

Course Syllabus

THAR 3130-201 Theatre Design Lab: Applied Scenography

Class Time: 12:00-3:00 pm, Fridays
Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts, Room 221

Faculty: Cat Johnson, MFA

Office Hours: by appointment

Email: 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 morning.)

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

Welcome!

Theatre Design Lab: Applied Scenography provides students the opportunity to develop their design for a realized production into a portfolio-ready design deck package, elevating their academic student work to the comprehensive work expected of entry-level professionals. Scenographers create their own process of text analysis, conceptual and contextual research, and application of design principles to transform the words on the page into tangible visuals that evoke both emotions and meaning, while also understanding the possibilities and limitations of physics, and communicate how these experiences can happen before their proposed built environments exist. In this advanced level course, each student's project will serve as the framework for honing their ability to transform written source materials, such as scripts or novels, into 3D live experiences and to articulate visual, spatial and temporal concepts to audience members, collaborators, and clients. Through coursework, students will examine how their design process evolves as co-collaborators and realities shape their ideas. Students will deepen their analysis of texts, broaden their research, expand their ideation process in order to fine-tune meaningful selections, practice model making- digital and/or physical, learn computer-aided drafting via Vectorworks (AutoCAD software developed specifically for the live entertainment industry), and solidify their virtual presentations. Under the guidance of the course instructor, each student will select their individual design project (in scenery, or a combination of scenery, lighting, costumes, and sound) from the following three choices: a production they are working on outside of class; a production within Theatre Arts, if approved; or a large-scale musical, opera, or themed environment unrealized production with additional technical stipulations.

Course Outcomes: results of successful coursework

- Expand knowledge of what is possible and effective in scenography
- Communicate designs and implementation to collaborators, clients, and audience
- Create a complete Design Package

Required Course Materials

Students must bring a laptop to each class session which can support free educational Vectorworks software. System requirements:
<https://forum.vectorworks.net/index.php?/articles.html/articles/sysreq2025/> Operating System and Minimum Hardware Profile/Entry-level Profile are acceptable.

Other design software may be necessary; free alternatives exists and can operate on the same student laptop as Vectorworks.

Assignments, Activities, and Final Project:

Each week the 3-hour class meeting will be divided between:

- ADP - Analysis, Discussion, and Presentations: prepared before class
- VWD - Vectorworks Drafting: started during class, finished after class
- RCI - Rendering and Communicating Ideas: in class practice

*	Analysis, Discussion, Presentations	Vectorworks Drafting	Rendering and Communicating Ideas
Week 1	Past work, Project Idea	What is included in a Design Package	Perspective Drawing
Week 2	3D Composition Photos	Step unit Ortho- Iso sheet	Foreshortening
Week 3	Text Analysis	LinkedIn Learning tutorial	3D Composition Sketching
Week 4	Broadway Designers Presentations	Begin final project drafting file	Drawing Ideas on the Fly
Week 5	Regional Designers Presentations	Curves and other modeling questions	Drawing to Specs
Week 6	Post Show Discussion	Class trip to live	Theatre production
Week 7	Research, Work in Progress, Present Multiple Options	Explore an Existing File	Unexpected Obstacles and Solutions
Week 8	Post Show Discussion	Class trip to live	Theatre production

	Spring	Break	Week
Week 9	Representational vs. Presentational & Properties	Title Blocks	Vectorworks to SketchUp to Photoshop
Week 10	What captivates, engages, inspires you?	Sheets: GPs, Section, GP for taping, Els, Pieces	Painter's Elevations
Week 11	Guest Speaker	Work Session	Physical Models
Week 12	Process Analysis & Final Rough Draft	Exporting to .STL in mm units	3D printing
Week 13	Flex	Flex	Flex
Week 14	Final Presentation	Final Design Package	Self Evaluation

See Canvas site for detailed ADP assignments and final project requirements.

*Schedule subject to change

Grading:

At the end of the semester each student will receive a grade. This grade will be a combination of the quality of the student's work and their collaborative contribution to class. An "A" grade means that as a production manager I would hire this student as a scenographer. A "B" grade means I would hire this student if I had no other candidates. A "C" grade means the student's work and collaborative contribution are adequate but I would conduct a new search to find a more suitable candidate. A "D" grade means the student was present during the course, and completed the assignments but did not demonstrate adequate work or contributions. An "F" grade means the student participated in less than 60% of the classes and assignments.

Throughout the course students will receive grades and feedback on assignments and works-in-progress in order to understand what grade their work and collaborative contributions are earning and how to improve. Each assignment and the final project include information about what the student needs to demonstrate in their work.

Expectations & Policies:

This course exists for student learning. The instructor will facilitate each intrinsically motivated student toward improvement as a scenographer. Each student is expected to take ownership of their own learning.

This course requires attendance. Missing a once-a-week class meeting means missing a large portion of the course. Only some course content can be made up for at another time or in another way. It is a student's responsibility to proactively communicate with the instructor about missed class time and take initiative about solutions for missed course content.

Academic Integrity- Students are expected to know and understand Penn's Code of Academic Integrity, <https://catalog.upenn.edu/pennbook/code-of-academic-integrity/> Collaborative and creative work requires pulling information from many sources but claiming other's work as one's own is plagiarism.

Generative AI has become a ubiquitous tool. Students must credit any text or images gained from AI sources with the name of the AI tool and the prompt provided. Claiming unedited AI output as one's own work earns a grade as an AI prompter, not a scenographer.

Campus Resources:

Students are encouraged to reach out to Penn's resources for assistance.

Students seeking assistance with disabilities or academic support can access Weingarten Learning Center resources at: <https://weingartencenter.universitylife.upenn.edu/>

Students can find resources for their wellness at: <https://universitylife.upenn.edu/>