

**Department of  
Theater  
Undergraduate  
Handbook  
Academic Year 2021-  
2022**

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## **Introduction**

Welcome to the UMass Amherst Department of Theater! I am Amy, the department's sound designer and Undergraduate Program Director. We are so happy to have you join our community; students are at the center of what we do creatively, technically, academically, and in our activism. By joining us along your college journey, you will amass lots of valuable experience in the theater, and many contact hours with mentors, teachers, and other students. You will give of your artistry, critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration, and heart to make our projects and shows, and our growth as a community, a reality.

This handbook will guide you with information and, along with our departmental website and Purple Lobbyist newsletter, keep you informed of policies and protocols. As questions come up, feel free to contact me, as well as other trusted members of our staff and faculty, and we will help you.

You are now part of a remarkable history of students and teachers who have accomplished wonderful things. We can't wait to see what you bring to our classrooms, stages, and beyond!

Amy Altadonna, Undergraduate Program Director

## **Anti-Racist Work in the Department of Theater**

Over the course of 2020-2121, the Department of Theater committed itself to making significant strides to address its shortcomings in the area of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. We have offered various opportunities for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion training to faculty and staff, invited dialogue and feedback from department members past and present including students. Most importantly, we are working on an Anti-Racist Roadmap, a project led by an Anti-Racist Committee that includes faculty, staff, and student members.

This work is on-going and unfinished; we selected the term “Roadmap,” because we understand that we are making progress but have further to go.

Work to achieve the ideals set out in the Roadmap continues in individual initiatives by faculty and staff, in staff and faculty gatherings, and through work by the Anti-Racism Committee. In parallel with that committee’s work, a number of individual department members and other committees also do work that includes Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion focus. Recent examples of this type of work include an on-going effort to review the major to address barriers to access, bolstering mentorship opportunities for new faculty, and offering a workshop specifically focused on hair and make-up for students of color .

A fuller accounting of the work done thus far, as well as upcoming plans for areas that must still be addressed, can be found on the department’s website at:

<https://www.umass.edu/theater/diversity-equity-and-inclusionanti-racist-roadmap>

## **Land Use Acknowledgment**

We acknowledge that we gather as the University of Massachusetts Amherst Department of Theater on the traditional land of the Nipmuc, Wabanaki Confederacy and the Pocumtuc peoples past and present, whose ancient relationships with the land continue to this day. We honor with gratitude the land itself and the people who have stewarded it throughout the generations. Please find ways to celebrate the resilience and strength that all Indigenous people have shown worldwide.

## **UMass Theater Overview**

Please note that due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, university policies may shift quickly to accommodate greater safety measures, which may affect department courses and performances. To stay up-to-date, please visit [UMass Amherst's COVID-19 information page](#).

### **The Department**

The Department of Theater creates and produces high-caliber, professional, artistic creations on stage, telling human stories that connect audiences and performers in our increasingly mediatized world. We model and practice professional theater-making at every level of our teaching and production process.

As part of a large public university, we remain committed to accessibility and opportunities for all students.

Our excellent, high-caliber faculty marry the theoretical with the practical, guiding students to discover theatrical skills as well as life skills that serve them in the world of theater and beyond. The expertise of our faculty often engenders artistic projects and opportunities for our students, and they have opportunities to practice their budding professional skills and make artistic creations in official and less official spaces.

The spirit of mentorship permeates our department, and we tailor our teaching and advising to the specific needs and strengths of our students. We build teams in everything we do, teaching students the art of collaboration, working in groups, and tackling projects from start to finish.

Welcome to the department. We're glad you're here.

### **The Theaters**

The department has two major performance venues: the Rand, an approximately 450-seat proscenium space, and the Curtain, a flexible black box that normally seats up to 80 people. These theaters, along with our classrooms and studios, bustle throughout the year. We normally produce 4-6 fully mounted main stage shows annually, plus a number of special presentations and co-productions. Additionally, we host dozens of more informal lab offerings, along with many other classroom- or student-generated projects.

