

**Department of Theatre and Dance
Theatre, MFA
Specialization in Performance as Public Practice
Handbook and Curriculum Guide 2026-27**

Revised Fall 2025

M.F.A. in Theatre
With a Specialization in Performance as Public Practice
Curriculum Guide

Table of Contents

Field of Study
Organization of Graduate Studies in the Department of Theatre in Dance
Advising
Coursework
Program of Study
Required Courses
Electives
M.F.A. Thesis
Continuing in the M.F.A. Program
Accommodations and Leaves
Policies for Assistant Instructors and Teaching Assistants

Field of Study

The M.F.A. in Theatre with a specialization in Performance as Public Practice is a unique, individually-defined, three-year program generally geared toward artist/scholars, artists, or arts organizers with professional experience in the field who are interested in exploring new methods for integrating research, writing, and performance practice, and for deepening the historical, theoretical, and analytical aspects of their written, organizational, and performance work. We also consider students of exceptional merit who have more recently begun their work in these areas. The culminating thesis project in Performance as Public Practice will include a practical component (such as a performance piece or community-based project) and a written thesis.

The MFA degree is a terminal degree that qualifies you to work in a variety of academic, artistic, and professional settings, including teaching at the university-level or in community settings, directing a performance company, managing an arts organization, working as a performance curator or festival director, working as a professional dramaturg, or devising performance work.

The M.F.A.. in Theatre with a specialization in Performance as Public Practice merges performance studies with theater history and critical dance studies. Through transnational and interdisciplinary perspectives, PPP examines what performance is, what it does, and how it makes meaning in distinct contexts, including theatrical and political stages, nontraditional sites and museums, festivals, and everyday life. We center PPP around its three core concepts.

Performance: Performance is research, theory and methodology; it is a pedagogical approach; and a site of analysis. Students examine a wide range of performances, texts, and embodied practices in order to consider the myriad ways in which performance both reflects and produces cultural, historical, social, and political knowledge and meaning.

Public: Public can refer to a place, space, or site of performance; it can mean a group with whom a theatrical, identitarian, or ideological performance is shared. Public can also be an adjectival modifier of performances, such as interventionist performances, or ones that participate in structures of civic society. As such, public affords attention to all the ways that performance is engaged with the larger world.

Practice: Practice is process. It includes the daily doing of dancing, acting, performing, curating, dramaturgy, community engagement, and more. It is thinking and writing. It may produce performances, but it always produces knowledge.

Organization of Graduate Studies in the Department of Theatre in Dance

The Graduate Studies Committee (GSC), consisting of the tenure-track and tenured faculty in the department, establishes the policies and requirements for all graduate programs offered by the department. They have delegated to the Graduate Studies Executive Committee (Grad XCOM) the administration of those policies.

Graduate students in PPP will primarily communicate with PPP faculty and their academic advisor (and later thesis supervisor) when they need guidance. Students will also work with the Department Graduate Advisor, who signs off on student paperwork, and the Graduate Coordinator, who can answer questions about enrollment status and registration.

Advising

Upon admission, each student is assigned an academic advisor from the PPP faculty. In consultation with this advisor, the student prepares the Program of Study that guides coursework, selects courses each semester, including requirements and electives that support the major field of study. At the beginning of the student's second year of coursework, they select a supervisor. The supervisor can be the same faculty member as the academic advisor or a different faculty member; once the transition has been made, the student will consult primarily with the supervisor. Supervisors must be members of the Graduate Studies Committee and the PPP faculty, although students can work with co-supervisors who work outside the Department.

Coursework

The MFA Degree is completed within three years of study, including course work, thesis preparation, and defense.

Program of Study

During the week before classes begin the first semester, students will work with their academic advisor to complete the Program of Study and submit it to the Graduate Coordinator. The Program of Study must be completed in order to register for classes. The MFA Program requires successful completion of 54 hours of coursework and thesis preparation.

Required Courses: Core courses offer the student grounding in a range of critical theoretical, methodological, historical, analytical, and performance practices.

