

# STAGE DESIGN

Degree Types: MFA

The Master of Fine Arts in Stage Design program (<https://stagedesign.northwestern.edu/>) at Northwestern University prepares a select group of scenery, costume, and lighting designers for professional careers in the American Theatre, international theater and related design fields. Central to this three-year program of study is an emphasis on intensive collaboration between designers and directors, rigorous analysis of texts, thorough research and a fervent effort to nurture unique artistic voices. It is our belief that passionate, insightful artists immersed in a team-based environment, will generate bold, compelling theatrical works.

The first year of study emphasizes the importance of skills, training, and design process. The second year prioritizes collaboration, research, and imagination and serves as a transition from the activities and points of view of the entering student to the professional profile and attitudes of the graduating designer. The final year's activity concentrates on designing and the preparation of the thesis portfolio.

The MFA in stage design is a terminal degree program requiring thirty-three academic units over nine quarters during a three-year residency. The MFA degree is granted upon completion of the program with a minimum grade point average of "B" and successful presentation of a design thesis portfolio. The portfolio must show clear evidence of mastery of the full range of graphic and conceptual support skills in the student's major area(s) of concentration and an acquisition of fundamental skills in the secondary design area(s). Two additional years are allowed for the successful preparation, presentation and defense of the MFA thesis portfolio.

At the end of the first two years of study, each student is required to successfully present a portfolio to the faculty illustrating and articulating his/her development and vision as an artist and designer.

## **Additional resources:**

- Department website (<https://stagedesign.northwestern.edu/>)
- Program handbook(s)

## Degree Offered

- Stage Design MFA (<https://catalogs.northwestern.edu/tgs/stage-design/stage-design-mfa/>)

## Stage Design Courses

### **THEATRE 310-0 Special Topics in Directing (1 Unit)**

Studies with Directing Faculty on special topics related to directing and theatrical forms.

Prerequisite: consent of instructor.

### **THEATRE 312-0 Text Analysis (1 Unit)**

Seminar in analysis of dramatic texts as related to the problems of realized theatrical production.

Prerequisite: consent of instructor.

### **THEATRE 313-0 History of Directing (1 Unit)**

### **THEATRE 320-0 Special Topics in Theatre Design (1 Unit)**

### **THEATRE 333-2 Advanced Creative Drama (1 Unit)**

Explores improvised drama as a teaching method and a means of learning for the elementary school child. Theory and practice through

reading, discussion, films, and observation. Course culminates in extended teaching projects with children from local schools.

Prerequisites: THEATRE 333-1 (or equivalent) and consent of instructor.

### **THEATRE 340-0 Special Topics in Advanced Theatre Studies (1 Unit)**

Content varies. Advanced study of individual playwrights, practitioners, regional theatres, historical periods, performance practices, or theoretical inquiries.

Prerequisite: THEATRE 140-1, THEATRE 140-2 or consent of instructor.

### **THEATRE 341-0 Theatre and Social Change (1 Unit)**

Prerequisite: THEATRE 140-1, THEATRE 140-2 or consent of instructor.

### **THEATRE 342-0 Dramaturgy (1 Unit)**

Seminar in creative dramaturgical research as it relates to the problems of realized theatrical production.

Prerequisite: THEATRE 140-1, THEATRE 140-2 or consent of instructor.

### **THEATRE 343-0 Puppetry History & Performance (1 Unit)**

Seminar in the history and theory of puppetry with an emphasis on embodied experimentation.

Prerequisite: THEATRE 140-1, THEATRE 140-2 or consent of instructor.

### **THEATRE 344-0 Gender & Performance (1 Unit)**

Exploration of recent research on the social and political background of gender, particularly women's access to performative expressions. Historical aesthetics: changing debates on women's participation in the public theatre and the significance of the body in performance.

### **THEATRE 345-0 African American Theatre (1 Unit)**

Study of African American playwrights, practitioners, theatre companies, historical performance practices, theoretical inquiries, or transnational influences.

Prerequisite: THEATRE 140-1, THEATRE 140-2 or AF\_AM\_ST 259-0 or consent of instructor.

### **THEATRE 346-0 Asian American Theatre (1 Unit)**

Study of Asian American playwrights, practitioners, theatre companies, historical performance practices, theoretical inquiries, or transnational influences.