## **The Academic Mission**

Within the context of a broad-based liberal arts education, the Bachelor of Arts in theater at the University of Massachusetts Amherst offers an integrative, balanced program of studies that prepares students either to undertake specialized training for careers in theater or to draw upon their arts education in allied fields and pursuits. The master of fine arts program in theater prepares students to compete effectively for careers as directors, designers, and dramaturgs.

In both programs, a production season is central to the department's mission — providing not only a laboratory for arts instruction but a dynamic and multifaceted outreach component that enables the department both to draw upon and serve the larger community. The Department of Theater is committed to the goal of cultural diversity and to the belief that a systematic study of theater in its many aspects can impart lifelong learning skills in creative problem-solving, effective teamwork, and interpersonal communications.

## **The Faculty and Staff**

Browse profiles for faculty and staff on the [UMass Theater Website](#).

# Curriculum

## Areas of Study

The Department of Theater is a Bachelor of Arts degree program, where all its students are required to gain experience in every facet of theater production. As students progress through the program and complete the major/minor requirements, they can begin to study at advanced levels in their chosen areas of concentration. No audition or portfolio is required to join the major or minor; students apply to the university and then declare the Theater major or minor.

Courses are offered in acting, directing, play analysis, theater history, dramaturgy, design, theater technology, stage management, and playwriting. In addition to the work done in department courses, students also gain practical experience working on a full season of mainstage productions, as well as a wide variety of smaller productions. Undergraduate students in the Department of Theater are cast in mainstage shows, direct smaller productions in the department, and serve on construction or run crews; advanced students in the Design, Technology, and Management areas often have the opportunity to design or stage manage the department's mainstage shows.

## Areas of Concentration

While we offer a broad, liberal arts approach to our major, each Theater major selects an Area of Concentration based on their individual interests. These include Dramaturgy (which includes theater history, playwriting, and play analysis), Performance (which includes directing and acting), and Design, Technology, and Management (which includes sound, lighting, costume, and scenic design, technical direction, and stage management). Theater majors and minors – as well as students outside the department – can also take courses toward the **Multicultural Theater Certificate (MTC)**.

## Requirements for the Major and Minor

For the B.A. degree in Theater, students must fulfill all University General Education requirements as well as appropriate requirements in the College of Humanities and Fine Arts. In addition, Theater majors must complete at least 36 credits in Theater. Theater minors must complete at least 16 credits in Theater. Checklists for the Theater major and Theater minor are included at the end of the handbook – click on the links to be taken to them.

If you have questions about major or minor requirements, please reach out to **Undergraduate Program Director Amy Altadonna**, or **Administrative Assistant**



## **Bethany Sherwood.**

The department's **Online Advising Page** is where students can find the most up-to-date information about course offerings, advising and registration schedules, Theater major and minor checklists, and department forms.

## **Advising**

On joining the Department of Theater, all new majors are assigned to a faculty advisor. Each semester, prior to course registration, your advisor will help you select classes, and will make sure you are fulfilling all Department of Theater requirements. Please keep an eye on your UMass email for updates about advising and registration schedules, which are updated each semester. Additionally, the **Online Advising Page** on the Department of Theater's website is a great resource for schedules, forms, and other academic information.

You can find your advisor by logging into your SPIRE account, and scrolling to the bottom right-hand corner of the page. If you do not have an advisor listed, contact **Undergraduate Program Director Amy Altadonna**, or department **Administrative Assistant Bethany Sherwood**.

Theater minors are not automatically assigned an advisor in the Department of Theater, but may request one. Their advisor is with their primary major department.

## **Department Advising Details**

All freshmen, sophomore, and transfer Theater primary majors are required to meet with their advisors during the pre-registration advising period each semester. This meeting is a quick check-in to make sure all major requirements are being fulfilled, and needs to be completed before the registration hold on a student's account can be lifted. Junior and senior majors are not required to meet with their advisor, but are encouraged to do so if they would like.

Many account holds (such as credit alerts, Health services immunization holds, and Bursar's office holds) can prevent you from enrolling for classes. It's a good idea to check SPIRE periodically over the course of the semester to see if there are any holds on your account, so they can be resolved prior to registration. To check for account holds, log into your SPIRE account, then check the right-hand column for the "Holds" section. Clicking on "Details" will take you to a list of all holds on your account; clicking on each one will give you directions on how to remove that particular hold.

