

# Theater Studies at Yale

Dear Student,

We hope the answers to these questions may be helpful in your decision-making about colleges in general and Yale in particular. Thank you for your interest.

Best wishes,  
Toni Dorfman and May Brantley

## **I love the theater. Do I need to major in theater studies if I hope to build a life in the theater?**

Heavens, no. The best preparation for a life in the theater, we believe, is the same as the best preparation for life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: a broad and deep liberal arts education. Some Yale undergraduates who have gone on to lives in the theater or film have, it's true, majored in theater studies, but others have majored in, among many other academic disciplines, English, American Studies, Philosophy, History, and Engineering and Applied Science. Thornton Wilder '20 majored in classical literature.

The reciprocal relationship between theory (dramatic criticism, dramatic literature, the interplay of history and theater, performance studies) and practice (acting, directing, playwriting, design, dance) is the emphasis in the Yale Theater Studies Program.

## **Do I have to audition to be a theater major at Yale?**

No. Any student who wishes to major in theater studies at Yale may do so. If you think you may opt to major in theater studies, register for THST 110-111, Survey of Theater and Drama, in your freshman year. This year-long survey is the prerequisite to THST 210a, Introduction to Performance Concepts, which is a course in basic acting technique. Usually taken in the sophomore year, it is the third required course (in addition to 110 and 111) for entry into the major. You will need to audition to get into 210a in the late spring of your freshman year, so that the performance faculty can figure out how many sections of 210a to provide. You will be admitted. We keep technique classes small so that instruction is one on one. Anyone can major in Theater Studies. There is no guarantee, however, that a student will be able to progress into intermediate acting (THST 211). If one completes 211, there is no guarantee that he or she will be admitted into advanced acting (THST 230). Entry into THST 211 and THST 230 is by audition only and – as with all seminars at Yale -- by permission of the instructor. Please note however that neither intermediate nor advanced acting courses are required to complete a Theater Studies major.

The major requires twelve courses in theater studies, roughly equally divided between theory (dramatic literature, criticism, history) and practice (production seminars in acting, directing, playwriting, design, dance, musical theater composing, libretto-writing, and performance, among other courses). Theory seminars and some of the upper-level production seminars, if there's room, are often open to students who have not completed the THST 110, 111, and 210 sequence, i.e., nonmajors.

### **Is Yale Theater Studies a preprofessional theater program?**

No. Yale Theater Studies is a liberal arts program. This said, however, a number of majors in theater studies have gone on to graduate work in the theater to prepare for professional careers.

### **May I double-major if I decide to major in Theater Studies?**

About half of our current Theater Studies majors are double-majoring in other disciplines, including history, computer science, English, humanities, literature, French, American studies, anthropology, and others. It's possible, though difficult, to double major in music. It seems to be almost impossible to double-major in studio art: too much time is required in both the studio and in the rehearsal hall to do well in both majors simultaneously.

### **When I'm applying for the theater program, how much in my résumé does my actual performance experience in high school, forensics, summer stock, community theater, regional theater, television, film, national tours, Off Off Broadway, Off Broadway, and/or Broadway weigh with my chances of being accepted into the theater program?**

It is the Undergraduate Admissions Office at Yale, not the individual departments and programs, which decides who's admitted to Yale College. Individual Yale departments and faculty have typically no say in who is admitted. For this reason, and also because of the volume of requests by high-school students for interviews with Yale theater faculty, we no longer for logistical reasons are able to schedule such interviews.

Once you've been admitted to Yale however we are glad to meet with you, whether at Bulldog Days or at another time.

Please do not submit videotapes or DVDs with your applications. We regret that neither Admissions nor our program is able to review them.

