

University of Florida School of Theatre and Dance
THE 6973c: Project in Lieu of Thesis
Spring 2026

MFA Acting Coordinator: Prof. Tim Altmeyer

MFA Design Coordinator: Jennifer Dasher

Instructor: Mihai Ciupe, Jennifer Dasher, Leo Lei, Jashodhara Sen, B. Manuel Simons, Tim Altmeyer

Meeting Times: TBD

Office Hours: Wednesday, 1pm – 3pm

Prerequisites: Admission to Candidacy

Course Description:

Final project presented in public performance demonstrating expertise in declared area of specialization. Creative project and accompanying paper in lieu of traditional thesis.

Completion of degree-culminating project presented in public performance, demonstrating expertise in declared area of specialization, and accompanying paper in lieu of traditional thesis, detailing the preparation and execution of performance or design in a realized production, requiring advisor's consent.

Purpose Of Course:

The Project in Lieu of Thesis is designed as a capstone project for the Master of Fine Arts in Acting or Design/Production.

Description of Projects:

The MFA Project shall consist of a significant piece of work that will demonstrate the students' expertise in both the academic and practical fields of the theatre, resulting in a document of substantial length (usually 25-50 pages).

The MFA student will be assigned a final project in his/her major area of study.

- MFA Acting students will use roles won through the SoTD block auditions.
- Design/Production will be assigned projects in support of SoTD productions.

The MFA project-in-lieu of thesis is expected to be a major role (Acting or Design) in a main stage production during the third year of study. Usually, these assignments will be made and confirmed during the preceding spring term before the student enters the third year of study. The thesis role (Acting or Design) may be one that has been suggested by the student.

However, the project/thesis assignment is the ultimate and direct responsibility of the Graduate Program Coordinators in consultation and collaboration with the Area Coordinators and the Director of the School of Theatre and Dance. Project assignments (Acting or Design) should be made with concerns for the best interests of the student actor/designer, the needs and opportunities for casting/design in the current production season, and the agreement of each production director.

The paper accompanying the MFA Project in Lieu of Thesis closely and carefully documents the student's work in the preparation and performance/production of the MFA thesis role (Acting or

Design). It is an academic document which is publicly accessible and should, like all such documents, give a reader who has not seen the production in question a wealth of information and interpretive material about the play and performance. It is important that the actor/designer consciously approach the MFA project-in-lieu of thesis assignment with a view to its eventual analysis and documentation.

Objectives:

In this course students will:

- Identify and refine a creative research topic for investigation;
- Provide an opportunity for students to detail methodology for researching and responding to the needs of their role/assignment in the production;
- Conduct a review of pertinent literature and research that supports this performance/production project;
- Demonstrate the knowledge acquired through research and creative process a in a paper that documents the methodology and results of the production assignment.

Coordinator/Instructor of Record:

The MFA Acting Coordinator is Tim Altmeyer.

The MFA Design Coordinator is Jennifer Dasher.

Design Area Mentors are Mihai Ciupe (Scenic), Jennifer Dasher (Costumes), Leo Lei (Lighting), Michael Clark (Projection), Jing Zhao (Sound).

First and Second Readers are typically assigned in the Spring semester prior to the third year of study. The First and Second Reader make up the Supervisory Committee for the student.

Scheduled Meeting Times:

Meetings are to be arranged between the MFA Student and the First Reader.

The student is responsible for keeping the committee chair (First Reader) up-to-date on their progress.

Prior to starting the project, MFA students must clarify with their Project Advisor all the expectations for the project including draft deadlines and submission dates.

A typical schedule includes a version of the following:

- The student will submit the paper for the project in lieu of thesis to his/her first reader.
- The reader has 2 weeks to provide written feedback to the student.
- The student will have 1 week to make necessary changes or rewrites. The first reader will provide written feedback to the student within 2 weeks.
- The student will make necessary adjustments within 1 week.
- If the paper is in an acceptable form, the first reader will send it to the second reader.
- A final version is created and the oral defense and signature page is completed.

