

Theatre Arts Department
Course Proposal for General Education
THA 3753G Development of American Theatre and Drama

1. **Catalog Description:** THA 3753G. Development of American Theatre and Drama. (3-0-3) F-even-numbered-years. AMER THEATRE/DRA. Major themes and forces in American civilization as seen through 18th-20th Century American plays. Attention given to development of theatre as an art form and as a social-cultural force in the U.S. Focus is on reading and analyzing dramatic texts. Pre-requisites: ENG 1001G and ENG 1002G. Writing-intensive.
2. **Student learning objectives:**
 - a. **Learning objectives designed to help students achieve one or more of the following goals:**
 - **Demonstrate the ability to write and speak effectively**
 - The course is writing active. Students will take short quizzes, and they will write short (2-5 pages) analyses and/or comparison/contrast papers on plays studied. Papers will be evaluated on mechanics, structure, content, and usage. As needed or appropriate, the instructor will give attention to effective writing techniques.
 - The course is a discussion course, not a lecture course. In the early days of the course, students are presented with history, theory, and technique; but from the outset, they are expected to discuss what they have read and to apply ideas seen in the plays to current conditions and problems. Exchange of ideas is encouraged.
 - **Demonstrate the ability to think critically**
 - All written assignments are geared toward developing and sharpening skills in critical and analytical thinking. For example, in several assignments, students must defend their interpretations of the author's purpose or "message." This is accomplished through discussing and analyzing the play texts.
 - Other assignments ask students to identify or to comment upon then-current, critical issues in American society as reflected in the plays. Their comments may take the form of a written assignment or a discussion in class.
 - Through these means, students are encouraged to think critically and analytically.
 - **Function as responsible citizens**
 - Works to be studied serve "double duty." First, the works must be recognized as excellent examples of American dramatic literature; otherwise, there is little reason to study them. But, second, works should also contain a trenchant historical or social issue worth examining. Through reading and discussing the works, students are asked to comment upon the play's social and/or historical significance. They also are prompted to make comparisons between American society of the Past and the Present.
 - Since examination of historical, social, economic, political, and religious issues that have exercised Americans helps students "function as responsible citizens," this course fulfills that portion of the general education mission.

b. Additional learning objectives designed to help students achieve the goals of the course and/or a particular discipline or program.

The course helps students achieve the goals of the Fine Arts requirement through the following:

- 1) By exposing students to masterpieces of American drama through reading, discussing, discussing, and appreciating major American plays.
- 2) By exposing students to how the theatre developed as an art form and as a “social commentator” in America from the 18th Century to the present.
- 3) By heightening students’ understanding and appreciation of *why* drama and theatre are classified as *art* forms.
- 4) By sharpening students’ awareness of the problems faced by diverse social and cultural groups within American society, both past and present, by reading works that address those problems. By studying works of art treating the concerns of different social and cultural groups, students should broaden their understanding of persons and historical eras outside their range of experience.

3. Course Outline

The following sample course outline indicates what materials may be covered in 45 fifty-minute class periods. Individual instructors may omit some segments in order to devote more time to a given topic or play.

Note: During some semesters, it is quite possible the Theatre Arts Department may produce one of the plays listed below or an appropriate substitute. During those semesters, it would be desirable to have students both read *and* see a particular play. Writing assignments and discussions would be changed appropriately.

- a. The Colonial and Late 18th Century in America (1½ weeks)
 - Review and discussion of events leading up to the Revolutionary War; immediate aftermath of the Revolution
 - Introduction to the theatre in America: British roots, religious objections to the theatre and to drama before and during the Revolution
 - Read Royall Tyler’s *The Contrast* (1787), the first play by an American on American themes
 - Discussion on differences between British and American life, attitudes, and culture, as seen in the play; American attitudes toward the British
- b. Early 19th Century views of the American Indian (1 week)
 - Discussion of American Romanticism: its outlook and its concerns; effect on theatre and drama in America
 - Read John Augustus Stone’s *Metamora* (1829)
 - Discussion of views emerging from the play: Indian views of the white invaders, Whites’ views of the Indians, the Indian as “noble savage”, overall meaning of the conflict between the two groups, comparison of views of the forest as God’s Temple/as savage wilderness
- c. Enter the woman playwright (1 week)
 - The place of women in the American theatre and in American drama in the mid-19th Century