Once admitted to Yale, a student can decide to major in Theater Studies without an audition. The Admissions Office is interested in knowing about an applicant's interests and activities, especially when they have been pursued seriously over an extended period of time. You will have ample opportunity in the application to discuss your involvement in theater. Remember that the Admissions Office admits students into Yale College, however, and not into the Theater Studies Program. Last year there were fourteen applicants to Yale College for every one student who was admitted. Once you're admitted though, the idea is, You're a Yale undergraduate and you can major in whatever you wish. You've already jumped through the hoop.

Your acting experience before Yale may be helpful in getting cast in productions, and a number of students at Yale have already worked professionally in theater, film, and television. (It's hard though to be a full-time Yale student, do well in your academic work, and still meet a shooting schedule.) However, it is also the case that some students who never set foot onstage before getting to Yale have acted up a storm once they're here. We can only surmise that college years are a time of great change and should be a time for you to take chances and learn new things. (This is not a new surmise, of course.)

## **Is there a performing arts program?**

There is no curricular performing arts program per se at Yale. But several other departments and programs have a separate performing or public presentation aspect at Yale. They're not all under one aegis or located in one performing arts complex. There is so much art, orchestra, opera, chorus, film, chamber music, theater going on at Yale at any given time in many different halls and venues that there's no way to see it all. There is a vast extracurricular performing arts program. Last year there were over a hundred undergraduate productions, most of them directed and produced by students. A few among these were Dramat productions. The Yale Dramat annually brings in a professional director and/or designer to work with students on the mainstage. The Dramat is an extracurricular all-student organization, and many Dramat members are not Theater Studies majors. You can become a full-fledged member of the Dramat by working backstage in three Dramat productions. Dramat productions occur in the University Theater and sometimes in the New Theater and Yale Repertory Theater. (An advantage of belonging to the Dramat is that you can get complimentary tickets to Yale Rep, School of Drama, and Dramat productions.) Any student, whether a Dramat member or not, may audition for Dramat productions.

Most theater at Yale, however, is not Dramat-produced. There's too much of it.

On any given weekend there are 4-5 theater productions going on -- in college theater spaces, the Off Broadway Theater, common rooms or multipurpose spaces in colleges, including college courtyards. Some of Yale's busiest actors are not theater studies majors. Yale students are blessed by the support of the Sudler Endowment: each semester any undergraduate student -- whether majoring in an arts program or not -- can apply for support for theater production, art exhibitions, concerts, dance, opera; the student submits an application to the master, or to a committee appointed by the master, of his or her college. The Sudler Endowment is one reason Yale is a theater school as well as a strong liberal arts college.

The Theater Studies Program has a separate theater, a big black box called the Whitney Space, earmarked for majors' senior projects and other curricular theater activity, where last year there were 14 productions. Other senior project productions took place in college theaters and courtyards. The senior requirement in Theater Studies may be partially satisfied by acting in, or directing, designing, or dramaturging a production. Seniors are also required to write a long research paper as part of their graduation requirement. Some senior project productions last year were Stoppard's *THE REAL THING*, Shakespeare's *MEASURE FOR MEASURE*, a fully produced original student play about Zelda and F. Scott Fitzgerald called *BEAUTIFUL LITTLE FOOLS*, Calderon's *LIFE IS A DREAM*, Lorca's *WHEN FIVE YEARS PASS*, and Sondheim's musical *PASSION*.

There are several full-time technical supervisors for undergraduate theater at Yale to oversee safety and to help with design and technical questions. Theater Studies has its own full-time technical director, working in collaboration with a production and design faculty member. During the year there are usually no more than two or three Theater Studies productions directed by faculty members.

This coming year two faculty-directed productions are planned as senior project venues, in fall an adaptation of Shakespeare's *HENRY V* and in spring Brecht's *CAUCASIAN CHALK CIRCLE* with an original score.

One of the perquisites of being a theater person at Yale is that there are many other students passionate about theater too. Students have found Yale friends with whom they've started theaters and/or theater production companies after graduation, in New York, Virginia, and elsewhere.

