DIRECTING THESIS GUIDELINES

Prerequisites: Practicums: Assistant Stage Manage and Stage Manage a mainstage production
Courses: Script Analysis; Principles of Acting; Directing; Directing Styles

Deadline: Proposals should be submitted by the middle of the semester during which (or soon after which) the project is to occur. The most common project slots are May and June.

Proposed dates for the performance much be submitted along with the proposal; two performances are required. Dates must be approved by the Directing Thesis Advisor, the Technical Director, and (if relevant) other department staff. No changes may be made to scheduling without going through the Directing Thesis Advisor and the Technical Director.

Length: Given the available resources, pieces must run 35 to 45 minutes. Directing Thesis projects can be one-act plays, an act of a full-length play, or a cutting or adaptation of a full-length play. The Directing Thesis proposal follows the “Director Prep Sheet” format used in the Directing class, and is likely to be ten to twelve pages long.

Budget: The Theatre Department provides a maximum of $300 for the reimbursement of approved Directing Thesis production costs. Costume, prop, set, and lighting equipment may be available. Download the Thesis Budget Guidelines and Template for more information. The Budget Proposal must be submitted with your Thesis Proposal. It will be reviewed and finalized when your thesis project has been approved. Outside funding and fundraising is not permitted.

WRITTEN PROPOSAL

Write and submit a proposal that includes the following components:

DIRECTOR’S ANALYSIS/PREPARATION

1. What is the style of the play? There are basically two styles: Realism (or lifelikeness) and everything else. Avoid a summary labeling the play, but discuss how its world differs from (or is similar to) “life.” Discuss such aspects as behavior, language, action, place, movement, light, color, character/audience relationship, audience viewpoint, clothing, or any other distinction you find meaningful. Don’t be fearful about referring to style “isms,” but use them as a starting, not an ending, point.

2. What, for you, is the most important idea of the play? In what ways does its specific story, characters, setting, etc. serve as a metaphor – and what larger “surround” does that metaphor represent? What makes the play worth doing?

3. What other ideas does the play develop, use, or suggest?

4. What is the dramatic action of the play – in one or two sentences – and what is the strategy of the action? How does it create a persuasive and exciting event?
5. For your chosen piece, choose five pages of text and submit a unit breakdown. Label the dramatic action unit by unit; number the units sequentially. Do this analysis directly on an enlarged copy of your script (in pencil) and submit a photocopy of your work. (If your proposal is accepted, you will do a unit breakdown and a line by line analysis of the entire piece and discuss your work with the Directing Thesis Advisor.)

6. Using the unit breakdown, analyze your scene by mood and tempo changes. Write the number of unit, then its mood and tempo. Explain how specific mood and tempo changes create excitement.

7. Discuss the actions of the play in relation to space and volume; articulate how space and volume heighten the play’s impact?

8. Discuss physical movement. What type, style, quantity, etc. of movement will realize the play most fully? What should the movement strategy be? How should transitions be handled? What will be the rhythm?

9. Discuss character.
   a. What makes each character individual? Create a visual image for each and describe typical or eccentric behavior.
   b. What is the strategy for each character? Do they evolve, change, regress? What character aspects (behavior, voice, movement, spirit, strength, etc.) make each theatrical?
   c. What are their motivations?
   d. What are their histories?

10. Discuss given circumstances: play’s setting; social and economic factors; racial, ethnic, religious factors; political factors; geography, region, locale; time, weather, physical factors.

11. Discuss the language of the play. Are specific rhythms necessary? Is dialect necessary? What devices of language are used?

Putting the play back together....

12. Describe the play’s visual story.

13. Describe the play’s aural story.

14. List and be prepared to discuss how you will handle the powerful moments in your chosen piece. (Discuss the four to six moments you experience as most powerful.) Make particular reference to visual images.

15. Discuss the difficulties of the text. How does it make its climax or create its effect? What is necessary to make it evocative and powerful? How does it speak personally to you?

16. Discuss your ideas for creating your scene.
PRODUCTION PLANNING/DESIGN.

1. SCALE: What is the overall direction and scale of the setting, costumes, lighting, sound, and any other production elements? Give as full a sense of these elements as is possible at this point.

2. PRACTICABILITY: Discuss how this production can be done on the main stage with limited resources. (Alternative performance spaces will be considered; please be prepared to justify this choice in detail.) Also discuss your sense of the availability of actors for casting.

DRAMATURGY: What background material do you need to approach the script and the production? Consider the playwright, the play, the cultural background, historical and contemporary criticism, the stage history, present-day intellectual/social/aesthetic/political issues, etc. Attach a bibliography of your research up to this point.

PERSONAL SUITABILITY: Directing takes a substantial sense of responsibility and sophisticated interpersonal skills. Moreover, lab projects must withstand strong resource constraints and cannot heavily tax other departmental functions. It takes a mature, self-motivated, and self-sufficient person to handle this situation well. Make a case that shows that you understand the challenges and have the qualities to surmount them.

PROPOSED DATES FOR THE PERFORMANCE: Two performances are required. Dates must be approved by the Directing Thesis Advisor, the Technical Director, and (if relevant) other department staff. No changes may be made to scheduling without going through the Directing Thesis Advisor and the Technical Director.

AFTER THE PROPOSAL IS ACCEPTED

Meet weekly with your Directing Thesis Advisor. Submit your line by line beat analysis at least three weeks before the start of rehearsals.

During the entire directing process, keep a comprehensive and detailed journal. Include notes from meetings with your designers and technical team, beginning with the initial introductory meeting; notes from meetings with others as deemed relevant, preparations for rehearsals, notes of actual rehearsals and tech, and anything else that is relevant to the process. Maintain an updated bibliography of dramaturgical research and a record of all design/concept changes and their respective justifications.

AFTER THE PERFORMANCE

Complete the journal, including your notes of each performance. While you will not be asked to share your journal, you should bring it to the defense.

THE DIRECTING THESIS PROJECT DEFENSE

Arrange a date with the Directing Thesis Advisor for your Thesis Project Defense.
Prepare a 10-15 minute presentation on all of your work on the project. Include a discussion of the process and a self-critique. Be prepared to answer questions from the committee that will arise in response to this presentation and to the work seen in the production.

The Committee votes Pass or Fail at the end of the Thesis Project Defense, but may choose to wait a week before issuing the decision in order for one or more Committee members to write a response to be issued along with it. A response may also be written even if a Pass or Fail is issued at the conclusion of the Thesis Project Defense.