



**THE 213 – FUNDAMENTALS OF ACTING  
COURSE SYLLABUS: FALL 2012  
T/H 11:00 AM-12:15 PM  
PERFORMING ARTS CENTER #126**

**Instructor:** Dr. Jim Al-Shamma, Assistant Professor of Theatre  
**Office Location:** Performing Arts Center #130  
**Office Hours:** M 11:00 AM-1:00 PM; T, H 12:30 PM-1:30 PM; W 11:00 AM-12:00 PM  
 (and by appointment).  
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*The information presented in this syllabus is subject to change with adequate notification.*

<b>COURSE INFORMATION</b>
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**Required Textbook:**

None.

**Required Viewing:**

***Proof***

By David Auburn  
 Directed by Jim Anderson  
 Produced by the University Playhouse at Texas A&M – Commerce  
 October 9-13 at 8 pm  
 October 14 at 3 pm  
 On the Main Stage

***A Wrinkle in Time***

By Madeline L' Engle  
 Adapted for the stage by James Sie  
 Directed by Carrie Klypchak  
 Produced by the University Playhouse at Texas A&M – Commerce  
 Saturday, November 17 at 6:00 PM  
 Sunday, November 18 at 3:00 PM  
 On the Main Stage

Tickets for these productions are: Non-student Adult: \$10; Senior: \$8; Student and Children: \$3.

You may make reservations by coming by the University Playhouse Box Office (PAC 101) from 1:00 p.m. – 5:00 p.m. on weekdays. Or, you may make advance reservations by phone at any

time by calling 903-886-5900 or by email at [playhouseboxoffice@tamuc.edu](mailto:playhouseboxoffice@tamuc.edu). You must present your student ID at the box office to receive the student price.

*\*Note: Please understand that viewing a performance of both of the University Playhouse shows listed above is an absolute requirement of the course. Part of becoming a skilled actor is viewing other actors' successes and challenges. Clear your schedule now!*

### **Catalog Course Description:**

This course focuses on introducing and developing the basic acting techniques of characterization, role analysis, stage movement, voice, and body control.

### **Course Introduction:**

Welcome! This course is required of all Theatre majors and minors at Texas A&M University – Commerce and aims to teach specific fundamental techniques associated with the acting process per the Stanislavski System. The methodologies used to reach determined objectives/learning outcomes are as follows: guided discussions of performances, rehearsals, workshops, small group and large group activities, written and creative assignments.

Training for creativity and improvisational theatre emphasizes the following concepts, which I will explain during class. I hope we can use them as the foundation for behavior in this class:

First	*Make your partner look good
by	*Saying YES
promoting	*Safety/Trust
releasing	*Energy
intensifying	*Being present/paying attention
facilitating	*Listening
supporting	*Spontaneity
encouraging	*Risk-taking
increasing	*Flexibility
fostering	*Sharing control and responsibility

**Student Learning Outcomes:** By the end of this semester, the student will be able to:

1. Demonstrate understanding and practical proficiency in executing the foundational principles of Stanislavski's approach to realistic acting for the stage.
2. Display acquisition of effective skills in working with others via a disciplined, collaborative, professional, respectful, and productive approach throughout the rehearsal and performance processes. These skills include:
  - The ability and willingness to engage in structured play in an ensemble.
  - An openness to experiencing change/surprise/movement as a result of give-and-take on stage.
  - The discovery and use of power from your **center** -- breathing, speaking, and moving from center.
  - Concentration, including:
    - the ability to focus attention
    - powers of observation
    - sensory awareness.

- Exploring your imagination.
  - Developing characters not limited by stereotypes.
3. Exhibit proficiency in accepting and incorporating constructive criticism into your own performances, while developing the skills needed to humanely and insightfully evaluate both personal artistic efforts and the work of others.
  4. Conduct a personal warm-up that consists of physical and vocal exercises for your ongoing development and for use before performance situations (on stage, public speaking, job interviews, etc.).

