**Theater and Dance**

Roger Bechtel, *Department Chair*

Noma Petroff, *Department Coordinator*

*Professor:* June A. Vail

*Associate Professors:* Roger Bechtel, Davis R. Robinson

*Senior Lecturers:* Gwyneth Jones, Paul Sarvis

*Lecturers:* Judy Gailen, Abigail Killeen, Sonja Moser, Michael Schiff-Verre

*Laboratory Instructor:* Deb Puhl

Students may minor in dance or theater. Although no major is offered in the Department of Theater and Dance, students with special interest may, with faculty advice, self-design a major in conjunction with another academic discipline. More information on student-designed majors may be found on page 29.

**Interdisciplinary Major**

The department participates in an interdisciplinary major in English and theater. See page 210.

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**DANCE**

The dance curriculum provides a coherent course of study through classes in dance technique and repertory, choreography, and dance history, theory, and criticism. The department emphasizes dance’s relation to the performing and fine arts and its fundamental connection to the broad liberal arts curriculum. The program’s goal is dance literacy and the development of skills important to original work in all fields: keen perception, imaginative problem solving, discipline, and respect for craft.

The foundation for classes in dance technique and repertory is modern dance, a term designating a wide spectrum of styles. The program focuses on an inventive, unrestricted approach to movement informed by an understanding of basic dance technique. This offers an appropriate format for exploring the general nature of dance and the creative potential of undergraduates.

Technique and repertory courses (*111, 211, 311*; and *112, 212, 312*) earn one-half credit each semester. Each course may be repeated a maximum of four times for credit. Students may enroll in a technique course (*111, 211, 311*) and a repertory course (*112, 212, 312*) in the same semester for *one full academic course credit*. Attendance at all classes is required. Grading is Credit/D/Fail.

**Requirements for the Minor in Dance**

The minor consists of five course credits: *Dance 101*; *Dance 111/112, 211/212*, or *311/312*; *Dance 102, 130, 145*, or *150*; and two additional courses at the 200 level or higher.

Students must earn a grade of Credit or C- or better in order to have a course count toward the minor in dance.
First-Year Seminars
For a full description of first-year seminars, see pages 149–60.

10c. Understanding Theater and Dance: Doing, Viewing, and Reviewing. Fall 2009. JUNE VAIL.
( Same as Theater 10.)

Introductory, Intermediate, and Advanced Courses

101c - ESD, VPA. Cultural Choreographies: An Introduction to Dance. Fall 2010. JUNE VAIL.
Dancing is a fundamental human activity, a mode of communication, and a basic force in social life. Investigates dance and movement in the studio and classroom as aesthetic and cultural phenomena. Explores how dance and movement activities reveal information about cultural norms and values and affect perspectives in our own and other societies. Using ethnographic methods, focuses on how dancing maintains and creates conceptions of one’s own body, gender relationships, and personal and community identities. Explores with dance and movement forms from different cultures and epochs—for example, the hula, New England contradance, classical Indian dance, Balkan kolos, ballet, contact improvisation, and African American dance forms from swing to hip-hop—through readings, performances, workshops in the studio, and field work. (Same as Gender and Women’s Studies 102.)

102c - VPA. Making Dances. Every year. Fall 2010. PAUL SARVIS.
Explores ways of choreographing dances and multimedia performance works, primarily solos, duets, trios. A strong video component introduces students—regardless of previous experience in dance—to a wide range of compositional methods that correspond to creative process in other arts: writing, drawing, composing. Includes some reading, writing, and discussion, as well as work with visiting professional dance companies and attendance at live performances.

104c. Stagecraft. Every year. Fall 2009. MICHAEL SCHIFF-VERRE.
Introduction to the language, theory, and practice of technical theater. Hands-on experience in lighting, scenic and property construction, costuming, and stage management. Considers the possibilities, demands, and limits inherent in different forms of performance and performance spaces, and explores the job roles integral to theater and dance production. Includes forty hours of laboratory work. Grading is Credit/D/Fail. (Same as Theater 104.)

