



THE 461/THE 561: Meisner Acting I
COURSE SYLLABUS: FALL 2015 (First Sub-term)
M/W 4:30 p.m. – 7:10 p.m.; Performing Arts Center #126

Instructor: Dr. Carrie Klypchak, Associate Professor of Acting and Directing
Office Location: Performing Arts Center #129
Office Hours: M/W 3 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.; T/H 12:30 – 1:30 (and by appointment)
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Acting is living truthfully under imaginary circumstances. ~Sanford Meisner

Who you truly are is magnificent and totally unique. ~Larry Silverberg

You are more interesting than the greatest actor who ever lived. ~Constantin Stanislavsky

COURSE INFORMATION

Required Textbook:

As the bulk of this course will be focused on practical application, there is no required textbook.

Required Special Supplies:

Throughout the course, you will be required to bring in materials for activities that are “physically difficult” in nature. Additional information regarding parameters will be outlined during the semester for these activities, but please plan for these minimal expenses now.

Suggested Outside Reading: (suggested to be read *after* completing course)

Sanford Meisner on Acting by Sanford Meisner and Dennis Longwell

The Sanford Meisner Approach (Four-book Workbook Series) by Larry Silverberg

Course Description:

Through exercises, performance activities, and presentations, this course provides a practical introduction to Sanford Meisner’s approach to actor training. This is a class that will be challenging, invigorating, and participatory. Please consider yourself to now be a part of a workshop rather than a classroom as it is usually understood.

Although there is a lecture/discussion component to this course, by nature actor training requires substantial studio work – both inside and outside of the classroom. Please consider

yourself to be part of a learning community where members support one another with suggestions and constructive criticism. Learning, observing, and sharing are central to this course. *Attitudes of awareness and openness are essential to your development and your contribution to the development of the other members of this class.* Please leave your worries, frustrations, competitiveness, and negativity outside the classroom door as much as possible.

Active participation in discussion and presentation of projects within the class is not only welcome; it is an essential requirement. Positive, helpful and constructive attitudes are also required! Presentations must be well prepared and shared with the understanding that questions and discussion will follow. The ongoing critique of performance is crucial to everyone's learning process and will be impossible without *an atmosphere of mutual respect, mutual responsibility, and openness.* You should be aware that the vast majority of class time is composed of activities in which you are REQUIRED to actively participate. *If you have no plans or interest in sincerely exploring Sanford Meisner's approach to actor training and accomplishing significant growth as a performer, this is not the class for you.*

Please understand that each "activity" in this course will require one element of actor-chosen "personalization." While Meisner's approach does not require or allow the actor to "re-live" real experiences and promotes the concept of "living truthfully under imaginary circumstances," this work will require that you "bring yourself" to the activities/presentations. Thus, it is imperative that you approach this work with maturity, a firm understanding of your personal boundaries, and an ability to communicate those boundaries in a respectful way. Again, you will choose your elements of "personalization," and you are required to choose elements that you can deal with emotionally. In other words, this is a course introducing a specific approach to actor training and not a therapy session☺. You should learn to develop an understanding of "leaving what happens in the work, in the work."

I serve as your "Observer" in this course – a term in Meisner training that means that I am your necessary guide and outside eyes/ears. So, if you will just trust me and approach the work with an open mind, an open heart, and a willingness to try new things, then we can work through our artistic challenges together.

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

1. demonstrate understanding and practical proficiency in executing the foundation exercises and theoretical concepts of Sanford Meisner's approach to actor training.
2. maintain connections with others during practical activities and presentations.
3. determine artistic challenges and practically negotiate those challenges during activities and presentations.
4. *Additional Student Learning Outcome for Graduate Students: write critically using analytical thinking skills about Meisner Acting activities and theoretical concepts.*
5. *Additional Student Learning Outcome for Graduate Students: synthesize information about Meisner Acting in quality, graduate-level scholarly writing.*

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Instructional / Methods / Activities Assessments:

PARTICIPATION AND GROWTH (undergraduates – 50%; graduates – 30%): *Note that attendance alone does not constitute participation.* Participation and Growth is a *huge* portion of your grade in this course – for good reason! As mentioned above, participation is vital in this class. This is an interactive environment and students must not only attend, but must also actively contribute to each class.

