

DRAMA

MFA Theatre Practice Handbook

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Our Program

The **Master of Fine Arts in Theatre Practice** brings talented and motivated graduate students together with outstanding educators, active artists and theorists with local, national, and international perspectives in the performing arts.

DEPARTMENT OF DRAMA



Table of Contents

Introduction	Page 3
Objectives	Page 3
Program Description	Page 3
Course Requirements	Page 3
Selecting and Registering	Page 4
Typical Course Load	Page 4
Year One	Page 4
Year Two	Page 5
Advising	Page 5
The MFA Theatre Practice Performance and Written Thesis	Page 5
Preparation	Page 5
The Written Component	Page 6
The Written Oral Defense	Page 6
Performance Opportunities and Residency Studio Space	Page 6
Additional Information	Page 7
Funding	Page 7
Advice	Page 7
Casting	Page 8
Posters & Playbills	Page 9
Graduates of the MFA Theatre Practice Program	Page 9
Related Documents and Appendices	Page 10
Checklist	Page 11

MASTER OF FINE ARTS IN THEATRE PRACTICE PROGRAM

Introduction

As a student of the MFA Theatre Practice your own process is at the centre. There is room for cross-fertilization in your training program as well as specialization in a chosen area. In addition, you will be introduced to numerous theoretical and artistic projects, in both research and creation, in which our faculty are engaged. The Master of Fine Arts in Theatre Practice stimulates and deliberately challenges your activity as an artist working in the field of contemporary performance. Its graduates have gone on to make substantial contributions to the academic and professional performance environment locally, nationally and internationally as teachers, directors, actors, dancers, playwrights, theatre activists, artistic directors, dramaturges, critics, arts administrators, communications and publicity directors.

Objectives

The Master of Fine Arts in Theatre Practice brings talented and motivated graduate students together with outstanding educators, active artists and theorists with local, national, and international perspectives in the performing arts. The program is aimed at mature artists (with at least five years of professional practice) who are interested in deepening or redirecting an already existing practice. This is a project-based degree offering advanced training for artists in the field of performance and its practical and theoretical applications. The prospective student defines their area of specialization and designs an individual program of study based on their professional goals in consultation with Department of Drama faculty.

Program Description

One-on-one mentoring from faculty advisors who are working artists and scholars in an area related to the student's sub-specialty. Participation in existing graduate courses in specific areas of performance, critical theory, and dramaturgy. A two-year residency that culminates in the presentation of a performative thesis project, supplemented by a written document. This MFA is a sequential program; candidates enter in the Fall semester. While potential candidates must apply with a clear idea of the nature of their potential thesis project, the students' work in the first year is exploratory and investigative, allowing for engagement in research, critical analysis and the refinement and development of these skills. It is expected that creative projects will be attached to existing department ventures or be located outside the department, developed in collaboration with other theatres/agencies. In consultation with their Supervisor and the Graduate Committee, students will plan their own program and submit a detailed proposal for their final graduating project.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Because MFA Theatre Practice enrolment is kept relatively low, our courses are small enough to allow students to get to know each other well and to receive good guidance and supervision from faculty. All students must complete 33 units of course weight (11 courses). All MFA Theatre Practice students must complete the Research Methods course (Drama 601) worth 3 units of course weight which prepares you for critical research and writing, including the thesis proposal. Thesis 903: (MFA Thesis

Project) will bring total course credits to 36. Each student will propose a thesis project (903) which will require a supervisor in the candidate's area of specialization. The thesis will consist of a major creative and practice-based project accompanied by a written component including research, documentation of the process, and analysis of results.

Through its Special Projects option (Drama 605) the Department also allows you to pursue independent study in areas outside of its usual course offerings. The availability of special projects courses, however, is dependent on the willingness of qualified faculty who must agree to teach these courses. DRAMA 605 is normally only taken in your second year, and you develop your proposal in conjunction with a supervisor before registering in order to complete your registrations as a full-time student.

DRAMA 606 is an undergraduate course that may be used to attain greater knowledge or expertise in an area related to your research. Students are normally allowed to take only ONE 606 class during the course of this program. The student will arrange together with the instructor of the course extra assignments to make it compliant with graduate course work.

Finally, because theatre by its very nature is both international and interdisciplinary, you may consider taking a course in another department or program such as History, Music, Art and Design, Classics, English, Romance or Germanic Languages, Film Studies, Women's Studies, Canadian Studies or Slavic and East European Studies, Sociology, Anthropology, or Comparative Literature. **Only graduate-level courses may count towards the MFA Theatre Practice degree, but undergraduate courses may be completed on an audit or non-credit basis.** For special arrangements, (DR 606) see the MFA Coordinator.