If you have questions about how to remove a hold, please contact the department's **Administrative Assistant Bethany Sherwood**.

The ramping schedule for course registration is released each semester, prior to the start of pre-registration; the schedule itself is based on credit level, so that rising seniors enroll first, then juniors, and so on. To find your enrollment appointment, log into SPIRE, then click on "Main Menu". Under "Enrollment", you will find your enrollment appointment for the current semester.

If you're looking for course guides on SPIRE, click on "Main Menu", then "Course Guides". From there, you'll choose the semester, and be able to narrow your search (by department, by professor, by time, etc).

### **Switching advisors**

Initial advisor assignments are made by the Undergraduate Program Director (UPD), though students are able to switch advisors with the permission of the professor they would like to switch to. The department's administrative assistant can process this request, once permission has been emailed to her.

### **Substituting classes**

Occasionally, a course taken outside of the Department of Theater can be counted toward a major or minor requirement. Check with your advisor and the UPD first to get approval for a course substitution (also known as a "Degree Audit Exception"), as they'll need to make sure the course completes the requirements. If approved, the administrative assistant will create a memo to be sent to the Registrar's office to have the class count toward a requirement.

This process can also be used to have a department course count toward a major or minor requirement (such as a special dramaturgy course offering being used toward the dramaturgy requirement). Please check with your advisor and the UPD to get approval in each case.

### **College of Humanities and Fine Arts Advising**

For Theater majors, the College of Humanities and Fine Arts Advising (CHFA Advising) makes sure students fulfill university and college requirements, such as the foreign language and general education requirements. Freshmen and transfer students meet with advisors from CHFA Advising before their first semester at UMass, who assist the students with creating their schedules. After this initial advising session,

students are assigned advisors within their major department, but they will still work with CHFA Advising with various administrative tasks. For example, CHFA Advising approves credit overrides, as well as late adds or withdrawals from courses.

**NOTE:** If you are a Theater minor, or if Theater is your secondary major, your Advising department is with the college to which your primary major belongs. For example, if you are an Electrical Engineering major, with a minor in Theater, your Advising department is with the College of Engineering, and they will process the credit overrides and late adds/withdrawals.

Click [here](#) for the CHFA Advising Website.

## Area Overviews

### Dramaturgy

The dramaturgy courses in the B.A. program are designed to give all students the tools they need for becoming thoughtful artists in working with theater text, as well as a rich appreciation of theater in all its varieties and contexts. The courses involve play analysis, theater history, dramatic theory, critical writing, creative writing, and the role of the dramaturg in the theater. Each course is structured around a specific repertory of dramatic texts reflecting a particular culture, historical period, or style. The dramaturgy requirement also fulfills the university's Junior Year Writing Requirement.

A handful of exceptional upper-level students may be invited to serve as production dramaturgs on Department productions and enroll in the graduate-level Dramaturgy Workshop.

For more information, email Professors [Chris Baker](#), [Harley Erdman](#), or [Priscilla Page](#).

### Performance

The undergraduate performance program at the UMass Department of Theater emphasizes a strong foundation in contemporary acting and directing techniques, along with a wide variety of specialized skills, including voice development, stage movement, and ensemble performance. The program also provides advanced courses in classical rhetorical training, Shakespeare, Moliere, voice, monologue and scene work, and directing. Students have opportunities to perform publicly on the Department's two main stages, as part of a formal production season. Additionally, there are numerous "studio" productions, where students can initiate independent projects, as actors and directors, or participate in performance works generated by the Department's graduate students.

For more information, email Professors [Judyie Al-Bilali](#), [Milan Dragicevich](#), [Elisa Gonzales](#), [Gina Kaufmann](#), or [Gilbert McCauley](#).

### Design, Technology, and Management

Design, Technology, and Management offers specialized course work supporting concentrations in scenic, lighting and costume design, technical direction and stage management within the context of a broad-based liberal arts education in theater. In addition to enriching course work in dramaturgy, history and performance techniques, undergraduates may pursue advanced work in their area of interest and may engage in challenging practical production experiences appropriate to their development.

