

Performing Arts

Performing Arts at Washington University is comprised of dance (p. 1) and drama (p. 1).

Dance

Students may select dance as a major through the Performing Arts Department. This course of study combines intensive studio work in the technique and theory of modern dance, ballet, and composition with seminars that examine dance as a global phenomenon containing forms that reflect culturally specific historical, aesthetic, and ethnological features. The program also includes a broad range of courses, such as stagecraft, music resources, improvisation, anatomy for dancers, pedagogy, dance therapy, musical theater dance, world dance forms, jazz, hip hop, and West African. Alternatively, students may choose to minor in dance.

The senior capstone experience is framed in consultation with Performing Arts faculty. In April, prior to registration for the fall semester, dance majors discuss the capstone requirement with their advisors. The dance capstone requirement can be satisfied by a senior honors thesis or a senior dance project. The format may range from a research paper or a written analysis of the student's dance development to a project emphasizing movement expression (e.g., the creation of a video résumé, a performance, or a choreographic project). In all cases, dance capstones have a written component.

Those who study dance at Washington University learn from faculty members who have both professional experience and academic degrees. Students also have the opportunity to study with guest artists-in-residence who teach master classes and set choreography.

Students may audition for the Washington University Dance Theatre, which holds annual auditions for students. Selected students will appear in faculty- and guest artist-choreographed concerts in Edison Theatre. Dance students particularly interested in performance may audition for the student repertory company, Washington University Dance Collective (WUDC). WUDC rehearses throughout the year and performs on campus as well as in venues in the St. Louis area. Students may also participate in departmental drama productions as well as student-directed work in choreography and theater. Further, each year, students have the opportunity to attend the regional American College Dance Conference to adjudicate work, perform, and take master classes.

Dance students may pursue study abroad at the University of Auckland, New Zealand; University of Ghana, Legon; and Roehampton University, London. With approval from the Dance program, courses at these institutions may fulfill dance major and minor requirements. Courses in other disciplines taught at these institutions may also be accepted by Washington University.

Drama

The drama major combines rigorous training in theater and performance studies (world theater history, performance theory, and dramatic criticism) with theater production, including courses in playwriting, acting, directing, devising, design (i.e., set, costume, lighting, and sound), and experimental digital performance.

In this program, students can take a wide variety of courses covering the history of world theater in comparative relation. Ranging from the ritual practices that emerged into the dramas of Ancient Greece to the post-dramatic explorations of habituated movements we make in everyday life, performance is studied as a corporeal practice and material expression of cultural meanings. By understanding performance as both an artistic practice and a sociological phenomenon, students learn to think critically about the complex ways that cultures make meanings in the forms and practices of embodied movement.

In small, individualized classes, professionally and academically trained faculty lead students in practice and discussion, helping them make connections between the study of theater as a liberal art and the application of skills in production. In acting, the department offers four courses that cover scene and character study, acting styles, and solo performance work. Additional courses in movement, voice/speech, and musical theater augment the performance course curriculum. A two-course directing sequence issues into a public showing of student-directed work, and some students have chosen to direct a fully designed production as their capstone or senior honors thesis. Recent graduates of the acting and directing sequence have been placed in prestigious MFA programs, in internships and jobs in regional American theaters, and in various professional schools and graduate programs. Our nationally recognized program in design and technical theater offers students a varied selection of costume, scene, lighting, and sound design courses. Our design faculty regularly facilitates opportunities for design and technical theater students to shadow them in professional design jobs and/or to intern within companies. A highly successful playwriting program, enriched by the annual A.E. Hotchner Playwriting Competition and workshops run by leading American dramaturgs, has produced playwrights whose work is now being performed in nationally recognized venues as well as in film and television.

Since 1991, the Performing Arts Department and the Globe Education Program have collaborated in the teaching of Shakespeare's plays. In either a two-semester first-year seminar or a four-week intensive summer program, students can explore the textual meanings, historical contexts, and cultural significance of Shakespeare's plays both as literature and in performance. Working with Performing Arts faculty as well as Globe personnel, students learn to bring Shakespeare's plays to life in master classes that teach them how to voice Shakespeare's poetry, realize his characters, and perform stage combat. Both course options offer students a summer study abroad opportunity to visit Shakespeare's birthplace in Stratford-upon-Avon and the reconstructed Globe Theater in London, culminating in their own performance on the Globe stage.

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