--The above is only a model/suggestion. Students and their committee chairs (First Readers) must create a calendar that allows all necessary deadlines to be successfully met.

REQUIREMENTS

Basic Requirement/Expectations: The student will:

- Keep a complete journal and record of research, sketches, drawings, budget, and promptbooks, as appropriate to the project.
- Clarify the approach and topics to be addressed in the paper by creating a paper outline.
- Consult with his/her First Reader on a regular basis to discuss the status of the creative project.
- In consultation with the First Reader, establish meeting times and deadlines for drafts and final submission of the paper.
- Submit the paper for review according to predetermined deadlines. In order to guarantee sufficient time for grading, the final submission date will usually be no later than one week before the final day of classes.

The First Reader may attend rehearsals or performances, shop sessions, production meetings, fittings, etc. (when appropriate and within reason) upon the student's request.

Students submit materials to the Chairs of the Supervisory Committees (First Readers) in conformance with the established deadline dates. The Committee Chair (First Reader) advises when he/she is completely satisfied with the document. At that point, the student or First Reader presents a clean copy of the complete document to the Second Reader for his/her comments and suggestions. The student reviews these notes with his/her Chair (First Reader). The student presents the final copy of the paper to the other member(s) of the Supervisory Committee for final review before the oral defense.

- Students are advised to submit well-organized and edited documents at each stage of the process.
- Sloppy submissions that have not been edited or proof-read will be returned unread to the student.

Project-in-lieu-of-thesis paper must be defended and in final form prior to submission to the College of the Arts.

EVALUATION AND GRADING:

Evaluation and grading of the project is administered by department-assigned supervisory committees, consisting of two graduate faculty members; one serving as chair (First Reader) and the other serving as member (Second Reader).

Acting students will be assessed on the quality of the written work expressing their translation of knowledge into practical application in the context of live performance by meaningfully synthesizing connections between voice, movement, and intellectual analysis in character creation.

Design/Production Students will be assessed on the quality of the written work expressing their means to produce design that artistically and functionally serves the production and/or their application of materials and tools to serve the artistic and/or functional aspects of the production.

Grading:

The project grade is assessed by the First Reader, based primarily on the quality of the written work submitted.

-Information about university-wide policies and resources can be found here:
<https://syllabus.ufl.edu/syllabus-policy/uf-syllabus-policy-links/>

MFA PROJECT/THESIS TIME LINE:

To facilitate degree-completion, it is recommended that all MFA Project-in-lieu-of-thesis Papers be completed by the end of the semester in which the project was performed/produced.

Faculty members are not obligated to review project papers during the summer, which may delay degree completion.

Students who do not complete their work according to standard academic year deadlines (August-April) may delay their graduation, and be required to register for additional final term credits, at their own expense.

- * MFA Acting Students who are assigned projects in the fall must complete their paper and comprehensive exams in the fall semester. MFA Acting Students who have projects in the spring must complete their paper and comprehensive exams in the fall semester.
- * MFA Design/Production students take 6 credit hours within the semester of the actual production, and 3 credit hours in the subsequent semester of their third year.

MFA PERFORMANCE PROJECT IN LIEU OF THESIS, MFA ACTING:

In preparation for the project-in-lieu of thesis, each student assigned a project-in-lieu-of-thesis role is recommended to present written background research work for the role to the Chair of their Thesis Supervisory Committee (First Reader) before the first official rehearsal for the production. This research work should include a bibliography. Following the rehearsal process and final performance of the thesis role, the student will have no more than two weeks in which to submit a draft of the paper for the project-in-lieu-of-thesis. The draft will include acknowledgements, abstract, table of contents, introduction, text analysis, performance preparation, performance assessment, conclusion and appendices.