111c - VPA. Introductory Dance Technique. Every semester. THE DEPARTMENT.
Classes in modern dance technique include basic exercises to develop dance skills such as balance and musicality. More challenging movement combinations and longer dance sequences build on these exercises. While focusing on the craft of dancing, students develop an appreciation of their own styles and an understanding of the role of craft in the creative process. During the semester, a historical overview of twentieth-century American dance on video is presented. Attendance at all classes is required. May be repeated for credit. Grading is Credit/D/Fail. One-half credit.

112c - VPA. Introductory Repertory and Performance. Every semester. THE DEPARTMENT.
Repertory students are required to take Dance 111 concurrently. Repertory classes provide the chance to learn faculty-choreographed works or reconstructions of historical dances. Class meetings are conducted as rehearsals for performances at the end of the semester: the December Studio Show, the annual Spring Performance in Pickard Theater, or Museum
Courses of Instruction

Pieces at the Bowdoin College Museum of Art in May. Additional rehearsals are scheduled before performances. Attendance at all classes and rehearsals is required. May be repeated for credit. Grading is Credit/D/Fail. One-half credit.

[113c - VPA. African Dance and Music. (Same as Africana Studies 113 and Music 113.)]


An introduction to theatrical design that stimulates students to consider the world of a play, dance, or performance piece from a designer’s perspective. Through projects, readings, discussion, and critiques, students explore the fundamental principles of visual design, as they apply to set, lighting, and costume design, as well as text analysis for the designer, and the process of collaboration. Strong emphasis on perceptual, analytical, and communication skills. (Same as Theater 130.)


For millennia, we have organized our fictions, our religions, our histories, and our own lives as narratives. However much the narrative form has been called into question in recent years, it seems we just cannot stop telling each other stories. Examines the particular nexus between narrative and performance: What is narrative? How does it work? What are its limits and its limitations? How do we communicate narrative in performance? Involves both critical inquiry and the creation of performance pieces based in text, dance, movement, and the visual image. (Same as Theater 145.)

150c - VPA. Improvisation. Every other year. Spring 2011. The Department.

Improvisation is a fundamental tool used by dancers, musicians, actors, writers, and other artists to explore the language of a medium and to develop new work. An interdisciplinary introduction to some of the primary forms of improvisation used in dance and theater. Content includes theater games, narrative exercises, contact improvisation, and choreographic structures. (Same as Theater 150.)

201c - VPA. Theater and Dance History: Moments, Movements, Theories. Fall 2009. Roger Bechtel.

Examines seminal historical moments in theater and dance through a focus on such conceptual categories as visuality, aurality, the body, space, spectatorship, political ideology, and so on. Historical eras covered include ancient Greece, medieval Japan, Renaissance Europe, and romantic, modernist, and postmodernist Europe and America. The focus, however, will be placed not on these individual moments per se, but on the effect of social and cultural pressures on the aesthetics of live performance across different times, cultures, and disciplines. Some time spent in the studio experimenting with historical forms. (Same as Theater 201.)

202c - VPA. Topics in Dance History: Rebel Dancers, Dancing Revolutions. Every other year. Fall 2010. June Vail.

A studio exploration of American social and theatrical choreography’s intersection with cultural and political upheavals in the United States during the past century. Assignments intersperse dancing with reading, writing, and viewing films and live performances, with workshops by visiting dance companies. Explores diverse styles and eras, including the turn-of-the-twentieth-century feminist/political art of Isadora Duncan; performances of racial and class solidarity by workers’ groups of the 1930s; avant-garde happenings and subversive choreographic strategies of the 1960s; the embodied politics of early hip-hop; and, the staging of gender identities in the 1990s and beyond.

Prerequisite: One of the following: Dance 101, 102, 111, 211, or 311, or permission of the instructor.
211c - VPA. Intermediate Dance Technique. Every semester. The Department.
A continuation of the processes introduced in Dance 111. May be repeated for credit. Grading is Credit/D/Fail. One-half credit.