<b>COURSE REQUIREMENTS</b>
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### Instructional / Methods / Activities Assessments:

#### Assignments

1. Written Journal -- This is your acting diary. It is an exercise in self-reflection meant to increase self-awareness. As an actor, *you* are the instrument, and so it is crucial to reflect upon your process. Feel free to write in stream-of-consciousness style. Write it to yourself for yourself -- not for me or to me. Write one typed page 2 times a week **whether we have class or not and whether you are in class or not**. You will turn this in to me every two weeks – see the course calendar for due dates. You will write these outside of class – however, I may occasionally provide time at the end of class to work on your entries. These will be graded on **how well you relate your entries to acting**. I will give you optional topics in class. However, you can always write about things we do in class. Additionally, I will be looking for you to write specifically about your process for creating the urgency scene, the animal study, the lip sync, the oral history, and the final scene.
2. You need to see the two departmental productions this semester and write about your observations of the acting. I will give you a format for these papers. Each is worth 10 points. Performance dates are provided elsewhere in this syllabus.
3. You will prepare 2 short solo scenes: a 1 minute *urgency* scene (no speaking, but sounds always fine), and an animal study (using sounds and movements) which will be performed solo and then used in group improvisations. These exercises will not be graded. If you prepare the exercise and then do it in class, you will receive full credit.
4. With a partner, you will prepare and present an open scene, in which you are given non-specific dialogue and asked to provide the given circumstances. You must provide the who, what, where, when, and why. Also, what are your characters doing immediately before the scene begins?
5. Your midterm will be a short performance based upon a short oral history. Please begin working on it now. We will discuss this assignment in class, but simply put, you will choose a person to study. You arrange to meet with and sound record or videotape the person for 20-30 minutes talking about her/himself. You are searching for **details** about this person. It is important that you begin with no preconceived ideas about this person. Pick someone you don't know well and about whom you have no strong feelings. Ask your person the following three questions:
  - 1) Have you ever come close to death?
  - 2) Have you ever been accused of something that you did not do?

3) Do you remember the circumstances of your birth?

If these questions aren't enough to get the person going, you'll have to ask other questions such as: Do you like your job? Why/why not? What are your hobbies? Why? What are you passionate about? What do you love/hate? Why? What are your favorite things, difficulties, greatest challenges, greatest joys. What do you fear? What do you want out of life? Ask for details, examples, **stories**. Let them talk. **Listen**. Only ask a question to get things rolling. While the person is talking, you observe carefully -- later making detailed notes about body movements, posture, facial expressions, etc. Next, you go home and listen to (or watch) the recording. Select 2-3 minutes to transcribe. This becomes your script. You memorize it, trying to incorporate all emotional sounds, pauses, etc. First, you try to imitate the person to the minutest detail. Then, let the details play on you... see what they awaken in you. This 2-3 minutes is then presented to the class.

Grade based on: Neatly typed script = 5; Memorized word-for-word = 5; Specific physical & vocal choices = 5; Time is actually 2 - 3 minutes = 5; Total possible points = 20.

5. Lip Sync: This is you performing a song as if you are singing it. Think of it as your dream music video. You don't actually sing; you mouth the words realistically. Create a character, set a scene, and choreograph your movements. Grade based on: Memorized words = 2; Staging/choreography = 2; Costume/props = 2; Performed w/commitment = 2; Imagination = 2.
6. Final scenes: In pairs, we will do various scenes. These scenes will be approximately 6 minutes in length. To prepare for this, you will do an initial scene analysis, memorize your lines, and create a movement sequence with your partner that captures the essence of the scene as you interpret it. The initial scene analysis will be turned in on the day you perform the scene, and a final, rewritten scene analysis is due at the end of the semester; both will be counted as part of your grade for the scene. I will give you guidelines for the scene analysis in class. I will also give you some class time to work with your partner and to create the movement sequence. Although we will spend some time working on the scenes in class, you are required to spend significant time rehearsing outside of class with your partner.

Students will bring to this course a wide range of acting experience. If you already have extensive experience, I urge you to approach this class with a beginner's mind. If some of the exercises seem easy to you, challenge yourself to fulfill them as deeply, and with as much detail and commitment, as you can. Even the most experienced actor can benefit from reinforcing the essentials. The class will also benefit from your feedback; position yourself as a valued member of the ensemble. Make yourself look good by making your partners look good.

