

# Course Syllabus

## **THAR 0130-301 Introduction to Costumes, Sets, Lights**

In-person Class Time: 3:30-5:00 pm Tuesdays (T) & Thursdays (R), Van Pelt 113 unless otherwise noted.

Faculty: Cat Johnson, MFA

Office Hours: by appointment

Email: [catj@sas.upenn.edu](mailto:catj@sas.upenn.edu) (checked Monday through Friday 9am to 5pm. Expect a response within 24 hours during the week and Friday afternoon emails responded to by the end of Monday.)

Office Phone: 215-898-2547 (messages checked and responded to similarly to above.)

### **Welcome!**

In this course we will explore the role of costumes, scenery and lighting in theatre. As these disciplines are creative and technical, emotional and analytical, as well as visual, spatial, and temporal this course will require personal engagement and exploratory learning. This also means this class can be a lot of fun!

We will begin with a foundation of scenographic theory and history, then practice the fundamentals of design, before applying these to the specific techniques of costume, scenic and lighting design. The course will culminate in a final presentation of your best work from the semester.

The class will consist of asynchronous work outside of class time and in-person class meetings requiring you to take an active role in your own and your classmates' learning. Activities and assignments will consist of readings and reflections, attending live and watching recorded theatre, writing analyses, having discussions, taking photos and analyzing visuals, learning computer software and modeling by hand, interpreting texts, communicating your imagination, and presenting your ideas both individually and with teams. Communicating via the internet is imperative for today's designers; this course will give you tools and practice.

### **Course Catalog Description:**

Design for theatre (and all of the performing arts) is a dynamic, collaborative process that engages both intellect and emotion in staging the dramatic moment. The personal vision of the designer must navigate the often-uncharted waters of the production process, from the earliest,

personal moments of design inspiration to the opening night performance. Design flows from creativity, is structured by research and theory, and is realized in living form by collaboration in the dynamic process of theatre-making. This class will integrate history, theory, and practice of stage design in this special interdisciplinary, active-learning course offering open to all Penn students. Required of all Theatre Arts Majors.

### **Course Goals & Outcomes:**

**GOALS:** what you will practice in order to be successful in this course

- Communicate visual, spatial, and temporal ideas
- Collaborate via in-person, digital, and online tools
- Engage with material and each other

**OUTCOMES:** results of successful coursework

- Learn to analyze theatrical scripts for the purpose of visual, spatial, and temporal design
- Learn to communicate meaning using design principles
- Learn the tools & techniques specific to each: Lighting, Sets, and Costumes

### **Assignments, Activities, and Assessments:**

***Unassessed assignments***- This course consists of active learning in-person class sessions and asynchronous individual assignments. Some assignments, like script reading, is not assessed, but the subsequent assignment, like script analysis, is assessed. The assessed assignment would be impossible to complete without doing the unassessed assignment. Similarly, viewing virtual lectures are not assessed directly but are necessary for engaging in class sessions which are assessed as a whole for engagement. Extra readings are also provided for depth of learning.

***Major assignments*** will be assigned a letter grade as a way of communicating how well a student demonstrated the learning objectives of those assignments.

- *A Midsummer Night's Dream script analysis*- following a template, to document the process of interpreting the text into scenographic information.

- *Midsummer Visual Research Collage*- research and production concept practice. (weighted slightly less)

-*Marisol script analysis & visual research*- similar to the 2 assignments above

- *Scenography Comparison Across Differing Production Concepts*- applying understanding of script analysis, design communication objectives, elements of design and principles of composition. (weighted slightly more)

- *Design projects*- one each in Sets, Lights, and Costumes. These three due dates are spread out during the second half of the semester.

-*Final Project*- a cohesive Design Presentation (multi-page pdf or video) of the best of the above three major projects and written analysis together.

**Process assignments & activities**- will be assigned a point value as a way of communicating how well the student fulfilled the purpose of the assignment. These are asynchronous prep work necessary for participating in class time and class engagement itself.

-*Theatre terms*- An open-book terminology quiz in the first week of class. This is your opportunity to make sure you will understand the industry-specific language we will use throughout the semester.