Core 1: Required Courses (12 credits)

- Research Methods (TD 388)*
- Supervised Teaching in Theatre and Dance (TD 398T)
- Proseminar: Theories and Methods in Performance as Public Practice (TD 391)
- Performance Theory (TD 391)

Core 2: Required Courses (18 credits)

- Performance and Media Analysis: Topics in Performance Analysis (TD 387D)
- Research and Practice: Performance Ethnography (TD 387D) or Performance as Research (TD387D)
- Historiography (TD 391) or Theatre History (TD 387D)
- Practice (9 credits). May include courses or topics such as: Choreography, Devising, Directing, Dramaturgy, Narrative in Physical Performance, Playwriting, etc.

Electives (18 credits, at least 6 of those outside the department):

Within the program and department, some electives will be offered regularly, while others only occasionally. They vary in content, methodology, and approach. PPP electives are offered as TD 387D (not to be confused with those courses, above, which serve as Core 1 or 2 requirements) For courses outside the department, students should carefully consider the professor, content, and methodology in relation to their research. We recommend seeking out courses taught by PPP's affiliate faculty, who often center performance in their courses and research.

The Office of Graduate Studies allows MFA students to include up to nine hours of upper-division undergraduate courses on their Programs of Study; however, the PPP faculty discourages students from including undergraduate courses as part of their graduate study. Such courses should only be taken after consultation with the faculty advisor or supervisor.

Thesis Hours (6 credits)

- TD 698

Some of the courses above are offered on regular rotations:

Fall, even-numbered years (eg 2026)	Fall, odd-numbered years (eg “2027”)
• Research Methods (TD 388) • Supervised Teaching in Theatre and Dance (TD398T) • Historiography (TD 391)	• Research Methods (TD 388) • Supervised Teaching in Theatre and Dance (TD398T) • Proseminar: PPP (TD 391)
Spring odd-numbered years (eg 2027)	Spring, even-numbered years (eg 2028)
• Performance Ethnography (TD 387D)	• Performance as Research (TD 387D) • Performance Theory (TD 391)

** Some courses may be applicable to more than one core 2 requirement, ie.. a course might fulfill “Performance and Media Analysis” and “Devising,” allowing some flexibility in the Program of Study. The student and advisor (or supervisor) select which (single) requirement the course is meant to fulfill. To determine what requirements a course fulfills, consult your advisor.*

M.F.A. Thesis

The M.F.A. thesis project in the Performance as Public Practice specialization will include two components:

1. **Practical component** that is developed and sustained over a 1-2-semester period and may include (but is not limited to):
 - The creation of original performance
 - Dramaturgy
 - Arts administration
 - Community-based work
2. **Written component** (75 pages) that may vary in its structure but should include:
 - A contextualization of the history, traditions, or practices in which the work is situated
 - Description and analysis of the work created
 - An evaluation of the project’s outcome

Regardless of the format, the intent of the culminating project is to demonstrate the depth of the student’s creative work and written analysis, and an ability to integrate theory and practice, conduct rigorous research, and engage critically with the selected field. Candidates for the M.F.A. degree must complete a thesis project as the major requirement for the degree.

Selecting a Supervisor and Preparing the Thesis Proposal

During semester three (fall of year two), the student and supervisor meet regularly to discuss the research and contours of the proposed project. By the beginning of spring semester of year two, they should designate two additional committee members. At least one of these must be members of TD’s Graduate Studies Committee (GSC). Students may approach their committee members for additional guidance.

Over spring semester of year two, the student will take an independent study with their supervisor (TD 395P, Advanced Projects in Performance Studies) to draft and redraft the thesis proposal. The final draft of the thesis will be presented to the committee by the specified deadline each spring, and an oral defense of the project will be scheduled.

After successfully passing the oral defense and receiving approval of the project by the committee, the student will submit the final document in accordance with the guidelines of the Office of Graduate Studies.