212c - VPA. Intermediate Repertory and Performance. Every semester. The Department.
Intermediate repertory students are required to take Dance 211 concurrently. A continuation of the principles and requirement introduced in Dance 112. May be repeated for credit. Grading is Credit/D/Fail. One-half credit.

Hybrid by nature, rebellious in spirit, performance rejects the boundaries and conventions of traditional theater and dance, combining and recombining these live forms with every other artistic mode and medium imaginable. Yet as the first decade of the new century draws to an end, so does the fifth decade of this “new” form. Is it still breaking boundaries, or has boundary-breaking itself become a convention? What, these days, is new about performance? Examines the genealogical roots of performance and studies the ways twenty-first-century performance is exploring the body, the mind, technology, intercultural aesthetics, and globalism. Students will enact critical inquiries in the creation of their own performance works. (Same as Theater 240.)
Prerequisite: One 100-level course in theater or dance.

Theater and dance have a long history of political engagement, social intervention, and community building. Examines the historical precedents for today’s “applied” theater and dance practice, including Piscator, Brecht, Boal, Cornerstone Theatre, Judson Dance Theatre, and Yvonne Rainer. Significant time also spent working with local agencies and institutions to create community-based performances addressing social issues such as homelessness, poverty, prejudice, and the environment, among others. (Same as Theater 250.)

Through a vigorous sequence of creative projects, fluent dancers excavate sources and explore methods for making dance. Detailed work on personal movement vocabulary, musicality, and the use of multidimensional space leads to a strong sense of choreographic architecture. Students explore the play between design and accident—communication and open-ended meaning—and irony and gravity. Studio work is supported by video viewing, and readings on dance, philosophy, and other arts.
Prerequisite: Dance 101 or 102 and two of: Dance 112, 212, or 312.

291c–294c. Intermediate Independent Study in Dance. The Department.

311c - VPA. Advanced/Intermediate Dance Technique. Every semester. The Department.
A continuation of the processes introduced in Dance 211. May be repeated for credit. Grading is Credit/D/Fail. One-half credit.

312c - VPA. Advanced/Intermediate Repertory and Performance. Every semester. The Department.
Intermediate/advanced repertory students are required to take Dance 311 concurrently. A continuation of the principles and requirement introduced in Dance 212. May be repeated for credit. Grading is Credit/D/Fail. One-half credit.

401c–404c. Advanced Independent Study in Dance. The Department.
Theater Program at Bowdoin offers students the opportunity to examine the ways theater can provoke the imagination, tell stories, create community, and challenge assumptions. Courses are offered in performance, theory, history, design, and stagecraft. Emphasis is placed on theater’s fundamental connection to the liberal arts curriculum, as well as theater literacy, performance skills, respect for language, and an understanding of social/historical influences on drama. The aim is to develop imaginative theater practitioners who collaboratively solve problems of form and content with a passionate desire to express the human condition on stage.

Requirements for the Minor in Theater
The minor consists of five courses: Two courses from Theater 101, 104, 120, 130, 145, 150; two courses from Theater 201, 220, 225, 240, 250, 260, 270, 305, 320, 321, 322, 323, 370; and one additional course in theater or dance. Students must earn a grade of Credit or C- or better in order to have a course count toward the minor in theater.

First-Year Seminars
For a full description of first-year seminars, see pages 149–60.

10c. Understanding Theater and Dance: Doing, Viewing, and Reviewing. Fall 2009. JUNE VAIL. (Same as Dance 10.)

Introductory, Intermediate, and Advanced Courses

101c. VPA. Making Theater. Fall 2009. SONJA MOSER.
An active introductory exploration of the nature of theater: how to think about it, how to look at it, how to make it. Students examine a range of theatrical ideas and conventions, see and reflect on live performance, and experience different approaches to making work. Designers, directors, performers, and scholars visit the class to broaden perspective and instigate experiments. Students work collaboratively throughout the semester to develop and perform original work.