Our students enjoy programs tailored to their academic and professional goals and are supported with individual mentorship. Our faculty, staff and guest artists are working theater professionals providing students with exceptional opportunities for creativity, risk-taking and success in the classroom, in our production season and in outside professional experiences. Our program cultivates collaboration, creativity, communication and leadership preparing our students for employment or advanced study. Graduates of our program enjoy prominent, successful careers on Broadway, in Hollywood and in many regional theaters.

For more information, email Professors **Amy Altadonna**, **Yao Chen**, **Michael Cottom**, **Penny Remsen**, or **Anya Klepikov**.

For a full breakdown of this area, please click **here**.

## **Department Productions**

Every year the department produces a season of fully mounted Main Stage productions as well as a number of special presentations and co-productions. Our main stage productions are produced in the Rand and Curtain Theaters, and occasionally in non-tradition spaces.

Undergraduates perform as actors or work in production activities behind the scenes. They may assist the graduate students, faculty members and guest artists, or may serve as directors, designers and dramaturgs in their own right. Participation is open to all University students, as well as to students at other area colleges and members of the community. Theater majors are also free to audition for other productions in the area, on other campuses, or under any auspices other than the Department of Theater.

The department also has a very active season of laboratory projects, as well as student productions and course showcases.

## **Season selection process**

This season is carefully planned to meet the needs of undergraduate and graduate students and to give faculty members a chance to exercise their creative talents. Guest artists are frequent collaborators. The season is planned to be diverse, offering students a chance to work on both classics and new plays. All styles and genres are represented on stage.

The season selection process for mainstage productions is done via committee, with representatives from the faculty, staff, graduate student, and undergraduate student groups. This committee reviews play submissions from members of the department, including graduate directing students and undergraduate proposals, and creates a proposed slate of plays on which the faculty vote. The approved slate is then announced to the Department of Theater community, usually in mid-spring semester.

Students are welcome to submit proposals for mainstage and independent presentations, as well as apply to be members of the department's Season Selection committee. Look for announcements in our Purple Lobbyist newsletter or on social media about opportunities to be on the committee or subject a play for consideration for the season.

## Auditions

All Theater majors and minors are welcome and encouraged to audition.

Most casting is determined by open auditions. Notices detailing the time, place, and specific requirements of each audition will be posted, as far in advance as circumstances permit, on the department website, on the call board, in the Purple Lobbyist, on the department's social media, and via posted flyers. Audition information will be posted at least 2 weeks prior to the scheduled audition.

The director will specify on the audition notice what preparation is appropriate for the audition. Usually, actors are asked either to prepare a monologue or to read from the script. In either case, it is in your best interest to be as familiar as possible with the play. QR codes for script downloads are available in the front office (FAC 112) and on the callboard.

Often a director or a member of the performance faculty leads an audition workshop before the auditions. Take advantage of this opportunity to work on your audition!

Sign up online for an audition via the links in the Purple Lobbyist or on our webpage, or on the QR code on the callboard, and arrive at the audition site well ahead of the scheduled time. Students who arrive after their scheduled time may not be allowed to audition.

## Callbacks

After open auditions are complete, the stage manager will post the callback sheet on the production callboard. If you are called back, you are expected to initial next to your name to acknowledge the call back.

## Casting

The Department of Theater is committed to racial, cultural and individual diversity. Casting for all department-sponsored productions is open to any student, staff, or faculty member of the Five College Consortium, any member of the community, or any invited guest artist regardless of race, ethnic origin, ability, sexual orientation or gender identification. Equal-opportunity casting is encouraged.

Unless otherwise arranged **prior** to auditioning, individuals who audition **will accept any assignment as cast**.

Before auditioning, you are cautioned that over-extension may hinder your creative and academic growth. It is recommended that you seek advice from your academic advisor

or other professors, or acting teachers, as appropriate, about auditioning for more than one assignment per semester.

Our experience has shown that having cast members in shows with overlapping rehearsal and/or performance schedules is complicated and disruptive to both shows.

Casting decisions will result in a production's exclusive service of the actor when rehearsal/performance periods overlap.

Cast members are still welcome to be in multiple shows whose rehearsal schedules do not overlap.

