

Comm 5365: Performance Theory

Instructor: Dr. Holley Vaughn
Office: 320f GAB
Office Hours: By appointment
Email: holley.vaughn@unt.edu

Course Description:

This course will introduce and interrogate a variety of theories that inform the practices of performance scholars and practitioners. Blending theory with praxis, the course facilitates understanding of theoretical bases of both past and contemporary performance based practices. Since the topic is so abundant, graduate students will be expected to develop their own research interests and responses in both research responses and in performances.

TEXTS: Bial, Henry. Ed. *The Performance Studies Reader*. 3rd ed. New York: Routledge, 2016.

Carlson, Marvin. *Performance: A Critical Introduction*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2004.

Hamera, Judith. Ed. *Opening Acts: Performance in/as communication and Cultural Studies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006.

Additional Articles

Assignments

Attendance, Participation & Reading Responses	20%
Mini-Performances	20%
Article Presentations	20%
Final Paper & Presentation	40%

Attendance, Participation and Reading Responses (20%): Based on attendance, preparedness, meeting deadlines, involvement in discussion and class activities. As is the case in most seminars, this one requires both intellectual curiosity and a willingness to “play along.” Among other things, this means having a firm enough command of the readings and issues for discussion each week to be able to risk opinions, observations, and questions in our discussions. Certainly, different people will make different kinds of contributions to class discussions, but in order to standardize much of your reading participation, I’ll expect each of you to complete several short homework problems video responses, thought experiments or analytical exercises in response to the readings

throughout the semester. In some instances, these exercises will require you to produce a short (1-3pp.) written document of some kind and to share the fruits of your labor with the other members of the seminar prior to our next meeting. On other occasions, you may be asked to prepare and present a short oral presentation to the group or to post a video response online. In practical terms, this means:

1. *Keep up with the reading.* This is a common expectation for any course, although I know from experience that it is honored more in theory than in practice. Like most seminars, this one will give you plenty of reading to do, and you'll need to budget your time to stay on top of it so that you can "play along" each session. Make no mistake, I expect you to thoroughly read for each class. If you have not done the readings then you are not allowed to speak in class. Reading is your ticket to speak.
2. *Complete the response exercises – and turn them in on time.* I will set a "due date" for the response exercises, one that is late enough in the week to give you time to do the reading and the preparation, but early enough to give us all time to read through your responses prior to our meetings. The bulk of your grade for these assignments comes from your timely completion and submission and of them.
3. *Be prepared to respond to each others' responses.* At times I'll ask you not only to send your responses/assignments/videos to others in the seminar, but also to read/watch what others send you. I'll expect you to do much of the talking, using your own and others' responses as springboards for the discussion.

Mini-Performances (20%)

1. Over the course of the semester, each of you will complete two mini-performance assignments. The first will be completed by everyone following our first few weeks of readings and discussing various definitions and ideas about what both performance and performance studies are, I will ask you to create a short (5 min.) performance using the language "Performance is . . ." and "Performance studies isn't . . .". The goal of this performance is for you to connect the theories, ideas, and arguments you have encountered in the first few week's readings in such a way as to create your own short performance defining your understanding of both what "performance" and "performance studies" mean. You may use personal narrative, quotes from the reading, popular culture references, dance, music, physical movement, etc. to create the mini-performance. My only stipulation is that the phrases "Performance is" and "Performance studies isn't" are part of the performance. You can, of course, also choose to use the counter-phrases "performance isn't" and "performance studies is" if you so choose.

2. You will also create a second mini-performance at some point in the semester. This mini-performance will serve as an exploration/application and/or a response/critique of a particular week's readings. As such, these assignments will vary and be topically based – i.e., each of you will do a different one based on a different set of readings. We will use class time one day next week to choose/assign these. The reading topics for these mini-performances center on theories of performance related to ritual, play, performativity, performing, and performance processes. These performance can and should be as varied as the readings themselves.

For example, the person doing the ritual mini-performance may wish to stage a ritual in which the class can participate, such as a wedding ceremony where we are all assigned roles to play. Likewise, the person doing the performativity mini-performance might prepare a 20 minute solo piece on their own experiences of performing their race, class, gender, or sexual identity. The person doing the performing mini-performance might spend the entire class time teaching us (the class) a particular performance skill – such as juggling or a dance routine – walking us through the 3-step process of training/rehearsal, performance, and aftermath/response.

The goal of these mini-performances is **not** so much for you to critique/respond to the readings as it is to get you actively embodying the type of performances the readings discuss. For that reason, they should be less theoretical/critical, and more practical. The more active and involved you and your audience are in these performances, the better.

Article Presentations (20%) Each student will give a POLISHED 20 min. conference style presentation over a group of foundational articles in the field. Each student will select a category of theory and then present on at least two articles from that category. The readings are as follows:

What is Performance & Performance Studies

Strine, Mary S., Beverly Whitaker Long, and Mary Frances HopKins. "Research in Interpretation and Performance Studies: Trends, Issues, Priorities." In Speech Communication: Essays to Commemorate the 75th Anniversary of the Speech Communication Association, eds. Gerald M. Phillips and Julia T. Wood (Carbondale, Southern Illinois UP, 1990):181-204.

Schechner, Richard. "A New Paradigm for Theatre in the Academy," The Drama Review 36 (1992): 7-10.

Conquergood, Dwight. "Of Caravans and Carnivals: Performance Studies in Motion," The Drama Review 39 (1995): 137-41.