104c. Stagecraft. Every year. Fall 2009. MICHAEL SCHIFF-VERRE.
Introduction to the language, theory, and practice of technical theater. Hands-on experience in lighting, scenic and property construction, costuming, and stage management. Considers the possibilities, demands, and limits inherent in different forms of performance and performance spaces, and explores the job roles integral to theater and dance production. Includes forty hours of laboratory work. Grading is Credit/D/Fail. (Same as Dance 104.)

106c. Introduction to Drama. Fall 2009. AARON KITCH.
Traces the development of dramatic form, character, and style from classical Greece through the Renaissance and Enlightenment to contemporary America and Africa. Explores the evolution of plot design, with special attention to the politics of playing, the shifting strategies of representing human agency, and contemporary relationships between the theater and a variety of forms of mass media. Authors may include Sophocles, Aristophanes, Marlowe, Shakespeare, Dryden, Ibsen, Wilde, Beckett, Mamet, and Churchill. (Same as English 106.)

Introduces students to the physical, emotional, and intellectual challenge of the acting process. Voice and movement work, analysis of dramatic texts from an actor's point of view, and improvisational exercises are used to provide students with a variety of methods for acting truthfully on stage.


An introduction to theatrical design that stimulates students to consider the world of a play, dance, or performance piece from a designer's perspective. Through projects, readings, discussion, and critiques, students explore the fundamental principles of visual design, as they apply to set, lighting, and costume design, as well as text analysis for the designer, and the process of collaboration. Strong emphasis on perceptual, analytical, and communication skills. (Same as Dance 130.)


For millennia, we have organized our fictions, our religions, our histories, and our own lives as narratives. However much the narrative form has been called into question in recent years, it seems we just cannot stop telling each other stories. Examines the particular nexus between narrative and performance: What is narrative? How does it work? What are its limits and its limitations? How do we communicate narrative in performance? Involves both critical inquiry and the creation of performance pieces based in text, dance, movement, and the visual image. (Same as Dance 145.)

150c - VPA. Improvisation. Every other year. Spring 2011. The Department.

Improvisation is a fundamental tool used by dancers, musicians, actors, writers, and other artists to explore the language of a medium and to develop new work. An interdisciplinary introduction to some of the primary forms of improvisation used in dance and theater. Content includes theater games, narrative exercises, contact improvisation, and choreographic structures. (Same as Dance 150.)

195c - VPA. Production and Performance. Every semester. The Department.

Engagement in the presentation of a full-length work for public performance with a faculty director or choreographer. Areas of concentration within the production may include design, including set, light, sound, or costume; rehearsal and performance of roles; service as assistant director or stage manager. In addition to fulfilling specific production responsibilities, students meet weekly to synthesize work. Students gain admission to Theater 195 either through audition (performers) or through advance consultation (designers, stage managers, and assistant directors). Students register for Theater 195 during the add/drop period at the beginning of each semester. Students are required to commit a minimum of six hours a week to rehearsal and production responsibilities over a period of seven to twelve weeks; specific time commitments depend upon the role the student is assuming in the production and the production schedule. Grading is Credit/D/Fail. One-half credit. May be repeated a maximum of four times for credit, earning a maximum of two credits.

Prerequisite: Permission of the instructor.

201c - VPA. Theater and Dance History: Moments, Movements, Theories. Fall 2009. Roger Bechtel.

Examines seminal historical moments in theater and dance through a focus on such conceptual categories as visuality, aurality, the body, space, spectatorship, political ideology, and so on. Historical eras covered include ancient Greece, medieval Japan, Renaissance Europe, and romantic, modernist, and postmodernist Europe and America. The focus, however, will be placed not on these individual moments per se, but on the effect of social
and cultural pressures on the aesthetics of live performance across different times, cultures, and disciplines. Some time spent in the studio experimenting with historical forms. (Same as Dance 201.)


Examines A Midsummer Night’s Dream, The Merchant of Venice, Twelfth Night, As You Like It, The Winter’s Tale, and The Tempest in light of Renaissance genre theory. (Same as English 210.)