*All assignments must be neatly typed (no larger than 12-point font), double spaced, with margins no larger than 1.25 inches. Pages must be stapled together in the upper left hand corner. (No paper clips, torn corners or folder covers please.) Assignments that are not stapled will not be accepted. Buy a stapler today!*

**Grading:**

Participation/Attitude	5
Written Journal. Collected 7 times -- worth 3 points each time	21
2 Written Observations of Plays. Each is worth 10 points	20
2 Short Exercises:	
Urgency Scene	4

Animal Study	5
Lip Sync	10
Open scene	5
Oral History Project	20
Final Scene	
Presentation	5
Script analysis – initial	5
Script analysis – final	5
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Total Points Possible:	100

GRADING SCALE: The following grading scale will be used to determine all individual grades as well as the student's overall grade in the course:

A	90%-100%	(Exceptional Quality Work)
B	80%-89%	(Above Average Quality Work)
C	70%-79%	(Average Quality Work)
D	60%-69%	(Below Average Quality Work)
F	0%-59%	(Fails to Meet Acceptable Expectations in Quality of Work)

### TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS

**WORKING EMAIL REQUIREMENT:** It is a course expectation that you have a working email address that you check daily. If you have not already acquired an email address through the university or otherwise, please make arrangements to do so before the next class meeting. There may be times that I need to contact you with important information and email is often the speediest and easiest way of doing so.

**WRITTEN WORK:** Unfortunately, papers/projects do occasionally get lost. Please, for your sanity, save your work on a disc or thumb drive, etc. Do not depend on your paper staying on the hard drive of any University computer, as it will be deleted, altered, or worse – turned in by someone else as their work! Be aware that it is a course expectation that you keep copies of your assignments until you receive your final grade for the semester.

### COMMUNICATION AND SUPPORT

#### **Contacting the instructor:**

Please feel free to visit me during my office hours at any time during the semester. I am here to help! If you can't make my office hours due to a scheduling conflict, please set up an appointment with me. It is not an imposition. Communicate, communicate, communicate! If something is occurring that is presenting you with difficulties with this class, let me know. Don't be intimidated. Talk to me! The easiest and most reliable way to contact me is via email. I check it fairly frequently. Please do not leave a message for me in the main department office.

#### **Student Resources:**

**Department of Mass Media, Communication and Theatre**

Performing Arts Center (PAC) #101

Phone: 903-886-5346 (Main Office)

<http://www.tamu-commerce.edu/mmct/default.asp>**Communication Skills Center**

Hall of Languages #103

<http://www.tamu-commerce.edu/litlang/CSC/index.htm>**COURSE AND UNIVERSITY PROCEDURES/POLICIES****Course Specific Policies and Procedures:**

**CLOTHING:** Dress for maximum freedom and movement. You may occasionally be lying and rolling on the ground. Fair warning: the floor may or may not be spotless. Wear comfortable shoes that you can move around in or bring other shoes. Heels, boots, short skirts, tight jeans, and low-cut shirts will all restrict movement (and consequently restrict your ability to participate in class). Do not wear jewelry that will affect your freedom of movement or speech. No hats are to be worn during warm-ups, activities, performances, etc. Also, please keep your hair securely away from your face during all exercises, workshops, and performances in class.

(It is essential that I be able to see your face during all practical acting exercises.) *No one will be excused from a class activity because of clothing concerns; you are required to wear clothing that will not inhibit participation in class activities.*

**ATTENDANCE:** You should realize the vital importance of daily student attendance for developing new skills and understanding new material. *You are expected to attend every class meeting. I am strict about this. There is no way to make up a missed acting class!* If you do not attend class, you may be leaving your partner stranded if in-class time is devoted to partner work, which it often will be! Your absence will have an effect on someone other than yourself – please be considerate. In cases of *extreme* emergency (such as hospitalization or a death in the family), you are required to contact me and any group members, partners, etc. *before* the class you must miss.

I will take roll at the beginning of each class in order to aid me in calculating your participation grade and tracking your attendance. *If you are absent, you are making that choice, and I expect you to accept the consequences graciously and in a mature manner.* It is your responsibility to remain informed of class activities if you are absent for any reason.