The completion of any miscellaneous homework assignments will also be considered part of your participation grade. There may be quite a few of these short assignments; they are all important to your success in this course. So please make sure you understand what is expected of you. Engaging in daily journal notations throughout the semester in THE BOOK is expected and considered part of your participation grade as well. You must bring THE BOOK with your journal entries to class each day. Should it appear that a student is not making journal notations at the end of each class, the instructor reserves the right to ask to see the journal entries at any point during the semester; if journal entries are not completed at that time, appropriate points will be deducted from the student's participation grade.

Positive, respectful and helpful attitudes are mandatory. *I would like to make this very clear: I will make every effort to treat you with the respect that I believe you deserve. You are also expected to treat your peers and myself with that same respectful attitude.* If I believe that a student is disrespectful, I will ask that person to leave the classroom. In this event, the student will receive a zero for any activities conducted that day in class and receive a zero for his/her participation grade for the day (no matter how long you have been in class). Disrespect, rudeness, or negative attitudes will *substantially* lower the student's participation grade. The following are other reasons you would be asked to leave the class and receive a zero for the day's activities: sleeping in class, reading the newspaper, working on other assignments, coming to class under the influence of . . . anything, or otherwise causing disruption or distraction during class (this includes cell phones going off in class – turn them off when you come into the classroom and don't turn them on again until you leave). Finally, it should go without saying that refusal to participate in any activity or part of an activity during class will result in a substantial and appropriate loss of participation points for the student.

Previous acting experience will not earn you a good grade in this course. Significant growth and a genuine attempt within the class will. This is a class that regards self-competition as a goal. You and your peers will arrive at various levels, and you will leave at different levels. However, growth from the beginning to the end of the semester can be evaluated. I challenge you to push yourself to grow and succeed. This class is concerned with developing *your* skills to the best of *your* ability. The community in the class is here to help all of us grow and expand our abilities.

Participation and Growth grades will be calculated daily and tabulated at the end of the semester. *Each student will begin with a Participation and Growth mid-point passing grade of 80.* Exceptional effort or lack of effort during each class and over the course of the semester as a whole will either raise or lower that grade.

**Graduate Student Additional Requirement: In many class sessions, graduate students may be required to prepare and offer two exercise presentations. More information regarding parameters will be offered at a later date.*

**Measures Course Learning Outcomes 1, 2, and 3.*

REPETITION/REREARSAL LOGS (20%): Each student will be required to submit four Repetition/Rehearsal Logs over the course of the semester. Each Log will count as 5% of the student's overall grade in the course. You should realize the vital importance of daily repetition/rehearsal in order to achieve proficiency in Meisner training. Unless otherwise announced in class, each student is required to document at least five hours of practical repetition/rehearsal time outside of class per Log submission (AKA: two and one-half hours per week). The Log should be typed, document specific repetition/rehearsal dates and times and include a short and specific explanation of the work during each time period (one-five complete sentences per explanation). *Note: "Activity" preparation time is considered part of your participation grade and does not count as Log time – so please do not include it in your submissions here.* The Log should include appropriate terminology as learned in this course. The Log should include your name and the total time logged for the week at the top of the page. This assignment will be largely based on the "honor system." However, if in-class performance suggests evidence that the student has not completed the documented logged times, there will be an appropriate deduction of the student's Repetition/Rehearsal Log grade. You will be graded on completing the minimum log times with appropriate foci and the construction of the document. So, please use your very best writing skills.