### **THEATRE 347-0 Latinx Theatre (1 Unit)**

Study of Latinx playwrights, practitioners, theatre companies, historical performance practices, theoretical inquiries, or transnational influences.

### **THEATRE 348-0 Transnational Theatre (1 Unit)**

Study of the history, theory, or literature of transnational theatre and other performance forms.

### **THEATRE 357-0 Orchestration (1 Unit)**

### **THEATRE 376-0 Intro to Acting for the Screen (1 Unit)**

### **THEATRE 402-0 Graduate Colloquium (1 Unit)**

Advanced graduate study. Topics vary with instructor.

### **THEATRE 420-1 Collaboration: American Realism (1 Unit)**

First in a series exploring collaboration between stage director and designers for production. Focus: collaborative process; realistic and naturalistic American drama.

Prerequisite: Permission of instructor.

### **THEATRE 420-2 Collaboration: Contemporary Drama (1 Unit)**

Second in a series exploring collaboration between stage director and designers for production. Focus: contemporary drama.

Prerequisites: THEATRE 420-1 and permission of instructor.

### **THEATRE 420-3 Collaboration: Shakespeare in the 21st Century (1 Unit)**

Third in a series exploring collaboration between stage director and designers for production. Focus: Shakespeare.

Prerequisites: THEATRE 420-1, THEATRE 420-2, and permission of instructor.

**THEATRE 434-0 Workshop in Drama-Oriented Teaching Techniques (1 Unit)**

Content varies; focuses on the origins and practice of storytelling, theatre games, and story theatre. Summer only.

**THEATRE 440-0 Studies in Comparative Theatre & Drama (1 Unit)**

One aspect of the drama and theatre before the modern period.

**THEATRE 441-0 Studies in Modern Theatre & Drama (1 Unit)**

One aspect of the modern theatre movement, a dramatist, or type of drama.

**THEATRE 442-0 Theatre Practice (1 Unit)**

**THEATRE 444-0 Dramatic Criticism (1 Unit)**

Principles of dramatic criticism from Aristotle to the present. Critical standards and methods and their application to the evaluation of drama in performance.

**THEATRE 445-0 History of Western Theatrical Practice (1 Unit)**

History and theory of theatre and drama.

**THEATRE 448-0 Studies in American Theatre and Drama (1 Unit)**

Intensive study of one aspect of American theatre and drama, such as political theatre, Chicago theatre, American drama and the American dream, or the history of acting in America.

**THEATRE 450-0 Topics in Stage Design (1 Unit)**

Seminars with guest or resident faculty on advanced topics in theatre design; intended primarily for graduate design students.

Prerequisite: Permission of instructor.

**THEATRE 451-1 Seminar in Advanced Directing (1 Unit)**

Seminar in advanced directorial topics; required of graduate students in the MFA program in directing.

**THEATRE 451-2 Seminar in Advanced Directing (1 Unit)**

Seminar in advanced directorial topics; required of graduate students in the MFA program in directing.

**THEATRE 451-3 Seminar in Advanced Directing (1 Unit)**

Seminar in advanced directorial topics; required of graduate students in the MFA program in directing.

**THEATRE 462-1 Advanced Studies in Lighting Design (1 Unit)**

Primarily for graduate lighting design students. Students develop lighting ideas and images based on text analysis and production parameters and explore graphic means of communicating their ideas and images.

Prerequisite: Permission of instructor.

**THEATRE 462-2 Advanced Studies in Lighting Design (1 Unit)**

Primarily for graduate lighting design students. Students implement lighting ideas and images through light plots. Photometrics and technical knowledge and skills emphasized.

Prerequisites: THEATRE 462-1 and permission of instructor.

**THEATRE 462-3 Advanced Studies in Lighting Design (1 Unit)**

Primarily for graduate lighting design students. Special topics are addressed through a paradigm of master classes, workshops, lecture demonstrations, and projects.

Prerequisites: THEATRE 462-1, THEATRE 462-2, and permission of instructor.

**THEATRE 463-1 Advanced Studies in Scenic Design (1 Unit)**

Script and the action of the play as the foundation for scene design. Use of initial reading of the script, combined with research, in forming design ideas.

Prerequisite: Permission of instructor.

