

# PERFORMANCE STUDIES

<https://communication.northwestern.edu/academics/performance-studies/index.html> (<https://communication.northwestern.edu/academics/performance-studies/>)

The Department of Performance Studies integrates artistic and analytical approaches to a wide range of performance texts, events, and processes. The courses explore an interdisciplinary range of literary, cultural, and personal texts in performance. The department has particular strengths in the study of literature through solo performance; the ensemble adaptation and staging of poetic, narrative, and nonfictional texts; intercultural performance; performance art; cultural studies and the ethnography of performance; and performance theory and criticism. Internships and field study for performance studies majors extend and deepen their classroom work with experiential learning. Extracurricular work provides students with a variety of opportunities to perform, adapt, and direct, enabling their creative work to reach an audience outside the classroom.

Performance studies majors have been successful in many professions that require intelligence and imagination as well as critical and creative skills. In addition to pursuing careers in professional theatre and arts development, many graduates teach literature, theatre, humanities, and performance studies. Majors have found performance studies an excellent preparation for law school and complementary to their interests in creative writing, communication, new media, anthropology, dance, literature, or social work. Performance studies can be thought of as a major that bridges artistic expression and conceptual analysis, theory and practice. Performance, in its manifold forms, is the subject and the method of study.

## Programs of Study

- Performance Studies Major (<https://catalogs.northwestern.edu/undergraduate/communication/performance-studies/performance-studies-major/>)
- Performance Studies Minor (<https://catalogs.northwestern.edu/undergraduate/communication/performance-studies/performance-studies-minor/>)

**PERF\_ST 101-0 Modes of Performance (1 Unit)** Introduction to performance as a concept, embodied practice, and as a critical methodology. We will cover the various ways performance has been conceived over time; various approaches to acting; various performance styles; and various ways of using performance to analyze literary and non-literary texts. Students will do both solo and group performances each week and write critical essays on performance.

**PERF\_ST 103-0 Analysis and Performance of Text (1 Unit)** This course studies texts, broadly defined and situated, through performance. Students explore how performance helps the performer and audience interpret a text, as well as express challenging political and personal themes. They examine the ways performance illuminates and draws out deeper understandings of social relations through embodied praxis. *Literature Fine Arts Distro Area*

**PERF\_ST 119-0 Production Laboratory (0 Unit)** Registration for performance studies majors fulfilling production crew requirements. Students perform duties for run crews and house crews in connection with department-sponsored productions in the Krause Performance Lab of Annie May Swift Hall.

**PERF\_ST 200-0 Introduction to Performance Studies (1 Unit)** Explores fundamental themes and debates that animate the field, introducing a range of ways of theorizing, conceptualizing, studying, and making performance. *Literature Fine Arts Distro Area*

**PERF\_ST 203-0 Performance Culture and Communication (1 Unit)** Explores how live performance and dramatic forms of communication are methods used to examine social behavior and cultural expressions.

**PERF\_ST 210-1 Performance of Poetry (1 Unit)** Introduction to the analysis and performance of poetry. Prerequisite: PERF\_ST 103-0 or equivalent.

**PERF\_ST 210-2 Performance of Narrative Fiction (1 Unit)** Introduction to the study of narrative performance. Prerequisite: PERF\_ST 103-0 or equivalent.

**PERF\_ST 220-0 Sound Cultures (1 Unit)** Introduction to ways of thinking culturally and historically about sound and listening. Students learn to describe, contrast, and analyze sound cultures over a wide geographical and chronological range.

**PERF\_ST 225-0 Black Music Studies (1 Unit)** This course introduces students to specific topics in the field of Black Music Studies that range from American gospel music and jazz to the question of how Black sound and performance gestate in everyday life, locally and transnationally. Students will engage with the complex socio-political dynamics that have historically shaped music in Black spaces as well as the role of Black and Afro-diasporic musical practices in shaping sono-musical cultures worldwide. No prerequisites. Specific topics and approaches to be determined by individual instructor.

**PERF\_ST 230-0 Food and Performance (1 Unit)** A critical engagement with food as a performance medium. This course explores food in its embodied, material, symbolic and evocative potential in historical, fictional, ethnographic and journalistic writings, as well as poetry, memoirs, cookbooks, selected films, plays, performances, music, visual and performance art.

**PERF\_ST 240-0 Performance and Technology: Composition Workshop (1 Unit)** In this course students will use basic mechatronics to create compelling movement-based performances. The course will involve workshop exploration of technologies embedded in performance: robots, media, computer interface. Students will create performance projects and discuss theoretical and historical implications of technologies in performance. Hands-on making and engineering workshops will be incorporated to develop basic skills in technological crafts such as circuit design and fabrication, toward technologically enhanced performance. No previous experience or programming skills required.