The formal attendance policy for this class is as follows: You are allowed two emergency absences in this class with no attendance grading penalty (although your participation grade will still be lowered accordingly upon a missed class). Upon the third absence, the student's overall grade in the course will be reduced by 3 points. This 3 point deduction policy will continue for each subsequent absence. *Due to the mandatory daily interactive nature of this course, upon the sixth absence (regardless of circumstances), the student may be automatically dropped from or fail the course – depending on the date of the acquired sixth absence.* (Please be aware that missing a scheduled appointment/coaching time with me without significant and appropriate advance notification also counts as an absence.) Please keep up with your absences in this course – this is your responsibility. Do not ask me how many absences you have during the semester; I may not have that information readily available when you need it.

Note: Each student will receive one “pass” regarding participation in warm-up activities. This pass is intended to be used on a day that the student may not feel up to extreme physical exertion. Please be advised: the “pass” does not include the day’s activities beyond the warm-up period.

\*for more information on the university attendance policy please go to the following link:  
<http://www7.tamu-commerce.edu/registrar/attendance.asp>

**LATE ARRIVALS:** To further foster a high level of commitment—and because the work we will be doing this semester will involve intensive focus—the class will adopt the following late entry policy. Students must be on time for every class. Entering a class late or leaving early is disruptive to the flow of the class and indicative of a less-than disciplined/committed artist. Please be on time out of consideration to your learning process and the processes of others. If you are late for class, your participation grade will reflect this. The class will begin promptly at the scheduled time. If you arrive more than 10 minutes late, please do not enter the classroom (you will be marked absent regardless). If you arrive within the ten minute grace period, please do so discretely in order to avoid disrupting the class activities/discussions. *It is your responsibility to make sure that you find me after class and document your late attendance for the day—otherwise, your initial marked absence documented during roll will remain.* Also, you are expected to stay until you are dismissed from class. An early departure will also significantly reduce your participation grade. *Two late arrivals (within the ten-minute grace period) or early departures (or any combination of the two) may be counted as one absence in the class.*

#### **ELECTRONIC DEVICE POLICY:**

*Cell phones, text message, social media, etc.*

Use of cell phones, messaging devices, and other electronic devices (for example, recording devices, music players, PDAs, computers) is prohibited in class unless specifically permitted by the instructor, or if the device is being used as a component of class learning activities. Failure to abide by this electronic device policy may result in corrective action by the faculty instructor. This may include being marked absent on the day of the infraction. Computer use during class time is limited to course-relevant activity. Web-surfing, video watching, etc. are not allowed.

#### *Class recording/image capture*

The use of personal recording devices (tape, digital, video, web camera, etc.) requires instructor approval. Student should request permission to record class activity in writing.

**LATE WORK:** *Workshops and Performances – Under normal circumstances, a missed workshop or performance may not be made up.* Late written work/projects will be deducted a full letter grade each class session after the assigned due date. This means that if you have to be absent for some reason on the day a written assignment is due, you must give your assignment to one of your classmates to hand in for you, or you will receive a grading deduction. All assignments are due within the first 10 minutes of the class period unless I specify otherwise. If turned in more than 10 minutes after the beginning of class on the day that the assignment is due, your assignment will receive one letter grade reduction in credit. No assignments will be accepted more than one class period late. **Work will not be accepted by e-mail.**

**EXTRA CREDIT:** As a general rule, there is no extra credit offered in this class – please, do not even ask. In the *rare* instance that an extra credit opportunity arises, that opportunity will be announced and equally available to all members of the class.

**FOOD, DRINK, GUM, and SMOKING:** Please do not bring food or drinks into the classroom at any time (exception: you may bring bottled water with you to class). As this is a course focusing on practical performance, chewing gum is not allowed at any time during class. Students are not allowed to smoke during class time – even when in individual/partner rehearsals at an outside location.

**INCOMPLETES:** Under normal circumstances, an Incomplete (I or X) will not be given for a final grade in this course.

**ARTISTIC CONTENT:** Writers and performers have explored a wide range of themes and viewpoints, using a variety of artistic approaches. Pieces will be selected by the students and instructor in order to aid their accomplishments in relation to the course learning outcomes. The pieces chosen and presented may contain ideas, language, or depictions of behaviors/images that you personally find offensive or otherwise disturbing. *Try to concentrate on the performance rather than your opinion about the material in such an instance.* There is also a policy in this class that a performer is required to inform his/her audience that the performance piece may be offensive to the audience. Any class member is always welcome to leave the classroom for that particular performance and return afterward in this case.