Thesis Proposal

The thesis proposal is a concise, descriptive, and narrative document that integrates the following

elements to a total of about 12 pages:

1. Introduction: This section briefly introduces the project, outlines the research to be undertaken, and gives the readers a sense of the project's significance. It overtly states the argument, including what questions the thesis will ask to illustrate the argument. It also emphasizes how the thesis will make a contribution to the field.
2. Review of Research: This section should locate your research within the theory, histories, literature, and influences you converse with or respond to.
 - How do you situate this work historically and within the fields you engage?
 - What are the sources (primary and secondary) that undergird your inquiry and how will you use these sources in devising and writing?
3. Narrative Description of Performance/Practice-Based Work: This section describes the performance or practice-based work that will culminate from the research.
 - Describe the work. Include what, where, when.
 - What are the central questions you are exploring in this work?
 - What are the methods you will use to undertake this work?
 - What is your strategy for producing the work and engaging audience? How do you see those strategies applying to your future work?
4. Written Component: This section will describe and outline the written work that will culminate from the research and performance work.
 - What will the written thesis focus on and argue?
 - What is the relationship between the performance and written work? How will these two components intersect and inform each other?
 - How will the writing account for/convey your research, process, and outcomes?
5. Chapter Breakdown and Conclusion: This section shows how the writing will be divided into chapters and articulates what will comprise each one. It is the work of every artist/scholar to design and frame their project with intentionality, creativity and originality. Recognize the job of shaping chapters is a key part of this process; it follows from an understanding of project goals, as determined through thought, research and the student's responses to each of the previous sections.

Practical Component

M.F.A. candidates should invite their committee members to view the creative portion of the thesis (if there is a public showing). If the student would like to use one of Winship's studio spaces, they should work with their supervisor, PPP's designated studio series representative, and the Department's Assistant Operations Manager to schedule use of the space in the spring of the second year.

Defense

M.F.A. candidates should schedule their oral defense date by week nine of spring semester, year three. The date should conform to the Graduate School's deadlines. The thesis committee needs to review the thesis at least two weeks prior to the oral defense date. Candidates will have 10-15 minutes to present their thesis material to the committee, and any invited guests, before the

committee begins asking questions and offering feedback. After successfully passing the oral defense and receiving approval of the project by the committee, the student will submit the final document in accordance with the guidelines of the Office of Graduate Studies.

Key Dates

Year	Semester	Task	Date
Fall, Year Two	Three	- Select a thesis supervisor - Enroll in TD 395P with supervisor or the Spring semester	Beginning of semester During Enrollment
Spring, Year Two	Four	- Designate Thesis Committee Members - Write, Revise, and Complete Proposal - Submit completed Thesis Proposal to Supervisor to circulate to committee - Defend Proposal	Beginning of semester Weeks 1 – 11 Week 12 Week 15
Summer, Year Two		Conduct Research for Thesis	
Fall, Year Three	Five	- Commence Writing of Thesis - Develop and Produce Practical Component	Weeks 1-15
Spring, Year Three	Six	- Continue to Write and Revise Thesis in response to feedback - Schedule Defense - Turn in Written Thesis to Committee - Defend Thesis	Weeks 1 - 11 Week 9 Week 12 Week 14

Continuing in the MFA Program

Each semester, the PPP faculty evaluate student progress. At the end of the academic year (generally before June 1) the advisor/supervisor provides each student with a letter of evaluation via email. Continuing in the Program depends on satisfactory progress. The Graduate School requires that students maintain a grade point average of at least 3.0; failure to do so will result in probation and possible dismissal from the program. The Program expects a grade point average of at least 3.5, no record of lingering incompletes, positive participation in and a clear commitment to the Program, satisfactory execution of TA or AI duties, and satisfactory and timely progress toward academic requirements and the degree. Failure to meet any of the Program expectations will result in a letter of warning from the Area Head that outlines expectations for improvement. If these expectations are not met, the Department's Graduate Studies Committee will recommend that the student be put on probation. If the Program does not see satisfactory progress following a period of probation, the student could be dismissed from the Program. See the university's [probation and dismissal policies](#) for more information.

Accommodations and Leaves

Students who require accommodations should contact and register with [Disability and Access](#).