Jackson, Shannon. "Rhetoric in Ruins: Performing Literature and Performance Studies." Performance Research 14 (2009): 4-15

Madison, D. Soyini and Judith Hamera. "Performance Studies at the Intersections." In The Sage Handbook of Performance Studies. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006): xi-xxv.

Bowman, Ruth Laurion and Bowman, Michael. "On The Bias: From Performing of Literature to Performance Composition." The SAGE Handbook of Performance Studies. Ed. D. Soyini Madison and Judith Hamera. Thousand Oaks: SAGE, 2006.

Ritual

Beasley, Myron M. "Tribute to the Ancestors": Ritual Performance and Same-Gender-Loving Men of African Descent. Text and Performance Quarterly 28 (2008): 433-457.

Goltz, Dustin B. and Zingsheim, Jason. "It's Not a Wedding it's a Gayla: Queer Resistance and Normative Recuperation." Text and Performance Quarterly 30 (2010): 290-312

Linde, Jennifer and Park-Fuller, Linda M. "[Recuperating, Revisioning and Renaming: Reading Resistance and Ritual](#)." Text and Performance Quarterly 30 (2010): 324-330.

Lockford, Lesa. "Social Drama in the Spectacle of Femininity: The Performance of Weight Loss in the Weight Watchers' Program," Women's Studies in Communication 19 (1996): 291-312.

Play

Hyde, Michael J. and Sargent, Kevin. "The Performance of Play, 'The Great Poem,' and Ethics." Text and Performance Quarterly 13 (1993): 122-138.

Lindemann, Kurt. "'I Can't Be Standing Up Out There': Communicative Performances of (Dis)Ability Wheelchair Rugby." Text and Performance Quarterly 28 (2008): 98-115.

Performativity

Fox, Ragan. "Skinny Bones #126-774-835-29: Thin Gay Bodies Signifying a Modern Plague." Text and Performance Quarterly 27 (2007): 3-19.

Jones, Stacy Holman. "(M)othering Loss: Telling Adoption Stories, Telling Performativity," Text and Performance Quarterly 25 (2005): 113-135.

Johnson, Javon. "Manning Up: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Los Angeles' Slam and Spoken Word Poetry Communities," Text and Performance Quarterly 30 (2010): 396-419.

Waggoner, Catherine Egly. "The Emancipatory Potential of Feminine Masquerade in Mary Kay Cosmetics," Text and Performance Quarterly 17 (1997): 256-72.

Performing

Bell, Elizabeth. "Sex Acts Beyond Boundaries and Binaries: A Feminist Challenge for Self Care in Performance Studies." Text and Performance Quarterly 25 (2005): 187-219.

Simmons, Jake. "Performing 'Of' and 'In': Charting a Body of Ambiguous Performances." Text and Performance Quarterly 28 (2008): 330-43.

Alexander, Bryant Keith. "Performing Culture in the Classroom: An Instructional (Auto)Ethnography," Text and Performance Quarterly 19 (1999): 307-31. Alexander

Performance Processes

Pineau, Elyse Lamm. "Re-Casting Rehearsal: Making a Case for Production as Research," Journal of the Illinois Speech and Theatre Association 46 (1995): 43-52.

Pelias, Ronald J. "Performative Inquiry: Embodiment and Its Challenges." In J. Gary Knowles and Ardra L. Coles, eds., Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Inquiry: Perspectives, Methodologies, Examples, and Issues (Los Angeles: Sage, 2008): 185-93.

Graver, David. "The Actor's Bodies," Text and Performance Quarterly 17 (1997): 221-217.

Madison, D. Soyini. "Performing Theory/Embodied Writing," Text and Performance Quarterly 19 (1999): 107-24.

Pineau, Elyse Lamm. "Intimate Partners: A Critical Autobiography of Performing Anais." In Voices Made Flesh, eds. Lynn C. Miller, Jacqueline Taylor, and M. Heather Carver (Madison, University of Wisconsin P, 2003): 33-46.

Final Paper (40%)

1. Write a 15-25 page paper based upon one of the following three logics:
 - a. Performance as the object of study
 - b. Performance as an explanatory model
 - c. Performance as a method of inquiry

The first choice requires you to isolate a performance event that you think is worthy of examination. Employ whatever methodology you feel is appropriate to help you explore the phenomenon.

The second choice requires you to use the theatrical metaphor to investigate some performance phenomenon. Make sure that your analysis moves beyond the obvious. You may want to locate your study within a particular dramaturgical perspective.

The third choice requires you to use performance itself as a way of exploring a text, subject, or culture. What is central is that you report your discoveries based upon your own performance work. Show how doing performance led to particular insights.

2. This paper will be due at the end of the semester. However, in order to help you manage your time and energies in the most efficient way possible, I have broken down this part of your grade into smaller sections. So while the final paper assignment (and all its various parts) is worth 40% of your grade, as you will see below, the paper itself is worth only 25% of your final grade. The other 15% will come from a thesis statement, outline, and meeting with me, all of which are meant to get you thinking about, focusing on, and working productively toward this final project. Deadlines for each of these parts of the final paper are listed in the weekly calendar, and I will discuss what I want for each as we draw closer to these points of the semester.
3. Your final paper is due on the date of our scheduled final exam. Rather than a test, however, I would prefer we have a final meeting (either at school or my house) where you present your final papers in an informal way and we discuss the class itself – what you learned, what you liked, etc. As we draw closer to this final exam date, we will decide as a class which option you prefer – an on-campus final class meeting or an off-campus final class meeting at my house.