**PERFORMANCE MATERIAL:** All performance material will come from plays appropriate to the unit under study. *No film scripts will be used in this class for performance purposes.* This is a course in acting for the stage – not film. Although there is significant crossover, these two art forms are different in a number of ways. Further, when choosing material, a piece found on the Internet or that is not part of an actual play script will not be acceptable. In order to work on a selection in this class, you must have access to the entire play from which the piece comes.

### **University Specific Policies and Procedures:**

**ACADEMIC DISHONESTY:** This course adheres strictly to the college's guidelines for Academic Dishonesty printed in the *Student's Guide Handbook*. Plagiarism, cheating, or otherwise representing another's work or ideas as your own without proper attribution will not be tolerated. All work must be new and created for this class during this semester by you. It is your responsibility to ensure that you understand the definition of Academic Dishonesty at Texas A&M-Commerce. If such an instance occurs, the student will receive an automatic zero for the work in question, and I will immediately report the incident to the Head of the Department. (*You should be aware that this could result in dismissal from school without credit for the semester.*)

**STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES:** The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact:

Office of Student Disability Resources and Services  
Texas A&M University-Commerce  
James G. Gee Library  
Room 132  
Phone (903) 886-5150 or (903) 886-5835  
Fax (903) 468-8148  
[StudentDisabilityServices@tamu-commerce.edu](mailto:StudentDisabilityServices@tamu-commerce.edu)



*\*Note: Please be aware that under no circumstances can I implement any disability accommodations without official documentation from the Office of Student Disability Resources and Services at Texas A&M University - Commerce.*

STUDENT CONDUCT: All students enrolled at the University shall follow the tenets of common decency and acceptable behavior conducive to a positive learning environment. (See *Student's Guide Handbook*, Policies and Procedures, Conduct.)

<b>COURSE OUTLINE / CALENDAR</b>
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**Tentative Schedule:** (subject to change at the discretion of the instructor)

Tuesday, August 28

Introductions and Syllabus.

Thursday, August 30

A physical warm-up.

Ensemble forming.

Assignment: Urgency scenes.

Tuesday, September 4

Assignment: begin work on Oral History Project.

Warm-up -- physical & vocal.

Thursday, September 6

Present 1 minute urgency scenes.

Assignment: work on animal study.

Tuesday, September 11

Journal #1 due.

Thursday, September 13

Present animal studies.

Tuesday, September 18

*Status* on stage.

Thursday, September 20

*Status* on stage.

Tuesday, September 25

Copies of transcripts from the oral history are turned in.

Journal #2 due.

Thursday, September 27

Assignment: open scenes.

Tuesday, October 2

Present open scenes.

Thursday, October 4

To be announced.

Tuesday, October 9

Midterm -- Oral history presentations.

Journal #3 due.

Assignment: begin work on lip sync presentations.

Thursday, October 11

Midterm -- Oral history presentations.

Tuesday, October 16

Play report on *Proof* due by today.

Scripts for the final scenes distributed.

Thursday, October 18

In class -- with your partner -- create movement piece of your scene.

Tuesday, October 23

Lip sync presentations.

Journal #4 due.

Thursday, October 25

Work on scenes in class.

Tuesday, October 30

Work on scenes in class.

Thursday, November 1

NO CLASS

Tuesday, November 6

Journal #5 due.

Lines memorized by today for final scene -- present line through in class.

Thursday, November 8

To be announced.

Tuesday, November 13

Initial scene analysis due.

First presentation of scenes in class.

Thursday, November 15

First presentation of scenes in class.

Tuesday, November 20

Play report on *A Wrinkle in Time* due by today.

Journal #6 due.

Thursday, November 22

NO CLASS – THANKSGIVING BREAK

Tuesday, November 27

Work on scenes in class.

Thursday, November 29

Work on scenes in class.

Tuesday, December 4

Final presentation of scenes.

Journal #7 due.

Thursday, December 6

Final presentation of scenes.

Course Evaluations

Tuesday, December 11 (Final Exam)

NO CLASS

Your Final Analysis Project must be turned in by noon on Tuesday, December 11 (*you may hand-in directly to Dr. Al-Shamma or place your Script Analysis in Dr. Al-Shamma's mailbox in the main department office – PAC 101 – at any point up until this time*). No late work accepted on this project.