Degree-seeking graduate students may apply for a [leave of absence](#) of no more than two long terms. Requests for a leave of absence must be approved in advance by the Graduate Advisor and the Graduate Dean. Applications from students who have been admitted to candidacy will be approved by the Graduate Dean only in rare and unusual circumstances. A student on approved leave must apply for readmission in order to return to the University, but readmission during the approved period is automatic and the application fee is waived. A student on leave may not use any University facilities; nor is the student entitled to receive advice from any member of the faculty. A leave of absence does not alter the time limits for degrees or coursework.

Policies for Assistant Instructors (AIs) and Teaching Assistants (TAs)

Policies for AIs

In accepting your appointment as Teaching Assistant or Assistant Instructor in the PPP area of the Department of Theater and Dance, we expect you to uphold the following standards in alignment with the Area's expectations for faculty and as indicated in the University's [Policies for TAs and AIs](#). Before being appointed to AI or TA, you must complete [Title IX](#) training. We also recommend that you utilize the services of the [Center for Teaching and Learning](#). They offer workshops, 1:1 meetings, and teaching observations. They also offer a [syllabus template](#) with suggestions for official language around university policies. In addition, we want to make sure you are taking care of your well-being; you can contact HR for questions about your insurance. Check out [this website](#) for services and resources for Graduate Students.

The Program considers your experience working as an AI and TA to be a critical part of your education and training in PPP. TD398T, Supervised Teaching in Theatre and Dance, is the first step in this process. Teaching is crucial fieldwork; it provides you with the skills to teach core curriculum in a Theatre/Dance/Performance Department, while developing your own voice, approach, and content.

Supervision

The PPP Area Head or another appointed faculty member will review your syllabus prior to the beginning of the semester. A PPP faculty member will also observe your class at least once during the semester. When you are contacted about an observation, share your syllabus and grant the faculty member access to your Canvas Page as a guest/observer. Prior to the observation, we recommend making an appointment to discuss how the class is going and your teaching goals for the session. The faculty member will write up their observations, assessments, and suggestions. This feedback is meant to be both affirming and constructive. Faculty may suggest a follow-up appointment to discuss the class session; we also invite you to initiate a follow-up meeting if helpful to you. A member of the PPP faculty will also write up an end-of-semester Teaching Assessment Evaluation to submit to the Area Head and Graduate Coordinator. We share these

documents with PPP faculty to provide context for annual reviews and letters of recommendation.

Expectations for AIs in PPP

1. You must teach your course in the location and instruction mode printed in the course schedule. Consult the Academic Calendar before planning your course.
2. Turn in a completed syllabus to the Area Head (or their designate) three weeks prior to the start of the semester. Your syllabus requires approval, and you may be asked to revise or make adjustments. Once approved, email your syllabus and CV to the TD course scheduler in the appropriate format in accordance [with state law](#).
3. Prepare and publish your Canvas Page before the first day of classes, and make sure your syllabus is readily available via Canvas by the first day. The Center for Teaching and Learning offers training in how to use Canvas and other technology in class, and we invite you to reach out to them for support.
4. Uphold your scheduled class days and times as listed in the course schedule. If students are registered for a 3-hour course, you should be teaching three hours a week.
5. Attend all class sessions. Planned absences from class require approval from the Area Head. If you need to travel for professional reasons (conference, performance event) or are ill and unable to teach for a session or two, we recommend having a contingency plan in place for coverage instead of canceling the session. If illness, family issues, or professional work means being away for more than a week per semester, please reach out to the Area Head and your advisor/supervisor for support.
6. Hold regular, weekly office hours.
7. Meet with the Area Head or your advisor/supervisor if you have concerns about your class, teaching, time management, or are struggling with your teaching. If you feel unable to talk to PPP faculty, or if PPP faculty are unavailable when you need help, reach out to the Graduate Advisor for assistance and counsel.
8. Your appointment is 20 hours, and you should not dedicate more hours to your work as an AI. Discuss strategies for balancing your workload with your advisor/supervisor. We recommend designating a set period of time weekly for preparation and grading so that you can limit yourself to the hours specified by your appointment.