SELECTING AND REGISTERING FOR COURSES

It is your responsibility to set up the consultation with the Coordinator in a timely fashion. The Coordinator needs to sign off your course choices, normally before September 1. You then give the sheet to the by September 7th, at the latest, and she will register you in your courses and keep the signed form in your file. If you are receiving a scholarship or a full-time GA¹ assignment, you must be registered as a full-time student in each term, or your monthly pay will be affected. Usually, courses are laid out like this.

TYPICAL COURSE LOAD

Year One

Term One (9 credits)		Term Two (9 credits)	
Option	Seminar Course	Option	Seminar Course
DR 601	Methods and Tools of Research	Option	Seminar Course
Option	Seminar Course	Option	Seminar Course

¹GA refers to GTA (Graduate Teaching Assistantship) or GRA (Graduate Research Assistantship). These are often offered as part of a funding package for graduate students.

Year Two

Term One (9 credits)		Term Two (9 credits)	
DR 605/or Seminar Course	One course: in either the fall/winter term/ relating to thesis prep	DR 605/or Seminar Course	One course: in either the fall/winter term/ relating to thesis prep
Option	Seminar Course	Option	Seminar Course
Option	Seminar Course	Thesis 903: Thesis Prep	

ADVISING

Your Program Coordinator can help with these decisions. They will work with you on your course selection, as well as respond to questions and issues that arise for you during your program. Normally you will meet with the Coordinator 1-2 times per term as well as by your request. Until a thesis supervisor is established, you will also work with the Coordinator as you develop thesis plans.

The MFA Theatre Practice Performance and Written Thesis

The MFA Theatre Practice is a two-year program that culminates in the **presentation of a creative thesis project** (performance, script, installation, dance, etc.) addressing your research questions and **accompanied by a written component**. This can take time and we encourage students to take this time. During the first term of the program you should think about performance and research topics which you might wish to pursue within the scope of your MFA thesis.

PREPARATION

Drama 601 will help you with the preparation of your thesis proposal. Normally over the course of your first term your research topic will be chosen and in a continuing dialogue with the MFA Coordinator and your Supervisor. Once a full-time continuing faculty member has agreed to be your supervisor you must briefly outline:

- Performance schedule/including workshops.
- Research importance and scope, its relationship to previous research in the field, the research procedure(s), and the performance protocols.
- The tentative timetable for the creation of the performance.

By the end of your first year, the proposal should be submitted to your MFA Supervisor(s)

NOTE: If your research involves human subjects an ethics review is required. This should be started in your first term because it may take some time to get it approved. See your advisor or coordinator for more details.

THE WRITTEN COMPONENT

An MFA thesis should normally not exceed 100 pages. (there are exceptions, this is a recommendation) The written document accompanies the performance research and is a companion document. The written document style can vary reflecting each student's research; combining academic rigor with their own discoveries and expertise in their chosen area of exploration.

THE ORAL DEFENSE

When the members of the MFA supervisory committee feel that your thesis is ready to go forward to the **oral defense**, your supervisor will schedule it, in consultation with the Grad Coordinator. This will also include making sure the members of the committee will be present at your performative thesis project; which will then be supplemented by a written document. The committee is created in consultation with the student.

Attending are your Thesis Committee (Supervisor, Internal and External examiners and Chair). It is an opportunity to discuss, critique, explain, analyze and defend project choices. A typical format consists of the candidate making an opening statement about the project, then Thesis Committee members asking a series of questions to the candidate. Normally the process takes 90-120 minutes.

Following the defense, the candidate completes revisions as requested. The Committee may request to see these, or they may leave it to the Supervisor to approve the final document.

The Drama Department requires that you submit one bound copy to the Guberman Reading Room, in addition, it is customary for you to offer a copy of your thesis to your supervisor. Please speak with your supervisor for more information about this topic.

PERFORMANCE OPPORTUNITIES AND RESIDENCY STUDIO SPACE

The MFA Theatre practice program normally provides opportunities for practical engagement with performance through dramaturgy, workshops of your research with undergraduate students, teaching, residencies and DR 605/606 courses in movement, physical theatre and directing. Due to limited rehearsal and performance space in the department, candidates may at times be required to access resources outside of the university. The theatre/dance/art community in Edmonton is a huge resource. Connect with people through attending openings, asking people to introduce you, and taking classes. Here are links to residencies offered in Edmonton to theatre and dance artists.

- Mile Zero Dance - <https://milezerodance.com/venue-rentals/>
- L'UniThéâtre - <https://www.lunitheatre.ca/>
- Azimuth Theatre - <https://azimuththeatre.com/about-us/>
- Good Women Dance Collective - <https://goodwomen.ca>

Additional Information

FUNDING

We try to fund our students as best as we can. Funding sources include Assistantships (GRA) and Graduate Teaching Assistantships (GTA), Tuition differentials, national, provincial and institutional scholarships. We encourage applicants and students to fervently pursue their own funding opportunities.