Some student plays in the annual Yale Playwrights Festival have gone on to New York and regional production soon afterward. Recent student scripts by students have been presented in the NY International Fringe Festival with a full Yale complement of actors, designers, and production people. A 2004 Yale College graduate won the 2008 Wendy Wasserstein Prize for playwriting. BLOODY BLOODY ANDREW JACKSON is now on its way to Broadway from the Public Theater and before that Off Off Broadway was created by Les Freres Corbusier, a company founded by Yale College graduates.

**Do most students at the School of Drama get their undergraduate degrees elsewhere than Yale College?**

Yes, most students at the School of Drama get their undergraduate degrees elsewhere. (A few have no undergraduate degree at all.) Most first-year students in the MFA acting program already have worked for several years in theater and have built professional résumés. Most first-year students in the directing program have been directing for a while or have started a theater or written a book. The Drama School seems to favor applicants who have already demonstrated their resolve and their talent by working in theater for several years. Many Drama School graduate students earned undergraduate majors in other fields than theater. This said, every year one or two recent Yale College students are offered places in the Yale School of Drama. Undergraduates at Yale may from time to time, by petition, be admitted into some graduate theater management or dramaturgy classes in the Drama School. Some students have been permitted to audit graduate design classes. A Yale undergraduate may with permission of the instructor and the director of undergraduate theater studies may take up to four graduate courses in the Drama School for undergraduate credit. There is no admission of undergraduates into graduate acting or directing classes.

**Is there any contact between undergraduate and graduate theater students at Yale?**

Indeed there is. Yale undergraduates sometimes perform in the Yale Cabaret and from time to time in small parts in School of Drama or Yale Rep productions. There is also, because of shared interests, and the proximity of the Drama School and Theater Studies programs to each other (they're on the same block), much informal contact. Drama School students also teach undergraduates as teaching fellows and section leaders in THST 110-111 and a few other large lecture courses. Graduate playwriting students have served as mentors for some undergraduate playwrights in the Yale Playwrights Festival, and serve as teaching fellows in some undergraduate playwriting classes. There is one Theater Studies/Drama School joint faculty appointee in acting.

**I would like to know if the theater major at Yale earns at BFA in theater or a BA in theater. Or does Yale even offer a BA in theater?**

There are basically two kinds of undergraduate theater studies programs in the United States. One is the conservatory program, in which students are offered intensive training in, usually, acting and in which they emerge with a B.F.A. (bachelor of fine arts) degree. The other is the liberal-arts program, in which theater studies are only part of a liberal arts curriculum, and students complete their studies with a B.A. (bachelor of arts). Yale's Theater Studies program is the second type, offering a B.A. (For information about schools that offer a theater B.F.A., you might want to contact the National Association of Schools of Theater, the accrediting body for educational theater programs in the United States. The Web address is [www.arts-accredit.org/nast/default.htm](http://www.arts-accredit.org/nast/default.htm))

### **What opportunities to do musical theater does Yale provide?**

There are several student organizations that specialize in producing musicals, including the Yale College Musical Theater Group, the Yale College Gilbert & Sullivan Society, and the Opera Theater of Yale College. The Yale Dramat produces a commencement musical every year as well as one or two other musicals in its season. In addition to these, students occasionally mount musical theater productions in colleges or the Off Broadway Space, a black box devoted to noncurricular productions, or in the college theaters. For most of these productions, there is a full student orchestra, student choreography, student musical direction, and almost always a full and lively house. In the last couple years musical productions at Yale have included Monteverdi's ORFEO and ARDO! ARDO!, Gilbert & Sullivan's THE PIRATES OF PENZANCE and H.M.S. PINAFORE, JOHN AND JEN, BAT BOY, URINETOWN, THE FULL MONTY, and a couple original student musicals. Last May the Yale Baroque Opera Project produced Sacriati's 17<sup>th</sup>-century opera LA FINTA PAZZA, the first American production.