**THEATRE 463-2 Advanced Studies in Scenic Design (1 Unit)**

Students apply drawing, painting, modeling and drafting skills developed in THEATRE 463-1 to create a mature design presentation that expresses their ideas clearly.

Prerequisites: THEATRE 463-1 and permission of instructor.

**THEATRE 463-3 Advanced Studies in Scenic Design (1 Unit)**

Using the process developed in THEATRE 463-1 and THEATRE 463-2, students generate a complete, professional scenic design for a major work of drama, including a fully documented package.

Prerequisites: THEATRE 464-1, THEATRE 462-2, and permission of instructor.

**THEATRE 464-1 Advanced Studies in Costume Design (1 Unit)**

Individual design process, involving text interpretation, character analysis, and research, in response to texts of various theatrical genres.

Prerequisite: Permission of instructor.

**THEATRE 464-2 Advanced Studies in Costume Design (1 Unit)**

Students apply costume design processes developed in THEATRE 464-1 to the interpretation of traditional and non-traditional text.

Prerequisites: THEATRE 464-1 and permission of instructor.

**THEATRE 464-3 Advanced Studies in Costume Design (1 Unit)**

Using the processes developed in THEATRE 464-1 and THEATRE 464-2, students generate a professional level costume design for a major work of drama. Texts may be in verse or operatic form.

Prerequisites: THEATRE 464-1, THEATRE 464-2, and permission of instructor.

**THEATRE 465-1 ADVANCED STUDIES IN COSTUME DESIGN: Digital Arts 1 (1 Unit)**

In this course students are introduced to fundamental digital methods for devising the elements that make a theatrical character: body mass, silhouette, texture and color. Through text analysis, thorough visual research and digital drawing and painting students will create final painted illustrations for the characters of Aurora Leigh (Michelene Wandor's dramatic adaptation of epic novel Aurora Leigh by Elizabeth Barrett Browning). The main component of the design process will be the discovery and application of digital art techniques using Stylus Pen and Cintiq Pen display / Intuos Pro Wacom Tablet in conjunction with computer program Corel Painter.

**THEATRE 465-2 ADVANCED STUDIES IN COSTUME DESIGN: Digital Arts 2 (1 Unit)**

In this design course students explore advanced digital methods for creation of expressive costume design solutions for non-realism genre of performance. With focus on characterization the students will analyze the text, commit visual research and use the advanced drawing and painting techniques to create a set of intricate illustrations that express unique point of view for - or in response to the chosen dramatic work. Students will apply the knowledge from 450-0-20 and further develop digital art methods using Stylus Pen and Cintiq Pen display / Intuos Pro Wacom Tablet. The final project will showcase the complete design process from initial ideas to final painted illustrations. Computer program Corel Painter will be used on its' own or in combination with other drawing / painting techniques of student's choice for the creation of their original design concept.

**THEATRE 470-0 Topics in Acting (1 Unit)**

Seminars with guest or resident faculty on advanced topics in acting; intended primarily for graduate acting students.

**THEATRE 471-1 Movement 1: Presence (1 Unit)**

Movement I will explore contemporary physical training techniques for actors with the intention of preparing the body for advanced creative practice. This course will establish techniques for addressing our

physical needs first as people, then as artists, and finally as a character. This class meets five days a week for two hours per session.

#### **THEATRE 471-2 Movement 2: Research (1 Unit)**

Movement II will delve into individualized actor research, integrating the practices of physical training, creative movement, and performance research—the development of physical actions for a role or performance. The intention of this course is to cultivate the actor's self-confidence and self-reliance in the articulation of physical inquiries and the subsequent development of relevant physical training and performance material. The ensemble will continue to practice group exercises established in the first semester that increase articulation, agility, core strength and partnership.

#### **THEATRE 471-3 Movement 3: Integration/Practice (1 Unit)**

Movement III, the final course of the first year movement series, will focus on the integration of physical training, personal research, and creative movement into a dedicated ensemble performance practice. The actors will cultivate the vitality and excellence of the entire ensemble, and each actor will be asked to sustain their individual training inquiries and sense of self within a rigorous group practice.

#### **THEATRE 471-4 Movement 4: Physical Theatre and New Work (1 Unit)**

This is a highly participatory, skills-based course designed to expand the actor's ability to discover and play in all aspects of their performance and creative work. We will concentrate on the actor's creative process, demystifying auditions, original material creation and rehearsal processes.

