

**Department of Theatre and Dance
M.F.A. in Theatre with a
Specialization in Performance as Public Practice
Curriculum Guide**

Revised Fall 2021

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Field of Study

The M.F.A. in Theatre (Performance as Public Practice) is a unique, individually-defined, three-year program generally geared toward established artists (directors, choreographers, performance makers, etc.) or arts organizers 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 M.F.A. 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 Performance as Public Practice specialization permits considerable latitude. The specialization focuses on the historical development, cultural and theoretical contexts and artistic significance of theatre and dance disciplines and institutions, as well the interrelationships of theatre arts and the role of performance in public spheres. Performance as Public Practice is highly influenced by interdisciplinary work in performance studies, defining performance in varied and wide cultural contexts. Students are expected to give primary attention to an area of expertise of their choice, while training in the broader theoretical, critical and historical contexts of the field.

Our faculty defines "public practice" as activities that include:

- Creating and/or producing performance

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- Working as an academic (a professor who melds theory and practice in their teaching, scholarship, production and service)
- Producing and distributing research and scholarship
- Writing performance criticism
- Working as a dramaturg and outreach director
- Arts administration
- Working in public programming with foundations and non-profits
- Establishing public policy
- Writing grants
- Using applied theatre methods and theories
- Teaching in universities, colleges, high schools and community centers
- Using performance as a tool for understanding communities and difference
- Theorizing performance as a site of civic engagement and often dissent
- Redefining and recontextualizing the role of performance in culture
- Promoting arts-based civic dialogue
- Case-making and agenda-setting for public culture

Graduates will contribute to the public practice of performance through:

- Creating performance
- Writing
- Public speaking
- Teaching
- Publishing
- Arts programming and curation
- Arts policy making
- Consulting

The Performance as Public Practice specialization offers students a broad spectrum of approaches, methods and disciplines. It prepares graduates to:

- Make clear and cogent arguments
- Manage and complete complex projects
- Integrate performance history, theory and practice
- Address a range of audiences from scholarly to popular
- Research performance histories, theories, practices, criticism and literature
- Forge connections among performance, communications, media, television and film studies, anthropology, cultural studies, popular culture, literary studies, gender and queer studies and other fields and subfields
- Analyze written texts and live performance
- Work as a production dramaturg and outreach director, collaborating with playwrights, directors, production teams and audiences
- Interpret and develop performance as a public practice in a variety of contexts, including commercial theatre, activist theatre, theatre of the oppressed, physical theatre or dance
- Teach courses ranging from large introductory lectures to specialized courses at the community college level and in community settings
- Create and implement outreach strategies that expand the meanings of performance to various audiences
- Develop research and teaching specialties within the field, such as:

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- Applied theatre practices
- Arts criticism
- Arts writing
- Black performance
- Community-based theatre
- Contemporary performance
- Cultural policy
- Dance studies
- Feminist theories and performance
- Historiography
- Latinx performance
- Musical theatre
- Performance ethnography
- Performance of the Americas
- Queer theatre and performance
- Text into performance
- Theories of pedagogy

Organization of Graduate Studies in the Department of Theatre and 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 (XCOM) the administration of those policies.

Graduate students in PPP will primarily communicate with PPP faculty and their academic (and later thesis) advisor 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 and can provide students with the Program of Study form. The form is posted on Canvas.

Advising

Each student is assigned an academic advisor from among the faculty who teach in PPP. With this advisor, the student plans courses each semester, prepares the Program of Study that guides coursework and fulfills other requirements for the degree. The academic advisor helps the student decide how to meet the core courses, language requirement and practicum in Performance as Public Practice and electives that support the major field of study. At the end of the student's second year of coursework, they propose two to three faculty who would be appropriate to supervise their thesis project. The PPP area faculty consult and select one of these faculty members as supervisor. Faculty supervisors must be members of the Graduate Studies Committee. The academic advisor can help with this transition.

Coursework

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

Program of Study

By the first week of November during their first semester in residence, students must submit for approval to the Head of the Ph.D. Program a Program of Study. The Program should be completed on the form provided by the Graduate Coordinator and discussed with the student's faculty advisor in some detail before it is submitted. The M.F.A. Program requires successful completion of 60 hours of coursework and thesis preparation:

1. Required Courses (36 credits)
2. Electives (12 credits, at least 6 of those outside the department)
3. Applied Practice Courses (6 credits)
4. Thesis Course Hours (at least 6 credits)

The Office of Graduate Studies allows M.F.A. 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 a faculty adviser.

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)

- Proseminar: Theories and Methods in Performance as Public Practice (TD 391)
- Supervised Teaching in Theatre and Dance (TD 398T)
- Research Methods (TD 388)
- Historiography (TD 387D)

Core 2: Required Courses (24 credits)

- Topics in Performance Analysis (TD 387D)
- Performance in Context/Dramaturgy (TD 387D)
- Performance Ethnography (TD 387D) or Performance as Research (TD387D)
- Topics in Performance History (TD 387D)
- Topics in Arts & Cultural Policy (TD 387D)
- Devising (9 hours)

May include: Kinetic Storytelling, Devising, Narrative in Physical Performance, Playwriting, Directing, Choreography, Solo Performance, etc.