**Measures Course Learning Outcomes 1 and 2.*

REFLECTIVE ESSAYS (graduate students only – 20%): Each graduate student will submit four formal reflective essays during the semester in which s/he will write critically using analytical thinking skills about Meisner Acting activities and theoretical concepts – each worth 5% of the overall grade. For each submission, the student will write a two-page reflective essay focused on the work undertaken and individual responses to the course activities during the weeks in question. These essays should not include simple documentation of activities outside of class time. The essays can include individual successes and challenges faced throughout the weeks, goals for yourself and a justification for those goals, reflections about the work in response to the disciplines of acting and theatre as a whole, etc. Please avoid knee-jerk responses (keep those responses for your personal journal entries). Really reflect in great depth and try to see the work in this course from both theoretical and practical standpoints in your essays. Please remember to use appropriate terminology as covered in this course. Use very specific examples to support your claims in the essays. Your daily journal notations in class should help you in composing the formal essays – although again, those journal notations will be immediate, daily, and personal responses to the work. These essays will be formally written reflections about the week in question after you have had time to consider broader perspectives. The essays should be typed, double spaced, utilize one-inch margins, and a 12 point, acceptable scholarly font. Each individual essay should include the student's name and the dates of the week under review at the top of the first page. Please staple the pages in the top left-hand corner for submission and only print on the front side of the pages. Graduate students will be graded on the depth of thought and the content of their essays, as well as the formal construction of the documents – so please use your very best writing skills.

**Measures Course Learning Outcomes 4 and 5.*

SCENE PERFORMANCES (30%): With a partner, each student will memorize, develop, and perform an assigned acting scene for the class using the principles of Sanford Meisner's acting approach. The scene will be presented in three "showings" during class – with improvement evidenced in each of the latter "showings" (the first presentation counting 5%; the second

presentation counting 10%; and the final performance counting 15%). More specific criteria regarding scene performances will be outlined at a later date.

**Measures Course Learning Outcomes 1, 2, and 3.*

Grading:

SEMESTER 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% (Good 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)

Note: Numerical correlations for individual assignments receiving awarded letter grades in this class may be calculated as follows: A 95%; B 85%; C 75%; D 65%.

GRADING RUBRIC:

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS – Assignment	Grade
Log 1 (5%)	
Log 2 (5%)	
Log 3 (5%)	
Log 4 (5%)	
Scene Presentation 1 (5%)	
Scene Presentation 2 (10%)	
Final Scene Presentation (15%)	
Participation and Growth (50%)	
Semester Grade	

GRADUATE STUDENTS – Assignment	Grade
Log 1 (5%)	
Log 2 (5%)	
Log 3 (5%)	
Log 4 (5%)	
Essay #1 (5%)	
Essay #2 (5%)	
Essay #3 (5%)	

Essay #4 (5%)	
Scene Presentation 1 (5%)	
Scene Presentation 2 (10%)	
Final Scene Presentation (15%)	
Participation and Growth (30%)	
Semester Grade	

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.

SAVING OF ASSIGNMENTS: Unfortunately, papers/projects do occasionally get lost. Please, for your sanity, save your work on 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 his/her work! Be aware that it is a course expectation that you keep copies of your original and graded assignments until you receive your final grade for the semester.

COMMUNICATION AND SUPPORT

Contacting Dr. Klypchak:

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 in this class, let me know. Don't be intimidated. I am here to assist you in success and will do my best to help you achieve it. 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 Theatre

Performing Arts Center (PAC) #101
Phone: 903-886-5346 (Main Office)

Communication Skills Center

Hall of Languages #103
<http://www.tamuc.edu/litlang/CSC/index.htm>

TAMUC Actor's Lab

Private Acting Coaching Sessions with Dr. Klypchak during office hours: open to all declared Theatre Majors/Minors and students auditioning for, or cast in, University Playhouse

productions. Actor's Lab is also available to any student enrolled in Dr. Klypchak's course(s) during the semester of enrollment. Important note: In order to participate in Actor's Lab, a student must bring a memorized piece and sign up at least twenty-four hours in advance on the sign-up sheet on Dr. Klypchak's door – PAC #129. Sign-up sheets are posted every Friday for the upcoming week. Please be advised that in Actor's Lab, we promote the highest level of professional standards. Thus, under normal circumstances, if a student makes an appointment for Actor's Lab and fails to keep his/her appointment without significant advance notice to the instructor, the student revokes the privilege of Actor's Lab for the remainder of the semester.