NOTE: This does NOT mean that actors cannot audition for all the shows -- just that they will have to consider their options and limitations wisely when deciding which show, if any, to list as a preference. In the case that a preference is not expressed, students will accept the role they are offered.

If the director, in concert with their advisors, determines that a suitable cast cannot be selected from those who have auditioned, auditions may be extended beyond the original schedule or the director may cast an actor from outside of the original pool of auditioning actors. Extending auditions or casting outside the original audition pool can occur only with the authorization of the department chair.

The department chooses plays each year with the intention of casting as many Theater majors and minors as possible. However, no actor is guaranteed a role in any play.

## **Cast Lists**

Cast lists will be posted on the department bulletin board. Read and react to the cast list in a professional manner. Initial your name if cast. If you feel it is necessary to discuss your audition, ask the person responsible for casting to discuss it with you, not to defend it to you.

## **Guest Artists**

As appropriate, a faculty member or guest artist may be cast in a role, giving students the opportunity to work and learn alongside professionals. This is done in consultation with the department chair and the performance faculty.

If you have been cast in a show and wish to read more about rehearsal expectations, **[click here](#)**.



## **Production Crew: TH 110, TH 210, TH 310**

Production and house staffing for season shows is managed through TH 110: Backstage Practice. This laboratory class is designed to provide practical production experience, including experience working on build crews, run crews, front of house staff and publicity crews. Specific crew assignments are determined by the production manager.

TH 110 is a one-credit course for which you are given a letter grade. Majors are required to successfully complete three credits of TH 110.

A mandatory organizational meeting for TH 110 is held at the beginning of each semester, in the Rand Theater. The precise date for this meeting will be posted on the course schedule for each semester, and is usually the first Monday after the start of classes.

TH 110 is open to all interested students.

In addition to TH 110, students may earn credit for participating in mainstage shows through TH 210: Rehearsal and Production, which is generally used for cast members, and TH 310: Theater Practice, which is used for students involved in advanced production assignments, such as stage manager, house manager, designer, crew chief.

If you have questions involving these courses, please contact **Production Manager Julie Fife**.

## **Production Calendar**

The UMass Department of Theater Production Calendar may be found **here**. For questions, please contact **Production Manager Julie Fife**.

## **Attendance and Ticket Policies**

### **Production Attendance**

All Theater students are strongly urged to attend all departmental productions, including main stage performances, studio presentations, class presentations and independent work. The department makes Theater passes available to all theater majors for the express purpose of allowing everyone to attend all shows and support fellow department members. The pass provides one complimentary ticket, as available, for all main stage productions. Students must make a ticket reservation through the FAC Box Office to ensure access to a complimentary ticket.

### **Complimentary Tickets and Ticket Reservations**

All department members are entitled to a limited number of complimentary tickets for themselves, family and friends for our events. Undergraduate majors, minors, and MTC students, as well as some BDIC students, are eligible for the Theater pass that can be used in advance or at the door for one ticket and can “earn” an additional ticket by helping publicize a production. Please be thoughtful about requesting additional comps as comp tickets affect our box office revenue and thus our budget. Tickets can be reserved in advance (recommended) through the Fine Arts Center Box Office or at the door.

For further details, please read **[our full policy online](#)**.

# Media Guidelines

## Media Recording and Sharing Guidelines

Both external professionals and Department members capture audio, photos, and video of our productions and events for archival, academic, and publicity purposes. Some of these items are shared variously on social media, on our website, through local press, and in digital and print publicity items to bring people to our productions and to recruit them for our academic programs. Others are for internal department use only, due to rights and/or privacy issues.

The department will inform production cast and crew through the stage manager when press, archival, or other records of a rehearsal or performance are scheduled to be made.

Before sharing on social media, please make sure that you have verbal or written permission from people whose faces and voices are prominently featured, or, if the photo or video you share was not made by you, from the creator. If your social media is set to public, the department may repost your item. The department will not follow or repost from private accounts.

For further details about media recording and sharing, **please read more online**, or consult our **Production Manager Julie Fife** or **Public Relations Director Anna-Maria Goossens**.