Starting four years ago Theater Studies has offered upper-level production seminars, cross-listed with the School of Drama, in musical theater history and in lyric and libretto writing; and, with the Department of Music, seminars as well in musical theater composing, directing, and performance. There are also opportunities for voice training in the Music Department, usually in noncredit-bearing courses.

### **Is there dance at Yale?**

Since 2006 curricular dance classes have offered in Yale Theater Studies to majors and nonmajors, including courses on African dance, traditional and contemporary, with a special concentration on dance from Burkina Faso; and the historic treatment of the body in various media - film, concert dance, and still images, encouraging students to think through cultural theory as a means of creating work.

This cluster of courses represents a diversity of dance forms, with an emphasis on their relationship to historical, social, and cultural forces. The courses include technique and composition as the expression of these forces. As usual in Yale production seminars, the reciprocal relationship between theory and practice is a recurrent theme in these classes; and all of these classes require students to create dances, solo and group.

Advanced seminars in choreography and repertory are also offered.

Two student last year conceived and choreographed their own senior project productions, one a critical treatment of THE NUTCRACKER and the other a collaborative dance piece exploring communication in person and via electronic media. There are many – at last count, twenty -- student dance groups that regularly perform at Yale.

### **Does Yale provide internships for undergraduate majors?**

Yale undergraduates have apprenticed and interned in recent summers at the Williamstown Theater Festival, the Goodman Theater in Chicago, Manhattan Theater Club, Playwrights Horizons and New Dramatists in New York, and many other places, including venues in Paris, Avignon, Madrid, Rio de Janeiro, Oxford, and London. There is a small stipend for student actors cast in the acting company of the Yale Cabaret summer season. The Theater Studies office maintains an up-to-date file of

internship and apprenticeship possibilities. Fellow students' own word of mouth about theaters, summer stock, and training programs is invaluable -- and honest. The residential colleges at Yale have special endowment funds earmarked for travel and expenses for which students going on internship may apply. The deans' offices have more information about these.

### **What is Yale policy on study abroad?**

Yale encourages students to study abroad and provides need-based support for travel and living expenses. In the past couple years students have spent a summer or a semester studying dance and design in Paris and its environs, in London at RADA or LAMDA, in Moscow at the Moscow Art Theater, and near Lublin, Poland, at Theater Gardzienice. Others have worked with the Yuyachkani troupe in Peru, and one student spent a summer studying and working in theater in China. Yale also offered its own summer courses in London, Paris, Swaziland, and Umbria.

### **Does Yale offer summer classes for high school students interested in theater?**

Yes. For more information about them, see [www.yale.edu/summer](http://www.yale.edu/summer), or call Yale Summer Programs at (203) 432-2430. These classes are not under the auspices of the Theater Studies Program, the offices of which are closed in the summer.

### **I had understood that Yale offered a DFA in Theatre. How can I obtain information on the program?**

Contact the Yale School of Drama. It confers graduate degrees. It is a separate unit from the Theater Studies Program, which is an undergraduate program in the humanities within Yale College. The School of Drama website is [www.yale.edu/drama/](http://www.yale.edu/drama/)

### **Where on line can I find more information about theater at Yale?**

The Yale Office of Undergraduate Admissions maintains two handy web sites: For an overview of theater at Yale, including a list of Yale graduates in the theater and entertainment industries, and for information about Yale College's admission process, see [www.yale.edu/admit](http://www.yale.edu/admit) For an overview created for freshmen about theater at Yale as an extracurricular activity, see [www.yale.edu/admit/freshmen/extracurriculars/theater.html](http://www.yale.edu/admit/freshmen/extracurriculars/theater.html)

Another site, created and maintained by the all-student organization Yale Drama Coalition, a dynamic group founded in 1999, gives a vivid picture of and practical information about undergraduate theater at Yale: [www.yale.edu/ydc](http://www.yale.edu/ydc)

To return to Theater Studies Program's home website, click on <http://theaterstudies.yale.edu/>