Performing Arts 60: Interactive Theatre: Theatre for Social Change

Interactive Theatre: Theatre for Social Change is designed to address issues of oppression through classroom and community presentations utilizing interactive theatre, a formal process for spontaneous dramaturgy and creating works of art. The course is less focused on specific “great works of art” and is rather designed to introduce the methodology, dramaturgy, and practices of Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed as well as other forms of activist theatre. It is also designed to lead students through a process of creating improvised social change theatre around issues pertinent to their own lives.

LEARNING GOAL 1 A: LOOK AT OR READ WORKS OF ART
Students in the class will read and interpret Forum Theatre scripts from past Interactive Theatre workshops and presentations. Scripts include texts on racism and privilege ("A Sensitive Question," "Seminar Gone Wrong"); classism ("Dinner Out"); sexual assault awareness and prevention ("Coercion/Consent," "A Little Tipsy"); homophobia ("That's So Gay"); substance abuse ("Owasted," "The Drinking Game"); Unhealthy Relationships ("Relationship Suite")

LEARNING GOAL 1b) ANALYZE/INTERPRET FORM AND MEANING
These scripts, written by SMC students and sometimes developed from standard anti-model scripts in the public domain, provide the foundation for instruction about playwriting, text analysis, character development, and representation of institutional and individual oppression. Students will use a weekly (2-3 page) journal entry to reflect on these plays and class topics, then apply their learning to the creation of their own plays in the second half of the term.

LEARNING GOAL 1c) APPLY DISCIPLINE-BASED VOCABULARY
Students will learn the theories, methods, and critical vocabulary of the Theatre of the Oppressed from texts such as Theatre of the Oppressed by Augusto Boal, Rainbow of Desire by Augusto Boal, Games for Actors and Non-Actors by Augusto Boal and Radical Street Performance by Jan Cohen-Cruz. They will apply the specific critical vocabulary utilizing Forum Theatre, Image Theatre, and Invisible Theatre’s community-based and anti-Aristotelian dramaturgical techniques for creating social actors and just communities.

LEARNING GOAL 1d) EXPLORE THE ARTISTIC PIECE’S SIGNIFICANCE WITHIN APPROPRIATE CONTEXTS
Students will study the historical context, ethnic context, and creative structure in which Theatre of the Oppressed was created. That is, students will learn how in the early 1970’s Boal adapted Stanislavsky’s European acting and dramaturgical methods to social conditions in Brazil, and how its legacy has been the spread of Theatre of the Oppressed methods internationally. They will also learn how students in past semesters have applied Theatre of the Oppressed techniques to local issues at St. Mary’s, thus understanding the significance of social action
theatre in various campus contexts.

LEARNING OUTCOME 2a) PARTICIPATION IN THE CREATIVE PROCESS
Students will enter into a semester-long process of learning Boal’s 4-tiered creative process designed to a) build physical and emotional expressiveness for the actor and non-actor 2) build artistic ensemble and community 3) brainstorm themes for creative exploration 4) create activist theatre and explore performative modalities such as street theatre, guerilla theatre, protest activism and more. Students will research, write, edit and perform their own and each other’s short plays on campus topics.

LEARNING OUTCOME 2b) PRODUCTION OF ARTIFACT APPROPRIATE TO THE DISCIPLINE
Students will each eventually create a short play on one theme in class such as racism, sexism, classism, homophobia. Their final project will be to perform this play in a forum theatre context with and for the other students.

How coursework will measure student learning of the outcomes
Reflective Learning Journal: Students will keep a weekly reflective learning journal for this class, a log of experiences and reactions to the readings, exercises, films, interactions, discussions, guest speakers, lectures, etc. as it relates to the goals and objectives of the course. The journal also provides a forum for students to reflect on their experiences, to deepen the learning that comes from course activities, develop scripts and to wrestle with the multiple thoughts and feelings that arise from the creative process. A primary objective of the journal is the critical analysis and incorporation of course materials around the methods and practices of Theatre of the Oppressed. The journal will be the main way students show their knowledge and understanding of the course materials. In general each week’s entry should be 2-3 pages in length, with the entire semester's work reflecting 20-40 pages.

Reading Response Papers: During the course, students are be asked to “evaluate, react and respond” to 4 of the different topics/readings in short 1-2 page papers. These papers are an opportunity for students to think critically about the methods of Theatre of the Oppressed as well as application of social justice concepts in the framework of the performing arts.

Final Project: Students will be responsible for researching, writing, editing and producing a short play based on events on St. Mary’s campus which follow Forum Theatre’s guidelines for creating an anti-model play. Students will then introduce their play to the class in the context of a Forum Theatre workshop in which classmates are invited to interact with the students’ characters and improvise “in character” in order to strategize real-world possibilities for creative social change.