#### **THEATRE 471-5 Unarmed Stage Combat (1 Unit)**

The course is designed to develop the skills required of an actor combatant competent in the use of unarmed choreography. Students will apply technical training and craft with storytelling and performance to create and apply choreography of staged violence. Students will be guided through warm-ups, training in safe and proper technique, and performance. The course is primarily a demonstration/active participation class. In concert with traditional scene work and script analysis, students will study techniques employed by fight choreographers to acquire an experiential understanding of physical and vocal exercises used in staged violence/choreography.

#### **THEATRE 471-6 Movement 6: Musical Theatre Dance for Actors (1 Unit)**

An introduction to dance styles found within the musical theatre repertoire with emphasis on style, terminology and skill preparation for musical theatre performance associated with modern and contemporary choreography.

#### **THEATRE 472-0 Dramatic and Aesthetic Theory for Stage Designers (1 Unit)**

Students will analyse big ideas of dramatic theory and aesthetic theory - concepts that have defined what is important about theatre and how it might be advanced as a form, as well as philosophical points of view concerning the beautiful, the ugly, and how we think about it - by investigating the work of thinkers within the theatre, and from the broader art-making world, from the mid 19th century to present day, considering their work in their historical context and in our present circumstances. By drawing synthetic conclusions from chronologically and philosophically incongruent sources, students will gain a more sophisticated understanding of current practice and will mature their own points of view as theatre artists. Students will read curated excerpts, lead and participate in discussion, and set forth analysis and opinion in Accountability Statements and Synthesis Papers, culminating in a Final Creative Project.

#### **THEATRE 472-1 Voice 1 (1 Unit)**

This first quarter course focuses on physical awareness, relaxation and freeing. Students are introduced to the sounds of English and the

American Stage Standard dialect through the use of the International Phonetic Alphabet as they work to develop their voices for stage performance. Students will perform selections of contemporary poetry in solo and group pieces from a variety of poets. This course meets twice a week for two hour per session.

#### **THEATRE 472-2 Voice 2 (1 Unit)**

The second quarter of voice builds on the foundation of the first. The work will focus on Shakespeare's works including sonnets, monologues suitable for auditions and scene work. This course meets twice a week for two hour sessions.

#### **THEATRE 472-3 Voice 3 (1 Unit)**

This class will explore the use of the voice in plays that demand highly skilled use of language including dialect work from some of these plays, which may include American Stage Standard and RP as well as other dialects from the UK, Europe, Africa and the United States.

#### **THEATRE 473-0 Speech (1 Unit)**

Having explored heightened text in the previous quarter students will now focus on American dialects through scene and monologue work by playwrights such as Tennessee Williams, Beth Henley, Horton Foote, Lillian Hellman, Sam Shepard, Tracy Letts, Stephen Adly Guirgis, John Patrick Shanley, Migdalia Cruz, Kristoffer Diaz, Luis Alfaro, August Wilson, Lynn Nottage, Ike Holter, Danai Gurira, Tarell McCraney, Lydia Diamond, Octavio Solis, David Henry Hwang and Lauren Yee and others. Students will employ the International Phonetic Alphabet to transcribe primary source and other recordings as they explore the rhythm and placement of various American dialects.

#### **THEATRE 474-1 Applied Music Theatre Voice I (0.34 Unit)**

The first part of a sequenced course focused on private instruction in vocal musical theatre technique and repertoire for graduate-level acting students. The primary course objective is to improve your individual instrument and approach to singing through one-on-one lessons with a vocal instructor and accompanist. Emphasis in lessons will be placed upon strengthening technique, improve confidence for performance and application of technique to repertoire. Students continue to build musicianship skills and their understanding and assimilation of vocal technique. Each week students are expected to spend one hour in private voice lessons and devote a minimum of 3 hours or practice-time outside of class. THEATRE 474-1: Applied Music Theatre Voice I is a pre-requisite for both THEATRE 474-2: Applied Music Theatre Voice II and THEATRE 477-2: Acting for the Musical.

