

Caden Manson
Course Descriptions

The Creative Spark - Making Theatre and Performance Now (FYS)

More and more artists are multi-hyphenate like actor-writer-coder, designer-director-singer, or dancer-landscape artist-filmmaker. Whether making different kinds of work or taking on various roles in the process, this course will help you find the multitude in yourself and art. The Creative Spark focuses on nurturing creativity, curiosity, and a resilient artistic practice in the expanded field of theatre and performance while exploring the contemporary landscape of theatrical approaches to making new work. The class will survey the many roles of creating work as a director, designer, dramaturg, performer, organizer, and generator. The course will also investigate contemporary artists embracing theatrical forms of care, devising, the choreographic, immersive, post-internet, music theatre, staging futures, performance cabaret, mixed reality, and beyond. Students will move between developing their creative practice, researching artists and companies through readings, videos, seeing live performance, and creating work through exercises, workshops, and creative prompts. Some of the artists and companies surveyed in this class include Ligia Lewis, who creates immersive, participatory, sensory environments for audiences; The Builders Association, who make interactive app-driven plays; Justin Vivian Bond, who produces cabarets centering trans and queer experience; Jaamil Olawale Kosoko, who invites audiences to follow them along a cross-platform celebration of black love and power; and Big Art Group, who create queer multimedia performance through a technique called real-time film. The Creative Spark meets once a week for 2 hours and will alternate individual conferences with small group meetings/conferences to include screenings, field trips, and performances. Students will also enroll in two other Theatre Components of their choice to complete their Theatre Third. Students are required to attend scheduled Theatre Meetings and Think Tanks and complete a set amount of technical support hours with student productions in the Theatre Program.

Beyond the Proscenium: Radical Acting, Directing, and Design in the Post-Internet Age

This is an immersive course designed for actors, performers, directors, designers, and writers who seek to push the boundaries of theater and embrace the bold world of post-internet aesthetics, where theatre and performance meet cutting-edge digital and networked methods. You'll investigate innovative approaches to contemporary theater, exploring new ways of storytelling that embrace technology's boundless possibilities. Through engaging exercises, thought-provoking readings, and inspiring discussions, you'll explore the fusion of theater with immersive multimedia elements, AI, video mapping, motion capture, 3D scanning/rendering, game engine, and networked liveness.

The course is divided into sections that each unveil a unique aspect of post-internet performance. You'll gain the vocabulary and skills needed to thrive in this digital era, from mastering performance, directing, and designing with cameras to working with networked storytelling and AI.

Through flash labs and composition days, you'll collaborate with peers to create original projects that synthesize the techniques, vocabulary, and skills introduced during the course. This dynamic workshop environment encourages you to take creative risks and unlock your limitless artistic potential. "Beyond the Proscenium" invites you to embrace the ever-evolving theatrical landscape

Performance Research

How are we engaged in the language and research in our field? How does this engagement manifest in how we articulate our art practice, talk about others' work, and develop relationships with collaborators/curators/funders? In this class, we will investigate the field of contemporary performance and how we engage and present our research and work.

In the first semester, we will survey the field of contemporary performance. We will read, watch videos, see work, and discuss from the reading list. As a group, we will propose new readings and videos. We will build a working vocabulary, an artist reference list, and a corpus of written responses to the research.

In the Spring semester, we will focus on our artistic practice and activate the knowledge we built in the first semester to develop and refine our creative language while developing field-specific tools. During the semester, we will discuss strategies and concepts for engaging with collaborators, audiences, and presenters/curators. We will also create or update our websites, artist statements, bios, resumes, and CVs. We will leave this class with these tools and documents not as finished products but as working documents that will continue to grow and change as we do as artists and citizens.

Performance Lab

Performance Lab is a foundational component in the curriculum for both first and second-year MFA Theatre graduate candidates. In this course, the values of research, experimentation, risk, failure, and embracing the unknown are celebrated. The course is designed to give equal attention to embodied practice, group performance experiments, and the spirit of play.

At the start of each cycle, students decide on a brief or collaboratively generate research questions, followed by a class vote to select the most compelling ones for exploration. Students are then randomly placed into research groups, where each eight-week cycle is dedicated to in-depth exploration of these questions. The lab time is utilized for developing research and practice strategies, emphasizing sharing findings, and exploring emerging possibilities and questions with the class.

Creating a comprehensive bibliography encompassing published journals, books, articles, performances, interviews, videos, and images is a key part of the process. This resource reflects the diverse range of inquiries and serves as a foundation for further exploration. Each cycle culminates with the proposal of new research questions or a vote on a new brief, fostering a continuous cycle of inquiry and discovery.

Embodied Thesis

Embodied Thesis offers a critical and supportive environment for second-year Theatre graduate students to develop and showcase new works of original theatre and performance. This course emphasizes a multifaceted approach to research, incorporating historical and artistic exploration, showings, improvisations, experiments, and discussions. Throughout the year, each student will create a unique project, whether individual, duo, or group, encompassing all design and technical elements in a piece under 30 minutes. Weekly class meetings facilitate discussions between students and faculty about these showings, addressing artistic and practical considerations. In the second semester, students will produce a

festival featuring their 30-minute pieces, with each student also serving on the crew (lightboard, video, sound) for their peers.

In the fall semester, students will focus on practice, sharing performance research, showing work in progress, responding to developmental prompts, and maintaining a practice journal. The course meets for 2 hours weekly, with an additional expectation of 4 hours of independent studio work or research. Monthly practice journals, shared via Google Docs, will log activities, research, visual collages, to-do lists, progress summaries, questions, goals, and needs. The creation strategy includes three phases: research (first semester), prototyping (end of the first semester and January break), and editing (spring semester, leading up to final showings). This structured approach ensures students receive comprehensive feedback and support, enabling them to develop their thesis projects with confidence and creativity.