COURSE AND UNIVERSITY PROCEDURES/POLICIES

Course Specific Procedures:

ATTENDANCE: I have designed this course for those serious students of the theatre who are committed to developing as artists and generating an exceptional product. With that said, serious students of the theatre do not skip class unless there is an emergency. In this upper division acting training class there is no such thing as an "excused" or "unexcused" absence. *Class meetings are highly interactive in nature.* You must come to class prepared to participate! It is also important to note that participation is a major component of your grade. Something to keep in mind: *you must be present in order to participate!* I expect you to practice/rehearse outside of class in preparation for in-class activities, I expect you to be familiar with any handouts you may receive, and I expect you to have completed all assignments on time.

I will take roll at the very beginning of each class in order to aid 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.

Prompt attendance is required at all classes. The formal attendance policy for this class is as follows. You are allowed one *emergency* absence in this course with no attendance grading penalty (although your participation grade will still be lowered accordingly upon a missed class). Please note that it will prove very challenging if you miss at all as it is absolutely impossible to "make up" a missed session in Meisner training – *we must always live in the present during this training – so we can never "go back" to make up missed work during class*; I encourage you to avoid missing even one class if at all possible. Under normal circumstances, upon the second absence, the student will receive a deduction of six points from his/her final grade; upon the third absence, the student will receive another six points deduction from his/her final grade; *due to the interactive nature of this course, upon the fourth absence the student will either be administratively dropped from, or receive an automatic F in, the course (depending on the point in the semester).*

Please be aware that missing a scheduled appointment/coaching time with me without significant and appropriate advance notification may also count as an absence. 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.

*for more information on the university attendance policy please go to the following link:
<http://www7.tamuc.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 4:30 p.m.! If you arrive after 4:40 p.m., 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. A late arrival or early departure will 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.*

SUBMISSION OF ASSIGNMENTS: All assignments must be submitted in hard copy to the instructor. While you are welcome to email me any questions that you may have, please understand that I cannot accept emailed student work at this time.

CELL PHONES AND LAPTOPS: Please turn off all cell phones upon entering the classroom. Please do not check messages or engage in text messaging during class. This is disruptive to the flow of the course. Further, I request that you do not use laptops during this class as the sound of typing is disruptive during others' presentations.

LATE WORK: "Activities," Performances, and Presentations – *Under normal circumstances, a missed "activity," performance, or presentation may not be made up.* Late Written Work/Projects – *Late written work/projects will not be accepted from graduate students.* For undergraduates, late written work/projects will be deducted a full letter grade each weekday 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 ten minutes of the class period unless I specify otherwise. At 4:40 p.m. on the day that the assignment is due, your assignment will receive one letter grade reduction in credit; at 4:30 p.m. the following day another letter grade will be reduced, and so on. No late assignments will be accepted after one week past the original due date.

Please note that failure to present any part of an activity, performance, or presentation may result in administrative dropping or an automatic failure of the course.

EXTRA CREDIT: As a general rule, there is no extra credit offered in this class – please, do not even ask.

ADAPTATION OF ASSIGNMENTS: Due to the fluid nature of this performance-based class, some assignments/scheduling may need to be adapted. All changes will be announced prior to implementation.

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. Smoking during class time (even when in individual rehearsals outside of the building) is never allowed.

CLOTHING: Students should come dressed for activity each day. Avoid tight clothing or clothing that inhibits your freedom of movement – come dressed to move! No hats will be worn during any exercises, activities, or performances. No one will be excused from class activities due to clothing concerns. *Also, please keep your hair securely away from your face during all exercises, activities, and performances in class.*

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

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 assure 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@tamuc.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.)

COURSE OUTLINE / CALENDAR

Tentative Schedule: (subject to change at the discretion of the instructor)

Monday, August 31

Pre-Test

Introduction to the Course: “Acting is Living Truthfully under Imaginary Circumstances”

Presentations: Joyous Objects

Discussion/Exercises: “The Reality of Doing” – Circle Stories

Homework: Get to know *The Book*

Wednesday, September 2

Exercises: “Mechanical Repetition” – Taking the First Thing and Repeating What You Hear;

Repetition “Into Language” – What’s Happening and Truthful Point of View; “The Three Moment Game” – Behavior

Homework: Taking the First Thing in Daily Life, Repetition “Into Language,” and Repetition with “The Three Moment Game.”

