of your play.

Week 13:

Due Monday-

*Staging Social Justice: Collaborating to Create Activist Theatre*

- “Inspiring Change and Action: Measuring the Impact of Theatre for Social Justice” by Susan V. Iverson (p.66-75)

This essay shares the results of research done on college campus after theatre was used to talk about LGBT issues. From this evidence and the methods through which it was accomplished, we see how theatre can be effectively utilized.

Due Wednesday-

Bring in an article where a college campus effectively pursued theatre for social change/justice. Write a typed response, and interpret how it could be applied at this institution.

Week 14:

Due Monday-

Come to class with a draft of your script for peer review!

Due Wednesday-

Come to class with a draft of your script for peer review!

Week 15:

Final play due!