

## 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,  
Dominika Laster 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, mechanical engineering, and modern Middle East studies. Thornton Wilder '20 majored in classics.

The reciprocal relationship between theory (dramatic criticism, dramatic literature, theater history, 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 course is the prerequisite to THST 210a, Introduction to Performance Concepts, which is a class 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. Entry into more advanced acting classes is by audition and – as with all seminars at Yale -- by permission of the instructor. Please note however that more advanced acting courses are not 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 many 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?**

A third 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 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 professional directors and/or designers 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 Iseman 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, and 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 Creative and Performing Arts Fund (CPA): 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 CPA 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 nine productions. Other senior projects took place in college theaters, Yale Rep, and elsewhere. The senior requirement in Theater Studies may be partially satisfied by acting in, designing, directing, dramaturging, or choreographing a production. Seniors are also required to write a long research paper as part of their graduation requirement. Two senior project productions last year were musicals: *ADDING MACHINE: A MUSICAL*, and *HEDWIG AND THE ANGRY INCH*. Other senior project productions included José Rivera's *MARISOL*, Lanford Wilson's *TALLEY'S FOLLY*, and Martin McDonagh's *A SKULL IN CONNEMARA*. We had quite a lot of Shakespeare last year due, in part, to a multidepartment, year-long celebration of Shakespeare At Yale: (<http://shakespeare.yale.edu/>) In the spring semester alone, we had faculty-directed productions of *OTHELLO*, *HAMLET*, and *CORIOLANUS*, and a student-directed production of *MACBETH!* Each year, some students write full-length plays or musicals as their senior projects; students also choreograph their own original dance pieces.

There are several full-time technical supervisors for undergraduate theater at Yale to oversee safety and to help with design and technical questions. The Theater Studies Program has its own full-time technical director, working in collaboration with a production and design faculty member. This coming academic year there will be two faculty-directed pieces in the Whitney Space, Shakespeare's *TWELFTH NIGHT* and *RICHARD III*, each serving as the culmination of a semester-long production seminar.

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.

### **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 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 are five Theater Studies/Drama School joint faculty appointees in the academic year 2012-2013.

### **I would like to know if the theater major at Yale earns a 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 in musical theater does Yale provide?**

There are several student organizations that specialize in producing musicals and opera, including the Musical Theater Group, the 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 per season. In addition to these, students occasionally mount musical theater productions in colleges or the Off Broadway Space, a black box devoted to extracurricular 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 of years undergraduate musical productions at Yale have included Rado, Ragni, and McDermott's HAIR (Dramat), Sondheim and Lapine's SUNDAY IN THE PARK WITH GEORGE, Laurents and Bernstein's WEST SIDE STORY, G & S's IOLANTHE and THE MIKADO, Larson's RENT, Landau/Guettel's FLOYD COLLINS and Brecht/Jourdan Urbach '13's CAUCASIAN CHALK CIRCLE. Every year, students write their own musicals: Matthew George '11/Stephen Feigenbaum '13's WISE BLOOD and Marina Keegan '12/Mark Sonnenblick '12/ Stephen Feigenbaum '13's INDEPENDENTS are recent standouts. Operas have included L'ITALIANA IN ALGERI by Rossini and COSI FAN TUTTE by Mozart (OTYC).

Curricular projects supported by the Yale Baroque Opera Project in the past two years include Cavalli's *SCIPIONE AFRICANO* and Monteverdi's *IL RITORNO D'ULISSE IN PATRIA*

Starting five years ago the Theater Studies Program 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 in musical theater composing, directing, and performance. These courses are known as the Shen Curriculum for Musical Theater. There are also opportunities for voice training in the Music Department, usually in noncredit-bearing courses.

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

Opportunities to dance at Yale abound in both curricular and extracurricular realms.

Since 2006, Yale Theater Studies has offered dance studies courses to majors and non-majors. The curriculum integrates the study of technique with history and theory, honing movement research models that synthesize the knowledge gained through the studio practice into research and critical writing.

The courses focus on diverse subjects, including traditional and contemporary West African dance, Balanchine ballet, American modern and postmodern dance, and dance in musical theater; dance composition; and theories of the body drawn from cultural, dance, and performance studies. A number of courses foster interdisciplinary discourse between dance and other artistic disciplines (music, visual art, film), and disciplines within the humanities and sciences. Many of the courses are cross-listed in departments and programs such as American Studies, African Studies, African American Studies, Film Studies and Physics.

In 2011, we launched Yale Dance Theater, an extracurricular, faculty-directed dance research initiative that centers on reconstructions of canonical choreography. YDT meets twice weekly during the spring semester for three-hour rehearsals with professional rehearsal directors, culminating in a final showing. Past projects have involved licensing works by Twyla Tharp (2011) and Merce Cunningham (2012). Students write about the process on an online blog. Admission is by audition. See the links below for more information.

Outside of YDT, guest workshops and dance technique classes are often offered during the year, coordinated by Theater Studies and the Alliance for Dance at Yale, the umbrella organization for student-led extracurricular dance. These classes are open to the Yale community. Look for announcements during the semester on these special offerings.

ADAY also supports many – at last count, twenty – extracurricular student dance groups that regularly perform at Yale.

For more information on these initiatives visit:

Dance Studies at Yale

<http://theaterstudies.yale.edu/news/dance-studies-yale>

Yale Dance Theater

<http://ydtp.commons.yale.edu/>

Alliance for Dance at Yale

<http://www.yale.edu/aday/groups/>

### **Is it possible to major in dance at Yale?**

We do not at this time have a dance major. Students who wish to pursue dance studies take a variety of paths. A small number of students major in Theater Studies, and concentrate on dance studies. Other students major in other disciplines, while passing through the sum total of dance courses. Upon the completion of one or more courses in dance studies, it's possible to undertake an independent study or senior thesis related to dance, either from within or outside of Theater Studies. Interested non-Theater Studies majors must explore this option in conversation with their DUS, as regulations vary between departments.

Past Theater Studies senior productions in dance range widely - the possibilities are endless. Most recently, Alejandro Bustillos '11 conceived and choreographed a senior project production called STR-CRS'D, which integrated queer theory and Shakespeare's tragedies to probe gender politics through dance.

### **What level of training must a student have to enroll in the dance studies courses?**

The dance studies curriculum consists of a mix of studio-based and sit-down seminars. For the studio seminars, the level of dance training required varies depending on the course. In 2012-2013, THST 235 Dance Theater serves as an introductory course, open to students of all levels. Courses such as Advanced Dance Repertory and West African Dance require a higher level of dance technique. However, there are always exceptions: students with no background whatsoever in dance have enrolled in these courses and done well, out of sheer determination and passion for the subject. The studio courses require an audition and/or permission of the instructor, to ensure that the student is fully capable of handling the practical work.

If you are interested in one of the dance studies courses but unsure whether your level of training equips you to handle it, it's best contact the instructor directly to discuss.

### **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 internships 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 few 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 offers 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, an activist 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 the Theater Studies Program's home website, click on <http://theaterstudies.yale.edu/>