Working with your Teaching Assistant:

1. You are the Instructor of Record, not the TA. Do not ask your TA to lead regular, weekly class sessions as this is against University Policy. See the [UT Policy on Teaching Assistants](#) [Section G] for more information.

2. That said, offer your TA the opportunity to lead a couple of sessions. We support collaboration and co-facilitation.
3. Seek to build a respectful, collaborative partnership with your Teaching Assistant(s). You should discuss and agree upon TA duties before the start of the semester, as well as policies and approaches to assessment.
4. Check-in frequently and meet regularly as a team so that you can plan and discuss concerns, assignments, and assessment.
5. Seek out the Area Head if you are having issues with or concerns about your Teaching Assistant. The faculty member who evaluates your class will meet with you to discuss your teaching and will also complete the TA evaluations for your course.

Policies for TAs

In accepting your appointment as a Teaching Assistant in the PPP area of the Department of Theater and Dance, we expect you to uphold the following standards in alignment with the Area's expectations for faculty and as indicated in the University's [Policy for Assistant Instructors](#). [See C and D]. Before being appointed as a TA, you must complete [Title IX](#) training. We also recommend you utilize the services of the [Center for Teaching and Learning](#). They offer workshops, 1:1 meetings, and teaching observations. In addition, we want to make sure you are taking care of your well-being; you can contact HR for questions about your insurance. Check out [this website](#) for services and resources for Graduate Students.

The Program considers your experience working as an AI and TA to be a critical part of your education and training in PPP. TD398T, Supervised Teaching in Theatre and Dance, is the first step in this process. Teaching is crucial fieldwork, which provides you with the skills to teach core curriculum in a Theatre/Dance/Performance Department, while developing your own voice, approach, and content.

Expectations for TAs in PPP

As written in the University's Policy on [Teaching Assistants](#), TAs help faculty, or the instructor of record, with the conduct and delivery of courses. Services provided by teaching assistants include, but are not limited to, grading, monitoring, leading lab and/or discussion sessions, offering office hour assistance to students, and performing clerical tasks associated with course instruction. Teaching assistants are supervised by the instructor of record and are subject to established departmental policies on student academic employment. At the end of the semester, the instructor of record will complete a TA Assessment Evaluation and turn that into the Area Head. After the Area Head reviews the assessment, it will be shared with the Graduate Coordinator and your advisor or supervisor, so that we may address your teaching in your annual review.

Guidelines:

1. Meet with the Professor, Instructor, or AI before the start of the semester to discuss the course, expectations, assessment approaches, and duties, and familiarize yourself with the syllabus and the course Canvas page.
2. Attend all class sessions. Occasional absences due to illness, family issues, or professional obligations are okay. Discuss scheduled absences (for professional events, for example) with the Professor/AI in advance. Extended absences require approval from the Professor and Area Head.
3. Hold regular, weekly office hours.
4. You may be invited to lead or co-lead some sessions, which will help you build the skills necessary for serving as an AI. But you may not regularly serve in the role of, or in place of, the instructor of record.
5. One of the primary duties of a TA in PPP is grading and assessment. Seek to complete grading in a timely manner (generally, within one week after the assignment is due). If you fall behind, it becomes difficult to catch up. Not providing feedback to students in a timely manner can undermine the course's scaffolding and can increase student anxieties about their effort or progress.
6. Meet with the Instructor of Record if you are struggling with your duties or have questions or concerns. If you feel unable to talk to the instructor, reach out to the Area Head, your advisor/supervisor, or the Graduate Advisor for assistance.
7. Your TA appointment(s) may be 10 hours (quarter-time) or 20 hours (half-time). Discuss strategies for balancing your workload with the instructor or with your advisor/supervisor. We recommend designating a set period of time weekly for grading so that you can limit yourself to the hours specified by your appointment.
8. If you are working with a faculty member, they will supervise your work and write your TA evaluation at the end of the semester. If you are working with an AI, the faculty member who observes the AI's work will complete your evaluation.