Prerequisite: One first-year seminar or 100-level course in English.

Note: This course fulfills the pre-1800 literature requirement for English majors.

[211c. Shakespeare’s Tragedies and Roman Plays. (Same as English 211.)]

[212c. Shakespeare’s History Plays. (Same as English 212.)]


An intermediate acting course focused on the link between language, thought, and feeling, with the goal of achieving full-mind-body engagement in the act of communication. Students work with poetry, plays, and other dramatic texts to encourage vocal, physical, and emotional freedom. Breathing exercises attune students to the physiological impulse to speak, while vocal exercises concentrate on developing increased range, strength, and color of expression. Interpretation is explored through close readings of texts. This course, along with Theater 225, Acting II: Physical Theater, is part of a two-semester course series. Theater 220 and 225 may be taken individually or in any order.

Prerequisite: One 100-level course in theater.

[223c - VPA. English Renaissance Drama. (Same as English 223.)]


Extends the principles of Acting I through a full semester of rigorous physical acting work focused on presence, energy, relaxation, alignment, and emotional freedom. Develops and brings the entire body to the act of being on stage through highly structured individual exercises and ensemble-oriented improvisational work. Scene work is explored through the movement-based acting disciplines of Lecoq, Grotowski, Meyerhold, or Viewpoints. Contemporary physical theater makers Théâtre de Complicité, Mabou Mines, SITI company, and Frantic Assembly are discussed. This course, along with Theater 220, Acting II: Voice and Text, is part of a two-semester course series. Theater 220 and 225 may be taken individually or in any order.

Prerequisite: One 100-level course in theater.


An overview of the development of the theater from the reopening of the playhouses in 1660 to the end of the eighteenth century, with special emphasis on the emergence of new dramatic modes such as Restoration comedy, heroic tragedy, “she-tragedy,” sentimental comedy, and opera. Other topics include the legacy of Puritan anxieties about theatricality; the introduction of actresses on the professional stage; adaptations of Shakespeare on the Restoration and eighteenth-century stage; other sites of public performance, such as the masquerade and the scaffold; and the representation of theatricality in the eighteenth-century novel. (Same as English 230.)

Prerequisite: One first-year seminar or 100-level course in English.

Note: This course fulfills the pre-1800 literature requirement for English majors.

Hybrid by nature, rebellious in spirit, performance rejects the boundaries and conventions of traditional theater and dance, combining and recombining these live forms with every other artistic mode and medium imaginable. Yet as the first decade of the new century draws to an end, so does the fifth decade of this “new” form. Is it still breaking boundaries, or has boundary-breaking itself become a convention? What, these days, is new about performance?

Examines the genealogical roots of performance and studies the ways twenty-first-century performance is exploring the body, the mind, technology, intercultural aesthetics, and globalism. Students will enact critical inquiries in the creation of their own performance works. (Same as Dance 240.)

Prerequisite: One 100-level course in theater or dance.


Examines dramatic trends of the century, ranging from the social realism of Ibsen to the performance art of Laurie Anderson. Traverses national and literary traditions and demonstrates that work in translation like that of Ibsen or Brecht has a place in the body of dramatic literature in English. Discusses such topics as dramatic translation (Liz Lochhead’s translation of Molière’s Tartuffe); epic theater and its millennial counterpart (Bertold Brecht, Tony Kushner, Caryl Churchill); political drama (Frank McGuinness, Athool Fugard); the “nihilism” of absurdist drama (Samuel Beckett); the “low” form of the musical (as presented, for example, by Woody Allen); and the relationship of dance to theater (Henrik Ibsen, Ntozake Shange, Stomp, Enda Walsh). Readings staged. Formerly English 262 (same as Gender and Women’s Studies 262 and Theater 262). (Same as English 246 and Gender and Women’s Studies 262.)

Prerequisite: One first-year seminar or 100-level course in English or gender and women’s studies.