Structure of the Paper for the Project in Lieu of Thesis for MFA Acting

The length of the MFA Project/Thesis Report is no less than 20 and no more than 50 pages of text, or approximately 5000 to 12500 words. Formatting and documentation will be according to the MLA Handbook (eighth ed.) or the Chicago Manual of Style (fourteenth ed.), to be determined by the faculty adviser.

1. Acknowledgments. Approx. 250 words. (Optional.)
2. Abstract. Approx. 150 words. Format as required by Graduate School:
<http://graduateschool.ufl.edu/graduation/thesis-and-dissertation>

3. Table of Contents.
4. Introduction. Approx. 250-500 words. May contain comments on the process of choosing the play and/or role; other pertinent comments.
5. Text analysis. A concise discussion of the text, placing it within its history, genre, critical tradition, etc., and including a brief performance history. Use of secondary materials (reviews, criticism) is strongly recommended. The point of the text analysis is to demonstrate the actor's awareness of the problems and possibilities of the role as they emerge from the text.
 - Script Analysis (includes basic plot summary, as necessary) – Approx. 600 words
 - Dramaturgy: Historical Context of play & relevance today – Approx. 600 words
 - Style of Production (comment on pertinent production modes, especially if they deviate from default realism) – Approx. 600-750 words
6. Documentation and analysis of rehearsal process and performance preparation. This is main section of the thesis report allows the actor to demonstrate his or her sophistication in using techniques, learned in the MFA program, for constructing a performance and thinking about the process. In this section, the actor should be explicit about his or her methodology and refer to standard terminology and acting literature. The approach can be either chronological (charting progress) or thematic (documenting selected areas of concentration). The writer should avoid being merely anecdotal and should draw on the rehearsal journal to establish a clear sense of the process of understanding and exploring the role. The emphasis should be on problem-solving, on how the specific challenges of the role were met. The section should conclude with an analysis of the methods used and their adequacy to the project.
 - Voice (problems, solutions, investigation/explorations) – Approx. 750 words
 - Movement (problems, solutions, investigations/explorations) – Approx. 750 words
 - Scene Study/Acting approach – Approx. 750 words
7. Performance. Approx. 500-750 words. A brief discussion of the performance of the role should note whether the rehearsal period accomplished a comprehensive preparation for the live performance (and if not, why?), how the performance progressed from opening to closing, and cite verbal feedback and criticism as well as any written reviews.
8. Conclusion. Approx. 250-500 words. Final summary evaluation of the thesis project.
9. Appendices used as needed, but at a minimum they consist of programs, posters, reviews, pictures or slides.
10. Bibliography should contain all materials (books, articles, videos and films, manuscripts, etc.) that are either directly cited in the text or were used in the actor's preparation and performance in some central way. Exclude materials merely referred to.
11. Biographical sketch. Approx. 250 words.

MFA PERFORMANCE PROJECT IN LIEU OF THESIS, MFA DESIGN/PRODUCTION:

A Project in Lieu of Thesis and its appropriate documentation will be required of all Master of Fine Arts candidates in partial fulfillment of the requirements for this degree. The Project will be selected and assigned by the candidate's faculty mentor who will, in most cases, serve as the

chair (First Reader) of the candidate's thesis committee. One additional faculty member will make up this committee.

MFA Design/Production students may suggest options and alternatives for possible projects but the final decision shall be made by the candidate's faculty mentor.

Designers, in most cases, will be assigned a Project in Lieu of Thesis that requires the design and execution of a play, musical or concert for the School of Theatre and Dance's season. Graduate students who are more technically focused shall have a project that incorporates a variety of technical roles associated with a production.

Expectations of the MFA Design/Production candidate do not differ from the usual expectations held for any student designer except that a detailed chronicle of the design process from the first reading of the play through to the actual opening of the production will be required. Documentation can begin as early as the assignment of the project.