- Students pay tuition over the summer months in order to stay enrolled full time for the purposes of funding and scholarships
- For scholarships, stay in contact with Liz in the office. Give her a list of your research interests and qualifications and she can pass along any opportunities.
- Paid Internships are available through the GSA.
- Residencies are available to apply for. Past examples have been l'UniTheatre (2 per year) and Mile Zero (on an application basis). There are others such as Good Women Dance. Or you can make your own residency by booking space for a week and asking people to work with you. ☺
- The GSA provides great benefits for dental, vision and chiro/massage. Take advantage of these.
- For your final project, the department will allot \$1000 for your use. You can also book SPS or Corner Stage, the easiest way to do this is to ask a stage manager friend at the University for help, fill out all the paperwork, then go get the signatures of the people necessary. Generally, start with your supervisor, they will contact the chair and the production manager who will give you the paperwork, then you fill it out and get signatures.
- Workshop West Playwright's Theatre has a long history of providing paid internships for grad students through SCIP. <https://www.workshopwest.org/>
- There are funds for travel through the department. (\$200-400) These go fast.
- There are funds for travel through GPS and GSA (varies).
- All Students wishing to be considered for SSHRC awards will submit completed application forms early in the fall term of their incoming year. Consult your academic advisor (MFA Coordinator) for this fall deadline.

Please See Graduate Handbook For More Information.

ADVICE

(in no particular order) Compiled by 2018 MFA Theatre Practice graduate Alyssa Bartlett.

- MFA Theatre Practice students do 11 courses, not 8 like the MAs. An MFA is considered a terminal degree, similar to a PhD, so more courses are required.
- All students are required to complete a Professional Development requirement. See Graduate Handbook.
- You can have one or two supervisors, and the best way to figure out who you want to work with is to meet with them in your first term. Discuss interests and research.

- Space finding is not usually a problem. You are allowed to book space just like everyone else. See General Department Handbook for booking process.
- A 605 and 606 are very useful things to do. You are also allowed to take courses outside the department. The best way to figure this out is to talk to the professor offering the course directly, bringing them the completed 605/606 form. Yes, there is a form.
- Typical workload is about 45+ hours a week for 3 classes and your GRA/TA assignments
- The degree is called Theatre Practice, and you should expect to practice outside of your class workload. The department provides the theoretical classes and guidance on your practice IF YOU ASK FOR IT. You are expected to grow your practice independently. Some of the ways you can do this are to audit classes such as the Movement or Voice classes (check with the professor ahead of time)
- Get to know the undergrads...they are a tremendous resource to learn from and with and will often be the people working on your projects later.
- The daylight hours in Edmonton in the summer are about 20 hours, in the winter it's about 8 hours. Make sure to get outside in the winter while the sun is up.
- Share resources you find with your fellow students. There is a thriving community that will support you.
- If you're interested in Playwriting, the Lee Playwright in Residence holds regular office hours. Keep your eye out for information about playwright's circles hosted by the department and Workshop West Playwright's Theatre (<https://www.workshopwest.org/>).
- There is a writer in residence through the English department who you can make appointments with <https://www.ualberta.ca/en/english-film-studies/programs/writer-in-residence-program/index.html>.
- You can volunteer as a production dramaturg on basically any studio show.
- The New Works Festival is often run by a grad student and provides many opportunities.
- The dance department is through the Phys. Ed department. There are performance companies such as Cripsie and MOD that you can perform with. Dance classes are offered through the Gym (Ballet, Contemporary, Modern, Jazz, etc.)
- Remember that a practice takes TIME so don't feel pressured to know everything all at once. Your ideas will change, your project will change, your practice will change. Work with what you have and the rest will be there when you need it.
- You will have a desk in the grad office for your use. Check with the Administration Office for location and access.

CASTING

If you are coming into the program from out of town, you are encouraged to see as many productions in the community as possible in order to familiarize yourself with the local performers. As a resource, students can seek help from second year directors and faculty.

Important Notes:

- Equity members cannot be used without permission of Canadian Actors Equity Association (Equity)

- All Equity negotiations are handled by the Venue Operations Manager, Fine Arts Production & Operations.
- See also “Administrative Info for Drama Department Productions” link in Related Documents Section of this handbook.
- No videotaping of any production with Equity actors may be done without permission of Equity. Please contact the Theatre Administrator at least two weeks prior to a proposed video date.

POSTERS AND PLAYBILLS (EXCLUDES STUDIO THEATRE)

Posters and playbills for non-revenue generating productions are *optional* and *at the discretion and expense of the student or other creative team members*. However, should such be produced, the following guidelines must be observed. Reach out to the Fine Arts Information & Outreach Coordinator to receive the Department wordmark and/or University Logo, and for guidance on layout & design best practices.