Some of the courses above are offered on regular rotations:

Fall, even-numbered years	Fall, odd-numbered years
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervised Teaching in Theatre and Dance (TD398T) • Historiography (TD 391) • Topics in Arts & Cultural Policy (TD 387D) • Topics in Perf Analysis (TD 387D)* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervised Teaching in Theatre and Dance (TD398T) • Research Methods (TD 388) • Topics in Performance Analysis (TD 387D)* • Topics in Arts & Cultural Policy (TD 387D) • Performance as Research (TD 387D)

Spring odd-numbered years	Spring, even-numbered years
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proseminar in Performance as Public Practice (TD 391) • Performance Ethnography (TD 387D) • Topics in Arts & Cultural Policy (TD 387D) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dramaturgy (TD 387D) • Topics in Performance Analysis (TD 387D)* • Topics in Arts & Cultural Policy (TD 387D) • Topics in Theatre History (TD 387D)

** A number of courses, offered in the fall and spring of both even- and odd-numbered years, can fulfill the “Performance Analysis” and “Devising” requirements. For example, Narrative in Physical Performance may count as either a “Performance Analysis” or a “Devising” course. To determine whether a course counts as an analysis or a performance credit, consult with your advisor.*

Electives (12 credits, at least 6 of those outside the department):

Some electives are offered regularly, while others only occasionally. They vary in content, methodology and approach. Some examples within the program include The Artist as Entrepreneur, Choreographing Gender/Dancing Desire, Feminist Theory and Performance, Narrative in Physical Performance, Reading the Canon, Staging Black Feminism, etc.

For courses outside the department, students should carefully consider the professor, content and methodology. Many PPP students find relevant courses in departments and programs such as African and African Diasporic Studies, American Studies, Art History, Asian American Studies, English, History, Mexican American and Latino/a Studies, Women’s and Gender Studies, etc.

Applied Practice Courses (6 credits):

For each of the six semesters of study, students will register for 1 hour of applied practice. The Applied Practice Courses, registered as TD 195P, may be practical work of any kind (engaging in a regular solo or devising practice, acting, dramaturgy, directing, choreography, creating a performance, outreach, playwriting, working with a non-profit organization, doing a community-based project, etc.). Students doing internships may register for TD 184. The practicum requires permission from a faculty advisor and will be handled via contract.

Thesis Writing and Research Hours (6 credits)

Candidates for the M.F.A. degree must complete a thesis project as the major requirement for the degree. The process for designing the project consists of several steps.

- As noted above, by the end of the student's second year of coursework, they propose two to three faculty who would be appropriate to supervise their thesis project. The PPP area faculty consult and select one of these three faculty members as supervisor. Faculty supervisors must be members of the Graduate Studies Committee.
- Prior to the end of the spring semester, the student and supervisor meet to discuss a research agenda for the summer, which will allow the student to spend time delimiting the topic and the contours of the project.
- At the beginning of the fall semester, the student and faculty supervisor meet to finalize the topic and to begin developing the thesis project proposal.

The M.F.A. thesis project in Performance as Public Practice 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
 - Internships
 - Dramaturgy
 - Arts administration
 - Community-based work

2. **Written component** (50-75 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.

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.

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 and creativity/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.
6. **Timeline for Project**

The thesis proposal will be reviewed and approved by a subcommittee of the PPP Program faculty. Once it's approved, in consultation with the faculty supervisor, the student will select two other members of the Graduate Studies Committee to serve on the thesis project committee.

During the writing and research process, the faculty supervisor will work most closely with the student, although other committee members might be approached for additional guidance. 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.

Continuing in the M.F.A. Program

Each semester, the PPP faculty and by the Graduate Studies Committee XCOM evaluate student progress. Continuing in the Program depends on satisfactory progress, as determined by the Graduate School policies in the most current bulletin. The PPP faculty expects a consistent grade point average of at least 3.0 (though preferably a GPA higher than 3.8), no record of lingering incompletes, positive participation in and a clear commitment to the Program and satisfactory and timely progress toward academic requirements and the degree. Unsatisfactory commitment and progress could result in rescinded financial aid awards and cancelled teaching assistant opportunities, as well as a letter from the Director of Graduate Studies detailing a period of required 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

Accommodations

Students who require accommodations should contact and register with [Services for Students with Disabilities](#) (SSD). It is important to discuss approved accommodations with your advisor and professors.

Leaves of Absence

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Leaves of Absence are highly discouraged, and should only be considered if necessary. Graduate students may apply for a leave of absence of no more than two semesters. 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 course work. For information on requesting a Leave of Absence or Readmission refer to the Graduate School:

<https://gradschool.utexas.edu/academics/policies/leaves-of-absence>