-*Theatre design theory and history readings and discussion*- a Canvas discussion post proceeding in-class discussion.

-*Script analysis process*- class by class prep work to understand the major assignment.

-*Elements of design & principles of composition*- three digital photo and one video clip assignments, four class sessions in a row in the first half of semester.

-*SketchUp*- basics project

-*Live theatre analysis*- attend our Program's live production and write an analysis of its scenography

-*Engagement*- An overall assessment of engagement in course materials, class participation, and active learning with peers

## **Grading:**

Each graded assignment has a rubric on Canvas. The one exception is engagement, which lists examples.

Late assignments are not permitted. Extenuating circumstances will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Communicate circumstances as soon as possible, and complete a Course Absence Report if you must miss class. Do not miss class for missing assignments; this will affect your learning (and therefore grade) twice. Assignments are designed to facilitate learning and are cumulative.

\*Grades in Canvas may not be accurate to a student's actual grade because of the weight of major assignments vs points for process assignments.

### **Expectations & Policies:**

*Classroom equipment-* A laptop capable of accessing Canvas, Google suite, and SketchUp simultaneously is necessary for this course. A digital camera that can upload to this laptop is also necessary; a cell phone camera is fine.

*Active Learning-* Theatre and scenic design is inherently a collaborative field, which also combines the study of sociology, psychology, history, physics, art, language, and many other disciplines. Much of our insight and learning come from experimenting with ideas and engaging with each other. Interactive learning requires vulnerability, mistakes and helping each other. It also provides opportunity for growth, understanding, relevant application, and even mastery. The more you put into this active way of learning, the more you will gain.

*Class sessions etiquette-* At the end of each class meeting each table is responsible for uploading a picture of their work from the class session, wiping their whiteboard clean, and pushing in their chairs. This may include one or more photographs of the activities completed on the classroom whiteboards and/or activities on Google slides, which save automatically. Photo files in the Google drive should be named as the date and table number. Put names of table participants directly on the slide or whiteboard.

*Advice on how to succeed-* Dig in! Learning from the course materials and activities works best when you get curious. Ask a lot of questions: ask classmates, ask the instructor, ask yourself. Use class work time to explore and test creative ideas. Take risks, make mistakes in class so that you can learn from them to tackle your projects with more confidence.

A lot of the skills of a stage designer take practice. Regular incremental work will improve the quality of your work. Daily drawings and observations, reading articles and interviews, and experiencing shows are three ways to become a better stage designer.

Proactively follow the class by class course schedule or Canvas Module flow. Look ahead for bigger assignments to manage time accordingly.

*COVID-19-* All University of Pennsylvania COVID-19 Protocols & Guidance must be followed. As of 8/18/22, masking requirements are determined by each course's instructor. I recommend but do not require mask wearing in class, unless or until University guidance changes.

*Academic Integrity-* Please familiarize yourself with Penn's Code of Academic Integrity, [https://catalog.upenn.edu/pennbook/code-of-academic-integrity/Links to an external site](https://catalog.upenn.edu/pennbook/code-of-academic-integrity/Links%20to%20an%20external%20site), which applies to this course. Collaborative and creative work requires pulling information from many sources but do not claim anyone else's work as your own.

## **Campus Resources:**

Take care of yourself and reach out to Penn's resources for assistance.

Students seeking assistance with disabilities can access campus resources at: <https://www.vpul.upenn.edu/lrc/sds/index.php> Links to an external site.

Students can find resources for their wellness at: <https://www.vpul.upenn.edu/index> Links to an external site.

Students facing academic challenges can reach out to the Weingarten Learning Center <https://www.vpul.upenn.edu/lrc/Links> to an external site. for assistance.

Stay up to date on COVID-19 protocols and supports: <https://coronavirus.upenn.edu/>

## **Calendar/Schedule:**

See Canvas for Module details.

MODULES:

Weeks 1: BIG PICTURE

Weeks 2-7: ANALYSIS & DESIGN FUNDAMENTALS

Weeks 8-14: COMMUNICATING VISUALLY, SPATIALLY & TEMPORALLY

Week 15: CULMINATION

\*Syllabus is subject to change.