Monday, September 7

NO CLASS – LABOR DAY

Wednesday, September 9

Repetition

Exercises: Advance “The Three Moment Game” – Working Off and Really Talk and Really Listen; “The Pinch and Ouch” – Something is Not Only over There, It is Also over Here

Homework: “The Three Moment Game” and “The Pinch and Ouch.” Continue Repetition.

Monday, September 14

Repetition

Activities: “Coming to the Door” – Actor’s Faith and Being Right Here, Right Now; “Doing Fully” – Working for Mastery

Introduce: “Physically Difficult Activity/Genuine Task” Requirements

Homework: Bring in Physically Difficult Activity/Genuine Task – Must be Simple and Specific.

Continue Repetition.

Due: Log #1

Wednesday, September 16

Repetition

Activities: “Genuine Task” – Coming to the Door Activities

Introduce: “A Little More Important”

Homework: Bring in an activity with a reason being “A Little More Important.” Continue Repetition.

Due: Graduate Reflective Essay #1

Monday, September 21

Repetition

Activities: “A Little More Important” – Coming to the Door Activities

Introduce: “In the Extreme”

Homework: Bring in an activity with reason being “In The Extreme” (and create a simple and specific reason that brings you to the door). Continue Repetition.

Wednesday, September 23

Repetition

Activities: “In the Extreme” – Coming to the Door Activities

Introduce: The reason for the person coming to the door must now be “A Little More Important” and “Expectancy” for the person with the activity.

Homework: One partner brings in the activity which is extremely meaningful along with “Expectancy.” The other person brings in a reason that is “A Little More Important” which brings him/her to the door. Continue Repetition.

Monday, September 28

Repetition

Activities: “In the Extreme” with “Expectancy” and Partner’s “A Little More Important” and “In the Room” – Coming to the Door Activities

Introduce: Person coming to the door “In the Extreme,” “Relationship,” and “Urgency.”

Homework: Decide on a simple & specific relationship. Then, one partner brings in the activity which is extremely meaningful along with “Expectancy” and “Urgency.” The other person brings in a reason that is “In The Extreme” which brings him/her to the door. Continue Repetition.

Due: Log #2

Wednesday, September 30

Repetition

Activities: “In the Extreme” with “Expectancy” and Partner’s “In the Extreme” adding “Relationship,” “Urgency,” and “Extremely Meaningful.”

Introduce: Scene Work (Improvisation with Words and “Canoe on the River”)

Homework: Read assigned scene in a relaxed place and try not to make any conclusions or start to consider “results” for the scene.

Due: Graduate Reflective Essay #2

Monday, October 5

Scene Work: “Mechanical Readings” (syllable by syllable)

Introduce: Circumstances/Comparison to Activities

Homework: Do Mechanical Readings. Write scene. Come in ready to talk about the circumstances of the scene from your character’s point of view and compare the scene to an “exercise” – Who is in the room? Who is coming to the door? Does anyone have an activity? What are the extreme reasons?, etc.

Wednesday, October 7

Scene Work: Working Readings (really talk and really listen – following impulse)

Homework: Continue working readings and get up on feet. Have all of the words learned by next class. Bring in rehearsal clothes for the remainder of the course.

Due: Log #3

Monday, October 12

Exercise: “Line Rehearsals”

Scene Work: “Where Are You Coming from Emotionally?” “Exploring Circumstances.”

Homework: Line Rehearsals. Work on the scenes on their feet and bring in activities for the scenes to next class and for the remainder of the course.

Due: Graduate Reflective Essay #3

Wednesday, October 14

Scene Work: Showing #1 (Enhanced Circumstances.)

Homework: Line Rehearsals. Work scenes on feet.

Monday, October 19

Scene Work: Showing #2 ("What is at Stake?") and Post-test

Homework: Line Rehearsals. Work scenes on feet.

Wednesday, October 21

Scene Showing #3 (Open to Invited Audience) *Actors' Call: 4:30 p.m.; Audience: 5:00 p.m.*

Due: Log #4 (*No late work accepted on this assignment*) and Graduate Reflective Essay #4