- ❑ Read and discuss Anna Cora Mowatt's social satire, *Fashion* (1845)
- ❑ Mrs. Mowatt's contributions toward raising the stature of American drama abroad; her contributions toward raising the social status of women in the American theatre
- ❑ Discussion of the play's view of the false values of the urban newly rich versus the homespun virtues of the rural agricultural yeomen
- d. Views of American Blacks on the eve of the Civil War (1 week)
 - ❑ Read and discuss Dion Boucicault's *The Octoroon* (1859)
 - ❑ Discuss depiction of Black and Indian characters, noting changes from *Metamora*
 - ❑ Discuss implications of marriage between white male and octoroon woman
 - ❑ Discuss playwright's equivocal stance on abolition
- e. Domestic roles and views thereon in the late 1800's (1 week)
 - ❑ Read and discuss James A. Herne's *Margaret Fleming* (1890)
 - ❑ Discuss male and female roles in the family, as reflected in the play
 - ❑ Playwright's views on the double standard in marriage
 - ❑ Treatment of ethnic and foreign characters in the play
 - ❑ Contributions and legacy of the play: the critics' views
- f. Introduction to the 20th Century in American drama (1/2 week)
- g. The city "melting pot" in the first half of the century (1½ weeks)
 - ❑ Read Elmer Rice's *Street Scene* (1929)
 - ❑ Discussion of the following topics emerging from the play: slums; urban immigrants; views of biases toward Italians, Jews, Polish, German, and other groups; "one-hundred-percent-Americanism"; Marxism versus capitalism; the "haves" and the "have-nots"; the intelligentsia versus the "rednecks"
 - ❑ Ethnic stereotypes
 - ❑ Playwright's view of American cities
 - ❑ Implications for urban living in the early 21st Century
- h. Economic collapse and individual degradation (1 week)
 - ❑ Read and discuss Sidney Kingsley's *Dead End* (1935)
 - ❑ The Depression: its effects on young children and on working adults
 - ❑ Stark differences between economic classes and between Whites and all other groups
 - ❑ Urban crime and disease as a result of deprivation
 - ❑ The individual versus the "machine" of Society
 - ❑ Comparisons between Then and Now
- i. After the War: Death of the American Dream (1½ weeks)
 - ❑ Attitudes in the postwar world
 - ❑ Read and discuss Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (1949)
 - ❑ The reality versus the fantasy of the American dream as seen in this play
 - ❑ The consumer mentality, mid-century
 - ❑ The individual as misfit in the 20th Century
 - ❑ Views of American business and businessmen
 - ❑ Role of the woman in the family: difference, but the same (compare to *Margaret Fleming*, 1890)
 - ❑ Implications of the "salesman mentality"
- j. The Black Playwright enters the Mainstream (1 week)

- ❑ Read and discuss Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959), first drama by a Black American to receive commercial recognition
- ❑ Views of the Black family
- ❑ Effects of prejudice and discrimination
- ❑ Views of Whites
- ❑ Significance—and ramifications—of Hansberry and her play
- k. Distortion of the American Dream (1 week)
 - ❑ Read and discuss the Chicago-based *American Buffalo* (1975), by David Mamet
 - ❑ The playwright's views of contemporary urban problems: crime, drugs, street violence, illiteracy, alienation from society, etc.
 - ❑ Implications for contemporary urban America
- l. Time set aside for exams and student projects (3 weeks)

4. Evaluation of student learning

- a. The following list of assignments indicates how students are evaluated in the course:

Quizzes (10)	10%
Essay exams (3)	50%
Oral report	10%
Term paper/project	20%
Class discussion/contributions	10%

b. **How the course satisfies the criteria for writing active:**

- 1) Writing will be “frequent”, as seen from the list of assignments above.
- 2) Much of the writing will be “brief”, except for the exams and the paper.
- 3) Quizzes and exams “assist students in mastering course content” in that the purpose of the quizzes and exams is to encourage students to notice and to think about what they have read.
- 4) The project (approximately 8 pages) has two purposes: (a) To allow students to explore in more depth some are that piques their curiosity; (b) to give students practice in organizing and developing a longer written assignment.

5. Rationale

- a. This course is placed in the Arts and Humanities component of the General Education curriculum.
- b. The 3000 level is appropriate because of the amount of work expected *and* because of the level of sophistication expected in writing and discussions. Prerequisites are ENG 1001G and ENG 1002G.
- c. This course is not similar to any existing courses, there is no duplication, there will be no program changes because of this course.
- d. This course is not required in any major or minor.

6. Implementation

- a. Jerry Eisenhour, Jean Wolski
- b. Textbooks:
 - (1) Stephen Watt and Gary Richardson, eds. *American Drama: Colonial to Contemporary*. Harcourt, 1995, (2) Lee A. Jacobus, *Bedford Introduction to Drama*,

current ed., (3) [If available/desirable:] Garff B. Wilson, *Three Hundred Years of American Theatre and Drama*

- c. Cost could include tickets to EIU productions not to exceed \$20.00.
- d. Fall 2000

7. Community College Transfer

A community college course will not be judged equivalent to this course.

8. Date approved by the department: 4/3/00

9. Date approved by the college curriculum committee: 4/12/00

10. Date approved by CAA: 10/19/00

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