**PERF\_ST 250-0 Topics in Performance Studies (1 Unit)** Readings, discussion, and creative work in performance studies research and artistic practice. Topics vary. May be repeated for credit.

**PERF\_ST 300-0 Movement Based Performance (1 Unit)** Movement laboratory exploring theories and techniques of movement for performance, including dance, physical theatre, and framed quotidian action. Introduction to leading practitioners and practices in movement training, choreography, and composition.

**PERF\_ST 301-0 Performance and Activism in Digital Culture (1 Unit)** Exploration of the intersection between performance and digital media as tools for activism. Includes practices of hacktivism, counter-surveillance, locative media activism, and networked protest. *Literature Fine Arts Distro Area*

**PERF\_ST 302-0 Art and Performance in Asian America (1 Unit)** Introduction to the arts and performance of Asian America, including

popular culture, performance art, theatre, and dance. Overview of current practices in Asian American aesthetic criticism.

**PERF\_ST 303-0 Transnational Flows of Performance (1 Unit)** Exploration of how transnationalism and globalization challenge the concept of modern nation-states as bounded territories, identities, and cultures by considering how social actors negotiate these processes through performance as an embodied, in situ-cultural practice. *Literature Fine Arts Distro Area*

**PERF\_ST 304-0 Sonic Practices of the Middle East and North Africa (1 Unit)** Sonic and musical practices and ritual in the Middle East and North Africa in relation to modernity, transnationalism, political economy, and performance. *Literature Fine Arts Distro Area*

**PERF\_ST 305-0 Performance Theory (1 Unit)** Introduction to theoretical approaches that animate performance studies, including Marxism, psychoanalysis, deconstruction, postcolonial theory, critical race theory, feminist theory, and queer theory. *Literature Fine Arts Distro Area*

**PERF\_ST 306-0 Performance and Race (1 Unit)** An exploration of the field of performance studies as it interrogates the relationship between race and performance. Anchoring each class in the work of artists who engages the medium of performance, we explore the ways in which race is performed and performative. Performance works by black, brown, Asian, and indigenous artists will anchor understandings of race and racism. *Ethics Values Distro Area*

**PERF\_ST 307-0 Performance in Latin America (1 Unit)** This course provides an overview of artistic, quotidian, and activist performance practices in Latin America. Students will engage performance practice as an object of study, analytic framework, and communication medium in order to develop their own work in dialogue with the course themes and contexts.

**PERF\_ST 308-0 Contemporary Middle Eastern Performance (1 Unit)** This seminar examines embodied cultural practices across the Middle East and North Africa, with particular attention to music, dance, theater, and popular culture. Spanning the late nineteenth century to the Arab Spring, students will better understand a cultural history of the region, its role in shaping global modernity, and the politics of gender, sexuality, and ethnoreligious difference.

**PERF\_ST 309-0 Black Performance (1 Unit)** Exploration of black performance traditions; introduction to various schools of thought regarding black performance.

**PERF\_ST 310-0 Performing Africa (1 Unit)** This course invites students to imagine themselves as creators and curators, rather than as passive consumers or critics, of African images. We will engage storytelling, photography, devised theater, and movement as creative strategies with which to probe the idea of Africa; and explore historical and contemporary discourses that underpin ideas about Africa in the West.

**PERF\_ST 312-0 Yoga: Practice, History, and Politics (1 Unit)** This course combines yoga practice with critical inquiry to engage the global phenomenon of yoga as performance, industry, philosophy, and culturally contested zone. We will study the historical and social processes that shaped the historic transformation of yoga from a 5,000 year-old South Asian tradition into a modern cultural form.

**PERF\_ST 313-0 Documentary Theater and Performance (1 Unit)** This practice-based course focuses on the historical and theoretical foundations of documentary theatre and performance. Through case studies we will explore the poetics and politics of the genre. Students will devise their own documentary pieces based on interviews, personal narratives, and archival records of their choosing.

**PERF\_ST 315-0 Non-Fiction Studies (1 Unit)**

Exploration of the dramatic impulse in nonfiction texts. Emphasis on autobiographical one-person shows.

**PERF\_ST 316-0 Folklore and Oral Traditions (1 Unit)** Genres of oral literature and an introduction to the methods and aims of folklore research. The nature of verbal art as performance and the importance of cultural context.

