ENVS 411 Communicating Environmental Issues with Theater

**COURSE INFO**

**Monday & Wednesday 10:00-11:50am**

**Location: Columbia 142**

**Co-instructors:**
- Chris Roddy
  - Email: croddy@uoregon.edu
  - Office hours: W 3:30-4:30pm & by appt.
  - Office location: Columbia 47C
- Megan Toth
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  - Office hours: M 12:30-1:30pm & by appt.
  - Office location: Columbia 47C

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

*Our species, ours, has by itself in the course of a couple of generations managed to powerfully raise the temperature of an entire planet, to knock its most basic systems out of kilter. But oddly, though we know about it, we don’t know about it. It hasn’t registered in our gut; it isn’t part of our culture. Art, like religion, is one of the ways we digest what is happening to us, make sense out of it that proceeds to action. Otherwise the only role left to us—noble, but also engaging in its impotence—is simply to pay witness.*

-- Bill McKibben, “Imagine That: What the Warming World Needs Now is Art Sweet Art”

University of Oregon Theater Arts professor Theresa May, an affiliate faculty member with Environmental Studies, has noted the ways in which performing arts acts “as medium between material and metaphoric worlds and the ways theater audiences influence performance in an organic exchange of meaning-making” (May, p. 85). Drama is a communications vehicle, unique in its ability to lead participants and audiences through “moments of direct experience, transcending mere knowledge, enriching the imagination, possibly touching the heart and soul as well as the mind.”

The aim of this course is to evaluate and illustrate how the theater arts can help communicate, critique, and educate on environmental issues and science.

Students will analyze how environmental science & policy issues are presented “on stage” in different types of performance ranging from avant-garde to Broadway/LORT to street and activist theater. As the course develops, we will shift to analyzing the use of performing arts in community discourse around environmental themes. The course will examine, explore and apply drama techniques as communication tools to support transfer of complex environmental information. We will analyze through active workshops how to work around barriers of accessibility, understanding, culture, etc. Students will examine if and how drama can be used as a unifying language in environmental conflicts that cross many disciplines and livelihoods.

Through groupwork and individual study, students will critically examine and test how drama – as a communications device – can be used in place of “traditional” modes of dialogue around environmental and science-based issues.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

- Attendance and participation in class discussions
- Attendance on **ONE FIELD TRIP** excursions to either: (1) To view a theatrical performance at the University of *AWAKE AND SING!* (not environmentally themed) live and in-person, OR (2) To attend a local theater workshop session to see how performance pieces are reworked with a community of peers. **THERE IS NO COST FOR EITHER TRIP**
- **TWO 1-2 PAGE ANALYSES** of environmentally themed performing arts pieces – contemporary or historic. Students will offer insight into how an environmental issue was presented/framed, the use of
communication techniques (character driven, stage directions, etc.), and analyze core messages within the piece.

- WEEKLY JOURNAL assignments to play, experiment, and develop individual theatrical interpretative works. Journal assignments might include writing monologues or dialogues, sketching sets and costumes, describing a choreographed movement piece, developing a character profile, etc. Each entry would surround a specific environmental issue.

- ONE 5-6 PAGE “SCRIPT”, puppet show, street composition, etc. about a pre-assigned environmental issue. These might include monologues, dialogues, forum theater, structured conversations for use at conferences and events, descriptions of dance choreography, song lyrics, plans for a performance, or other creative outlines of how the performing arts might be used to communicate a topic. Students will also provide a demonstrated understanding of the pre-assigned environmental issue with a one-page treatment discussion of main arguments, controversies, misconceptions, etc.

- GROUP PERFORMANCE PIECE that builds on the individual script assignment. Continuing to use the same environmental issue, students will workshop individual components of their midterm scripts and create a composite of ideas for a final performance piece. Students will work together to determine how best to represent their environmental topic, and will then present their piece in a staged reading. A full range of options for students include creating anything from the above taxonomy (puppet theater, street activism, etc.) to a representation of how drama might be used in bridging gaps in collaborative and/or citizen participatory science. Expectations will be for a final script copy, a poster, and a dress rehearsal staged reading/performance.