#### **THEATRE 474-2 Applied Music Theatre Voice II (0.34 Unit)**

The second part of a sequenced course focused on private instruction in vocal musical theatre technique and repertoire for graduate-level acting students. The primary course objective is to improve your individual instrument and approach to singing through one-on-one lessons with a vocal instructor and accompanist. Emphasis in lessons will be placed upon strengthening technique, improve confidence for performance and application of technique to repertoire. Students continue to build musicianship skills and their understanding and assimilation of vocal technique. Each week students are expected to spend one hour in private voice lessons and devote a minimum of 3 hours or practice-time outside of class. THEATRE 474-1: Applied Music Theatre Voice I is a pre-requisite for this course, and THEATRE 474-2: Applied Music Theatre Voice II is a co-requisite for THEATRE 477-2: Acting for the Musical.

#### **THEATRE 475-0 Summer Performance (3.25 Units)**

Summer Performance is a quarter-long rehearsal and performance process that results in a public festival of work at the Wirtz Center in Evanston. Students will be cast in plays that are directed by professional directors and mentored by faculty.

**THEATRE 476-0 Shakespeare Collaboration For Actors And Directors (1 Unit)**

This course focuses on second year MFA Actors and Directors putting into practice their knowledge and skills surrounding classic text developed in the level one courses: Introduction to Shakespeare (actors and directors) and Illuminating Shakespeare's Text (directors). Actors and directors will collaborate on a minimalist production of a Shakespeare play assigned by the faculty. This creative process will develop the actors' and directors' ability to illuminate the poetic, imaginative, and narrative heart of Shakespeare's texts.

**THEATRE 477-1 Advanced Acting 1: Realism/Naturalism and Physicalizing the Form (0.5-1 Unit)**

This course will alternate days between script-based text/scene work and the process of physicalizing text that can open up the body to an even deeper understanding and inhabiting of character. Through an alternating series of lessons, the class will focus on tools and tactics found both in the text and in the body that will help facilitate instinct, play, risk and improvisation. Students will employ these tactics to create character and deepen scene work. This course meets four times a week for three hours. Students can expect to have 10 hours of out-of-class work per week.

**THEATRE 477-2 Advanced Acting 2: Contemporary Drama and Attacking the Scene (0.5-1 Unit)**

This section of acting class will build on the text work and character creation from the first section while continuing to grow and deepen the physical creative processes discovered in the fall. This course will focus on contemporary scripts whose structure may prove more elusive and activate multiple-character ensemble work. Continuing to focus on script analysis and given circumstances, students will learn how to read modern work for context and theme and how to find the characters within the plays that serve both. Writers may include Suzan-Lori Parks, Tarell Alvin McCraney, Young Jean Lee, Will Eno and Karen Zacarias. This course meets four times per week for three hours and students can expect to have 10 hours of out-of-class work per week.

**THEATRE 477-3 Advanced Acting 3: Shakespeare 1 (0.5-1 Unit)**

First Year Acting MFAs will begin the practice of analyzing Shakespeare's text with basic scansion through an in-depth study of sonnets and monologues. This course will meet two days per week for three hours.

**THEATRE 478-1 Advanced Acting 4: Shakespeare 2 (1 Unit)**

This course will build on the sonnet and monologue work from Acting 3 and, using the tools acquired to further the student's understanding of Shakespeare in performance.

**THEATRE 478-2 Advanced Acting 5: Acting for the Camera (1 Unit)**

Working actors are called to audition for industrial films, commercials, television & web series as well as independent and feature films of varying budget sizes. This class focuses on prep work and techniques geared to approach these auditions with skill and confidence. Topics to be covered in the class include headshots & resumes, reels, casting types, the casting process, union membership fees and requirements for health insurance, appropriate audition wardrobe looks and other current industry practices.

**THEATRE 499-0 Independent Study (1 Unit)**

Content varies. May be repeated for credit with change of topic. Permission of instructor and department required. SEE DEPT FOR SECTION AND PERMISSION NUMBERS.

**THEATRE 545-0 Seminar-Studies in Drama (1 Unit)**

Content varies. May be repeated for credit with change of topic.

**THEATRE 546-0 Seminar-Studies in Theatre (1 Unit)**

Content varies. May be repeated for credit with change of topic.

**THEATRE 590-0 Research (1-3 Units)**

Independent investigation of selected problems pertaining to thesis or dissertation. May be repeated for credit. SEE DEPT FOR SECTION AND PERMISSION NUMBERS.