**PERF\_ST 317-0 Feminist Performance (1 Unit)** This seminar focuses on the analytics and practice of intersectional, queer, and trans-feminist performance through a selection of key scholarly, artistic, and activist works. Pursuing what a feminist performance practice is and what it does, we will develop critical readings and hands-on experiments that follow feminist strategies in response to issues like gender-based violence, dissident identities, and collective emancipation. *Ethics Values Distro Area*

**PERF\_ST 318-0 Performing Masculinities (1 Unit)** This course will examine the ways in which masculinity is represented in popular culture, theoretical discourse, and live performance. Assuming that gender is made and not given, the course will challenge the assumption that only “men” are creators, performers, and producers of masculinity. We will also examine the ways in which race, class, and sexuality alter tropes of masculinity. *Ethics Values Distro Area*

**PERF\_ST 319-0 Queer and Trans of Color Critique (1 Unit)** This class explores the development of queer of color and trans of color critique, their relationship to each other and to the realm of performance and performance studies. In addition to engaging with the traditions of queer and trans of color critique, the course will explore queer and trans of color performance practice as a site of theoretical praxis. *Ethics Values Distro Area*

**PERF\_ST 321-0 Performance, Sex, and Censorship (1 Unit)** This seminar pursues the central issues that animated the “culture wars” in the United States since the 1980s, such as artistic expression, censorship, sex and sexuality, gender, race, reproductive choice, and religion. It focuses the history of performance, art, and censorship in the contemporary US, as well as the relevant first amendment law that accompanies much of this history. *Historical Studies Distro Area*

**PERF\_ST 322-0 Museums and Cultural Collections (1 Unit)** A look at museums as sites and practices of performance. This course focuses on how museums have historically collected, exhibited, and programmed around objects, images, plants, and, at times, human and non-human animals. We will explore the history of collections in libraries, cultural centers, museums and other archives. The course includes significant site visits to Chicago museums and collections.

**PERF\_ST 323-0 Performing Popular Music (1 Unit)** This course approaches the study of popular music practices, discourses, and worldmaking from the perspective of performance studies, with its attendant focus on the role of embodiment, social and cultural difference, and practice-based research.

**PERF\_ST 324-1 Presentational Aesthetics (1 Unit)** Theatrical convention, presentational mode, and conscious artifice in the performance of dramatic literature, poetry, and nonfiction.

**PERF\_ST 325-0 Adaptation: Writing and Staging (1 Unit)** This is a course in the fundamentals of adapting an existing, non-dramatic text (such as a novel, short story, memoir, non-fiction of all kinds, poetry, etc.) into a theatrical event. We will focus on all the issues involved in moving a story from one mode of address to another: direct and indirect discourse, voice, the implied author, compression, how time works differently for the reader vs. the spectator, and narrative and what to do about it; as well as replacing text with image, inventing dialogue, and staging the

impossible. Some texts will be assigned, but primarily students will work with print texts of their own choosing. Students will have many small exercises in both writing and staging; and work towards a “big project” – the completion of a significant part of their own adaptation. The course could be of interest to anyone interested in directing or creating plays from non-dramatic source texts.

**PERF\_ST 326-1 Performance Art (1 Unit)**

History, development, and theories of performance art as a live-art genre from the modernist avant-garde to contemporary cross-cultural forms. Media in all forms, with emphasis on performance process and audience relationship.

**PERF\_ST 327-0 Performance Ethnography (1 Unit)**

Ethnographic approaches to the field of performance studies, including the theoretical foundations of performance ethnography and methodological approaches to its performance.

**PERF\_ST 330-0 Topics in Performance Studies (1 Unit)**

Readings, discussion, and creative work in performance studies research and artistic practice. Topics vary. May be repeated for credit.

**PERF\_ST 331-0 Field Study/Internship in Performance Studies (1-4 Units)**

Intensive participation in off-campus production and/or field research experience. Departmental approval required.

**PERF\_ST 335-0 Social Art Tactics (1 Unit)**

Exploration of historical and theoretical foundations of social art practice, including work focused on social change in such genres as performance, digital media, relational art, and photography. Performance/art workshops; development of performance-based interventions.

**PERF\_ST 336-0 Latino/a Performance (1 Unit)**

Exploration of US Latina/o literature through narratives of migration, annexation, exile, and diaspora; focus on the arrival and development of Latina/o performance traditions in the United States.

**PERF\_ST 338-0 Autobiographical Performance (1 Unit)** In this process-oriented class, students will spend ten weeks analyzing a variety of autobiographical performances and developing solo performance pieces. Students will learn how to create a performance and move from the personal to the universal by pulling inspiration from personal experiences, family archives, and canonical performance art pieces. Students will also learn and practice methods for giving and receiving thoughtful and consensual critical feedback.

**PERF\_ST 399-0 Independent Study (1 Unit)** Prerequisite: consent of undergraduate dean after submission of petition.