- REFLECTION PORTFOLIO that incorporates an individual reflection on the group performance piece, an exploration and refinement of one journal entry, and a short proposal for incorporation of performing arts activities to be designed for use in an ENVS 202 discussion section on a predetermined topic/issue.

All assignment due dates are marked in the course schedule below.

**GRADING CRITERIA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation and attendance</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weekly Journal</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enviro./Communications theater analyses</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Script” assignment</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group performance project w/team journal component</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individual reflection portfolio</td>
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**COURSE POLICIES**

- CLASS PARTICIPATION
  Discussion is vital to this course. You’ll be expected to be an active participant in class discussions. That means completing readings before class and engaging professionally in discussion. Although no relevant comment is off-limits in this course, we will be discussing controversial topics and you are expected to treat all members of this class respectfully. Be careful not to dominate discussion so others feel welcome to contribute.

- ATTENDANCE
  Don’t miss class unless you’re sick. We’ll all be working to stay healthy this term. If you get the flu, please email us ahead of class so that we know not to expect you. Three or more absences for any reason will result in a full letter reduction of your final grade. Please arrive to class on time.

- In order to pass this class, students must complete and turn in all assigned coursework. No incompletes except in the case of a documented emergency.

- Please retain copies of the original graded work that is returned to you throughout the term. It is your responsibility to keep these original copies as documentation of your grades.
TECHNOLOGY
No texting. Laptops are not allowed in class unless you receive direct permission for note taking or during peer review sessions.

Individual differences: If you experience difficulty in the class for any reason, please don’t hesitate to contact us. If you have a disability that may prevent you from fully participating in this class, please let us know as soon as possible.

The UO offers a range of free services to help students in a variety of situations:

- ACADEMIC LEARNING SERVICES (ALS)
  Provides a number of services to help students with coursework. If you are unsure of what sort of services might help you most, ALS is happy to answer questions. http://als.uoregon.edu. Phone: 541-346-3226.

- UNIVERSITY COUNSELING AND TESTING CENTER
  Provides comprehensive mental health and testing services to UO students. Counseling services are provided through a student paid fee as part of the incidental and student health center fee, so there is no additional cost to students. http://www.uoregon.edu/counsel/ Phone: 541-346-3227

- DISABILITY SERVICES (DS)
  Provides assistance and support to students with documented physical, psychological or learning disabilities and provides accommodations to students based on disability. http://ds.www.uoregon.edu/. Phone: 541-346-1155. TTY: 541-346-1083.
UNIT 1: OVERVIEW OF CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THEATER ARTS & SCIENCE

Week 1: Introduction to course themes, evolution of “eco-theater” & environmental issues in drama, connecting dramatic arts to communicating science

Readings and course work due WEDNESDAY:

In-class workshops:
- MONDAY: Improvisation warm-up techniques (non-verbal)
- WEDNESDAY: Improvisation warm-up techniques (mirroring)

Assignment:
- DUE WEDNESDAY: Bring journal to class (no entry required)
- Course readings as required

UNIT 2: WHAT IS ENVIRONMENTAL THEATER? (Emotional. Plot driven. Simple storytelling. Etc.)

Week 2: Environmental theater for a general audience and main stage productions (Broadway/LORT)

Readings and course work due MONDAY:

Readings and course work due WEDNESDAY:
- SELECTIONS: Act Two

In-class workshops:
- MONDAY: Scene analysis and study for Life of Galileo
  http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bsOBTw4ZbQ
- WEDNESDAY: Scene study from Copenhagen and/or Dumping Ground

Assignment:
- DUE FRIDAY by email: First 1-2 page analysis of performance piece (See Blackboard assignment)
- Weekly journal assignments (announced in-class)
- Course readings as required
- Discussion of journaling and how to approach journal entry writing/drawing
Week 3: Community-based environmental theater and other formats (street, improvisation, puppet, etc.)