All MFA Design/Production candidates must submit an Abstract that outlines the project to be undertaken. This must be prepared according to the format and guidelines established by the Graduate School for submissions made during that academic year. Information regarding these established guidelines and specifics will be presented to the candidates at a meeting early in the process by the Graduate Student Coordinator. A timeline, including deadlines, for this project will also be presented to the MFA Candidates.

Structure of the Paper for the Project in Lieu of Thesis for Designers/Technicians:

All MFA Design/Production candidates must include the following in their Project document:

- A synopsis of the script (including the musical score if designing a musical piece), or a general overview of the production's content if designing a concert.
- Commentary on the piece, including quotes and citations, which may include reviews, journal articles, essays, and personal assessment, along with a small production history listing major productions of the work here and abroad.
- A Works Cited/Consulted page that lists all materials used in the research and design of the production must also be included. This should be quite detailed and offer an annotated Bibliography of useful material for future designers of this work.

Scenic Designers should include information regarding research and findings of items pertaining to the actual production's design including, but not limited to, historical and environmental research, palette sources, textural sources and specifics such as furnishings and properties.

Drafting should also be included in the Appendix.

A Table of Contents for a Scenic Designer might look something like this: Tables of Contents:

1. Introduction
2. Play Synopsis
3. Play and Production History
4. Location Research
 - a. Geographical Facts
 - b. Climate
 - c. Architecture of the Area

- d. Details
- 5. The Design Process
 - a. Discussions with the Director
 - b. Design Meetings
 - c. Mentor Guidance
 - d. Design Choices
 - e. Building Schedule
- 6. The Creation of the Production
 - a. Scenic Studio Progress
 - b. Budget Allocations, Concerns and Choices
 - c. Unforeseen Problems and their solutions
- 7. Tech Week
 - a. First Tech and Crew Execution
 - b. Dress Rehearsals
 - c. Opening
- 8. Conclusion
 - a. Production Commentary

Costume Designers should include information regarding research and findings of items pertaining to the costumes designed for the production including, but not limited to, historical and environmental research, palette sources, textural sources and specifics such as undergarments, accessories and trim.

A Table of Contents for a Costume Designer might look something like this: Tables of Contents:

- 1. Introduction
- 2. Play Synopsis
- 3. Play and Production History
- 4. Period and Character Research
 - a. Geographical Facts
 - b. Climate
 - c. Dress of the Era
 - d. Details and choices for this Production
- 5. The Design Process
 - a. Discussions with the Director
 - b. Design Meetings
 - c. Mentor Guidance
 - d. Design Choices
 - e. Building Schedule
- 6. The Creation of the Production
 - a. Costume Studio Progress
 - b. Budget Allocations, Concerns and Choices
 - c. Fittings and Alterations
 - d. Unforeseen Problems and their solutions
- 7. Tech Week
 - a. First Dress and Crew Execution
 - b. Dress Rehearsals
 - c. Opening

8. Conclusion
 - a. Production Commentary
 - b. Other Choices and Reconsiderations
 - c. Self-Evaluation
9. Works Cited/Consulted
10. Appendixes
 - a. Source Images
 - b. Rough Sketches and Preliminary Images
 - c. Plates (must include swatches, here or in a separate appendix)
 - d. Production Photos (At least three, but enough to include all characters)
11. Biography
 - a. Brief History
 - b. Photo

Lighting Designers should include information regarding research and findings of items pertaining to the actual production's illumination including, but not limited to, historical and environmental research, palette sources, textural sources and specifics such as practical units, gel colors and fixtures to be used, as well as all technical information available on the technology used in the production.