## Communication

The Department of Theater's online presence includes an **official website** and social media accounts, as well as an in-department newsletter (The Purple Lobbyist), and email list. Students are welcome to follow the department through all of these, and to encourage family and friends to like the Facebook page and follow us on Instagram for news and publicity about events.

For a full breakdown of department communications, **click here**.

To receive the department emails, contact **administrative assistant Bethany Sherwood**.

To receive the Lobbyist, contact **Public Relations Director Anna-Maria Goossens**.

## Department Community

### Student productions

Our students take charge to produce works they are excited about, from fully-mounted productions to staged readings to original devised theater pieces and more. These events are usually free and open to the public — check [the student work webpage](#) as the semester progresses for performance times and reservation details, as well as photos and information about previous student work events.

If you are interested in staging an independent production in department spaces, please contact [General Manager Willow Cohen](#) and [Production Manager Julie Fife](#).

If you are interested in applying for grant funding to support your student production or project, please contact [General Manager Willow Cohen](#).

### Community Play Read

The department's Community Play Read (CPR) group is a weekly event, where department members (students, staff, faculty, alumni, and friends) join in reading a different play each week, with randomized casting and a focus on globally relevant issues. For the Fall 2021 semester, CPR will be offered in a hybrid mode, with both in-person and Zoom components. CPR will take place on Monday afternoons, at 4:00pm ET.

For more information, please email [CPR producer Sena Yacteen](#).

### Undergraduate Activities Council

The Undergraduate Activities Council (UAC) represents the undergraduate UMass Amherst Theater Department student body. Within the Council, members assign peer mentors to first-year and transfer students, lead tours for prospective students, and host social events in order to build and strengthen the department's community.

For more information about UAC and their duties, and how to join, please contact [Jemma Kepner](#).

### Department Social Media

[Facebook](#) | [Flickr](#) | [Instagram](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Youtube](#)

## **Use of Department Spaces and Additional Resources**

Students who are interested in using department spaces should contact **Production Manager Julie Fife** for use of the Rand or Curtain Theater, **General Manager Willow Cohen** for use of non-theater department spaces and campus spaces, and area heads for use of shop spaces.

For more information on services such as peer mentoring, campus resources, or internships, please visit the Department of Theater's **Educational and Professional Resources page**.

To view the University of Massachusetts's ongoing safety measures to guard against the spread of COVID-19, including current mandates and testing information, please visit **the university's resource page**.

## **University Information**

### **Bursar's Office**

215 Whitmore | [bursar@admin.umass.edu](mailto:bursar@admin.umass.edu) | 413-545-2368 | [Website](#)

### **CHFA Advising**

E-202 South College | [advising@hfa.umass.edu](mailto:advising@hfa.umass.edu) | 413-545-6152 | [Website](#)

### **Dean of Students Office**

227 Whitmore | [studentconduct@umass.edu](mailto:studentconduct@umass.edu) | 413-545-2684 | [Website](#)

### **Disability Services**

161 Whitmore | [disability@umass.edu](mailto:disability@umass.edu) | 413-545-0892 (V/TTY) | [Website](#)

### **Financial Aid**

243 Whitmore | [finaid@finaid.umass.edu](mailto:finaid@finaid.umass.edu) | 413-545-0801 | [Website](#)

### **Fine Arts Center Box office**

Fine Arts Center Room 143 | [facbox@umass.edu](mailto:facbox@umass.edu) | 413-545-2511 | [Website](#)

### **Undergraduate Registrar's Office**

213 Whitmore | [regtrans@registrar.umass.edu](mailto:regtrans@registrar.umass.edu) | 413-545-0555 | [Website](#)

### **University Health Services**

150 Infirmary Way | [uhs@umass.edu](mailto:uhs@umass.edu) | 413-577-5000 | [Website](#) | [Mental Health Services Counseling](#)

### **COVID-19 Testing Information**

413-577-2999 | [Website](#)

## Google Survey

As we move into a new year, the handbook has been overhauled to reflect the Department of Theater's many changes and new policies. We hope this leaner handbook has been helpful, but we also want to be clear that this is a living document, and can be updated at any time (and will get fancier as time goes by!).

If you have thoughts about what could be added, changed, or expanded, please let us know by filling out [this form](#). Thank you!