Readings and course work due MONDAY:

Readings and course work due WEDNESDAY:

In-class workshops:
- MONDAY: Street theater scripting exercise I
- WEDNESDAY: Street theater scripting exercise II

Assignment:
- **DUE FRIDAY** by email: Second 1-2 page analysis of performance piece (See Blackboard assignment)
- Weekly journal assignments (announced in-class)
- Course readings as required

UNIT 3: THEATER AS LANGUAGE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL DISCUSSION & GROUP PROBLEM-SOLVING

Week 4: Giving voice to the voiceless – exploration of social and environmental justice in theater

Readings and course work due MONDAY:

Readings and course work due WEDNESDAY:
- Augusto Boal, Founder of the Theater of the Oppressed, Interview. (2009). Democracy Now. Available at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3rkVD_Oln7g
- Chapter: Theater for Oppressed

Field trip:
- Feb. 3rd: No Shame Theater workshop session | 126 W. Broadway | 7:30 PM (Feb. 3) **OR**
- Feb. 2, 3 or 4th: See UO Theater Production of Awake & Sing | Free tickets: http://pages.uoregon.edu/theatre/freetickets

In-class workshops:
- MONDAY: Image theater techniques I (Complete the Image, Remember the Image)
- WEDNESDAY: Image theater techniques II (Oppression Transformation)

Assignment:
- Weekly journal assignments (announced in-class)
- Course readings as required
**Week 5: Application of forum theater to environmental issues**

Readings and course work due MONDAY:
- Chapter: The Council of All Beings

Readings and course work due WEDNESDAY:
- Chapter: Art of Interactive Theater

In-class workshops:
- MONDAY: Forum theater practice session I
- WEDNESDAY: Forum theater practice session II

Field Trip:
- Friday, February 3rd | 7:30pm
  No Shame Theater Workshop, 126 W. Broadway (Atrium Building)

Assignment:
- **DUE WEDNESDAY** group formation for final production project and selection of environmental issue
- Weekly journal assignments (announced in-class)
- Course readings as required

**UNIT 4: ENVIRONMENT, SCIENCE & THEATER – SCIENTISTS AS STORYTELLERS**

**Week 6: How drama can support environmental science community discussion and collaborations**

Readings and course work due MONDAY:

Readings and course work due WEDNESDAY:
- Chapter: Rainbow of Desire

In-class workshops:
- MONDAY: Community discussion exercise
- WEDNESDAY: Collaboration-based learning exercise

Assignment:
- **DUE FRIDAY** by email: Individual Script Assignment
- Weekly journal assignments (announced in-class)
- Course readings as required
- Group project
### Week 7: Using theater to avoid “Ivory Tower Syndrome” for environmental scientists & advocates

**Proposed readings and course work due MONDAY:**

**Proposed readings and course work due WEDNESDAY:**

**In-class workshops:**
- MONDAY: Interpretative dance improvisation exercise
- WEDNESDAY: Cell Slam Revisited!

**Assignment:**
- Weekly journal assignments (announced in-class)
- Course readings as required
- Group project

### UNIT 5: COMMUNICATING AN ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUE/SCIENCE WITH THEATER

### Week 8: The creative process of fitting theater form to environmental science issues

**Proposed readings and course work due MONDAY:**

**Proposed readings and course work due WEDNESDAY:**

**In-class workshops:**
- MONDAY: Group scripting session I
- WEDNESDAY: Group scripting session II

**Assignment:**
- **DUE FRIDAY** by email: Draft of group performance piece script, design ideas, etc.
- Group project
- Reflection portfolio
- Course readings as required
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<th>Week 9: In-class workshops for scripting, set and prop design, costume design, presentation preparation, etc.</th>
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<th>Week 10: Presentation of dress rehearsal for group productions</th>
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<tr>
<td>o <strong>DUE MONDAY AND WEDNESDAY:</strong> Group performance/production and discussions</td>
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<tr>
<td>o <strong>DUE TUESDAY OF FINALS WEEK:</strong> Individual Weekly Journal and Reflection Portfolio</td>
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