A Table of Contents for a Lighting Designer might look something like this: Tables of Contents:

1. Introduction
2. Play Synopsis
3. Play and Production History (if designing a Dance Concert, this section might, instead, focus on past work of the Choreographer, Stylistic matches to previous works or Diversion from the norm- offer some information as to the source of the piece and how it is to be interpreted this time as opposed to previous mountings)
4. Research
 - a. Climate and Temperature of the piece(s)
 - b. Music or Aural History (or History of the composer/creator if this is a new work)
 - c. Sources of Illumination (practical or environmental)
6. The Design Process
 - a. Discussions with the Director
 - b. Design Meetings
 - c. Mentor Guidance
 - d. Design Choices
7. The Creation of the Production
 - a. Lighting Studio Progress
 - b. Budget Allocations, Concerns and Choices
 - c. Unforeseen Problems and their solutions
8. Tech Week
 - a. Paper Tech/Dry Tech
 - b. Wet Tech and Crew Execution
 - c. Dress Rehearsals
 - d. Opening
9. Conclusion
 - a. Production Commentary
 - b. Other Choices and Reconsiderations
 - c. Self Evaluation

10. Works Cited/Consulted

11. Appendixes

- a. Source Images
- b. Rough Sketches and Preliminary Images
- c. Plates (must include a plot, program sheets and magic sheet, here or in an additional appendix)
- d. Production Photos (at least three)

12. Biography

- a. Brief History
- b. Photo

In all cases, these documents should be a chronicle of the successful achievement of applying accumulated knowledge and skill toward a specific end. Dwelling on what did not go as planned, budget shortfalls and poor colleague response is not important here as these are things outside the designer's control. Instead, the document should include how design elements/problems/challenges were solved and how the accumulation of current skills coupled with past experience led to the successful completion of this project and the awarding of a terminal degree.

MFA THESIS/PROJECT REPORT FORMAT:

Each student is responsible for conforming to regulations governing format, final term procedures and dates for submitting his/her thesis to his/her Supervisory Committee. Students MUST follow the procedures outlined online.

<http://www.graduateschool.ufl.edu/media/graduateschool/pdf-files/Guide-for-ETDs.pdf>

Academic Honesty Policy:

UF students have the responsibility to conduct themselves in an honest and ethical manner while pursuing their studies. They are expected to abide by the UF Academic Honesty Policy, which defines an academic honesty offense as "the act of lying, cheating, or stealing academic information so that one gains academic advantage." In the context of this course, this includes conducting original research and properly citing sources for any materials (both printed and online) used in writing the supporting research paper. Submitting work that has been plagiarized will result in a failing grade.

For more information on the UF Academic Honor Code see:

<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code>.

Accommodations for students with disabilities:

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center. [Click here to get started with the Disability Resource Center](#). It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.

Campus Resources:

Health and Wellness

- *U Matter, We Care*: If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu, 352-392-1575, or visit [U Matter, We Care website](#) to refer or report a concern and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.

- *Counseling and Wellness Center*: [Visit the Counseling and Wellness Center website](#) or call 352-392-1575 for information on crisis services as well as non-crisis services.
- *Student Health Care Center*: Call 352-392-1161 for 24/7 information to help you find the care you need, or [visit the Student Health Care Center website](#).
- *University Police Department*: [Visit UF Police Department website](#) or call 352-392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies).
- *UF Health Shands Emergency Room / Trauma Center*: For immediate medical care call 352-733-0111 or go to the emergency room at 1515 SW Archer Road,
- Gainesville, FL 32608; [Visit the UF Health Emergency Room and Trauma Center website](#).

Academic Resources

- *E-learning technical support*: Contact the [UF Computing Help Desk](#) at 352-392-4357 or via e-mail at helpdesk@ufl.edu.
- [*Career Connections Center*](#): Reitz Union Suite 1300, 352-392-1601. Career assistance and counseling services.
- [*Library Support*](#): Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.
- [*Teaching Center*](#): Broward Hall, 352-392-2010 or to make an appointment 352-3926420. General study skills and tutoring.
- [*Writing Studio*](#): 2215 Turlington Hall, 352-846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers.

Course Evaluations:

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. [Click here for guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner](#). Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via ufl.bluera.com/ufl/.

Course Fees:

Information about associate course fees can be found at <https://one.ufl.edu/soc/2188>