Theater and dance have a long history of political engagement, social intervention, and community building. Examines the historical precedents for today’s “applied” theater and dance practice, including Piscator, Brecht, Boal, Cornerstone Theatre, Judson Dance Theatre, and Yvonne Rainer. Significant time also spent working with local agencies and institutions to create community-based performances addressing social issues such as homelessness, poverty, prejudice, and the environment, among others. (Same as Dance 250.)


A writing workshop for contemporary performance that includes introductory exercises in writing dialogue, scenes, and solo performance texts, then moves to the writing (and rewriting) of a short play. Students read plays and performance scripts, considering how writers use image, action, speech, and silence; how they structure plays and performance pieces; and how they approach character and plot. (Same as English 214.)

Prerequisite: One 100-level course in theater or dance or permission of the instructor.


Introduces students to the major principles of play direction, including conceiving a production, script analysis, staging, casting, and rehearsing with actors. Students actively engage directing theories and techniques through collaborative class projects, and complete the course by conceiving, casting, rehearsing, and presenting short plays of their choosing. A final research and rehearsal portfolio is required.

Prerequisite: One 100-level course in theater or dance.
291c–294c. Intermediate Independent Study in Theater. THE DEPARTMENT.

305c. Studio 305. Spring 2011. ROGER BECHTEL.

A senior theater seminar focusing on independent work. Advanced students creating capstone projects in playwriting, directing, acting, and design meet weekly as a group to critique, discuss, and present their work. Final performances are given at the end of the semester.

Prerequisite: One 100-level course in theater and one additional course in theater or dance, preferably at the 200 level.

320c. Theater Styles. Every third year. Fall 2009. DAVIS ROBINSON.

An advanced acting class that explores issues of style. What is Tragedy? Farce? Melodrama? Commedia? Realism? The Absurd? Through research, analysis, and scene work in class, students become familiar with a range of theatrical idioms. Emphasis is placed on understanding the social/cultural needs that give rise to a particular style, and the way in which style is used in contemporary theater to support or subvert a text.

Prerequisite: One 100-level course in theater and one additional course in theater or dance, preferably at the 200 level.

321c. Comedy in Performance. Every third year. Fall 2011. DAVIS ROBINSON.

Looks at several facets of comedy on stage, from its origins in Greek and Roman theater to contemporary comic forms. Theory is combined with practical exercises in clowning, satire, physical comedy, wit, timing, phrasing, and partner work to develop a comic vocabulary for interpreting both scripted and original work. Students work in solos, duets, and groups to create final performance projects that are presented to the public at the end of the semester.

Prerequisite: One 100-level course in theater and one additional course in theater or dance, preferably at the 200 level.

322c. Ensemble: Theater and Dance Collaborative Creation. Fall 2010. THE DEPARTMENT.

Experienced theater and dance students collaborate to devise an original performance event. The course spans the entire process from conception to research, writing, staging, choreographing, and ultimately performing for the public. With emphasis on experimentation—and a process that includes dance and acting technique—the aim is to both embrace and transcend disciplinary traditions.

Prerequisite: One 100-level and one 200-level course in theater or dance, or permission of the instructor.

323c. Acting Shakespeare. Spring 2010. ABIGAIL KILLEEN.

An advanced-level acting course dedicated to the study of Shakespeare toward its original purpose: performance. Building on the skill sets learned in Acting I and both sections of Acting II, students combine advanced text and rhetorical analysis with rigorous physical and vocal work designed to bring the text off the page and into performance.

Prerequisite: Theater 120 and Theater 220 or 225, or permission of the instructor.

370c. Advanced Directing. Spring 2010. SONJA MOSER.

A continuation of Theater 270. Students build upon their knowledge of play analysis and staging to examine composition, design, and actor collaboration in greater depth. Advanced directing skills, theories, and techniques will be exercised through work on non-realistic material. Culminates with each student directing a 30-minute-long theatrical work.

Prerequisite: Theater 270.

401c–404c. Advanced Independent Study in Theater. THE DEPARTMENT.