- **Poster Designs:** check the rights agreement for billing requirements. As a general rule - the work’s title should appear before the name of the playwright or anyone else on the production’s creative team. Remember to include dates, times, location of the performances, information for ticket sign-up, the Department’s logo, and the course number (e.g. DRAMA 684) on all posters.
 - » The playwright’s name is typically no less than half the type size of the play’s title.
 - » Should you wish to include the director’s name on the poster, we ask that you include the names of the designers.
 - » Should you wish to include actor names on the poster, we ask that you include the stage manager(s).
- **Playbills:** These are created by the Director and should including cast and crew considerations, Drama staff lists, as well as the Drama Emergency Bursary Fund statement.
 - » Always recognize the rights holder as well as the playwright and creative team – e.g., “Rights for this production courtesy of Samuel French”.
- Rights agencies may request copies of posters and playbills so keep extra copies just in case you are asked to forward them.

GRADUATES OF THE MFA THEATRE PRACTICE PROGRAM

- Caroline Howarth, Co-Artistic Director of Concrete Theatre. MFA Theatre Practice 2010
- Joshua Wickard MFA Theatre Practice 2011.
- Gerry Morita, MFA Theatre Practice 2012, *CHASM: the spaces between: In Aesthetics and Practice*
- Michele Fleiger MFA Theatre Practice 2012, *Teaching the Large Ensemble*
- Michelle Rios MFA Theatre Practice 2013
- Nikki Shaffeeullah MFA Theatre Practice 2013
- Priscilla Yakielashek MFA Theatre Practice 2013
- Tara Brodin MFA Theatre Practice 2013

- Tatiana Duque Valencia MFA Theatre Practice 2014
- Valerie Planche MFA Theatre Practice 2014, *Coniunctio Oppositorum: The Alchemy of Presence*
- Mia Van Leeuwen MFA Theatre Practice 2014
- Nancy Sandercock MFA Theatre Practice 2015, *frost flowers/arctic death machine: a passage to elsewhere* *SSHRC recipient
- Joshua Clendenin MFA Theatre Practice 2016, *Cabareacht in Babel*
- Cristine Lesiak MFA Theatre Practice 2016, *The Object of Constellations*
- Joelle Prefontaine MFA Theatre Practice 2017, *Huh?! Social Change Through Plurilingual Immersive Theatre for Young* * SSHRC recipient
- Maryam Zarei MFA Theatre Practice 2017, *The Whisper of the Sea*
- Cristian Paul Badiu MFA Theatre Practice 2017, *Stage reading of The Time Merchant by Matei Visniec*
- Stacey Murchison MFA Theatre Practice 2018, *Elements Solo: Practice, Performance, and Philosophy*
- Alyssa Bartlett MFA Theatre Practice 2018, *HANGWOMAN: Devised Dance Theatre in Process and in Performance*
- Stacey Murchison, MFA Theatre Practice 2018, *Elements Solo: Practice, Performance, and Philosophy*
- Léda Davies, MFA Theatre Practice 2020, *Virtuosity at the Bottom of the Sea*
- Kian Moradi MFA Theatre Practice 2024, *A Horse Named Shabrang: Synthesizing Theory and Practice to Develop a Methodology for a Ritualistic Performance*
- Beshel Francis MFA Theatre Practice 2025, *One Too Many, A Thousand*
- Reyna Alvarez MFA Theatre Practice 2025, *Muxe in the Snow*

Related Documents and Appendices

The following documents are referred to in this Handbook, and should be obtained, read in detail and referred to throughout the program:

Online Documents found here: <https://www.ualberta.ca/drama/resources/drama-student-resources/graduate-resources>

- General Department of Drama Handbook
- Graduate Handbook

From the Venue Operations Manager (Fine Arts Production & Operations)

- **Administrative Info for Drama Department Productions** found here: <https://www.ualberta.ca/drama/resources/policies>
- Department of Drama Production Calendar
- **Note:** Please follow up with the Venue Operations Manager, Fine Arts Production & Operations for questions or clarifications.

From the Graduate Program Advisors

- Department of Drama Graduate Seminars
Published each Spring for the coming academic year

Checklist

- ☐ Read: Department of Drama General Handbook
- ☐ Read: Graduate Student Handbook
- ☐ Read through “Related Documents” listed on pg 10
- ☐ If you are teaching, read: Contract Instructor Handbook
- ☐ Choose your “options” or “elective” courses for the year
- ☐ Make a plan to familiarize yourself with the local acting pool
- ☐ Get to know the Faculty and start considering thesis ideas and advisors
- ☐ Funding Opportunities: APPLY! (more information in the Graduate Handbook)