

PERF 220: *Reflections of American Society on Stage* (Spring 2018)

Section 001: “The Musical and the Mirror”

Class Meeting Times: Tuesday and Friday, 9:45–11:00am, Katzen 151

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Office Hours: Tuesday and Friday, 11am–1pm; or by appointment

Website: <https://edspace.american.edu/nblustein/course-pages/perf-220/>

OVERVIEW

We are at a watershed moment in Broadway musical theatre. Never before has the commercial musical theatre marketplace been so unequivocally saturated with talented artists of color, female and LGBTQ creators and directors, and other traditionally underrepresented voices. This is a far cry from the Broadway of even a half-century’s past, in which racial slurs, passive roles for women, and the apparent artistic assertion that Americans are homogeneous in appearance and lifestyle (Caucasian, Christian, aggressively heterosexual) was considered not only normative but universally desirable.

How did such a community transcend its own traditions, so that 1969’s hit musical *1776* would become but precursor to the overnight sensation of *Hamilton*? What movements are responsible for such sweeping changes? Does excellent art precipitate acceptance, or does a society ready to embrace diversity subconsciously pine for a more progressive “world” to be depicted on the stage? And how does Broadway’s vivid re-emergence in American culture and economy impact its (and our) future?

METHODOLOGY

In this course, we will examine the nine musicals that have been awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Drama, from 1931 to 2016. These musicals were ostensibly honored for “dealing with American life.” As a result, this course will not be a survey; instead, the ways in which these specific shows reflect, embrace, subvert, and shape American society and identities will be at the center of our exploration. We will also examine other works of art, writings, performances, and analyses that are directly or closely related to each of these shows. The format of this course will consist of:

- Preparing for, and participating in, lecture and discussion groups;
- Viewing musical films and live performances of musicals;
- Reading and viewing supplemental materials;
- Presenting group and individual projects;
- Taking quizzes and exams on readings, musicals, and films; and
- Completing written assignments.

GENERAL EDUCATION LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This is a course in *Foundational Area 1: The Creative Arts* in the General Education Program at American University. As a student taking a course in this area, you will:

- Examine the nature of creativity, especially imaginative and intuitive thinking;
- Situate creative works, and judgments about those creative works, in their appropriate social and historical context; and
- Develop the student’s own creative and expressive abilities, so that the student can better understand the qualities that shape an artist’s work.

(General Education Learning Objectives, Continued)

We will place particular emphasis on the first and second of these goals. Courses in this area are oriented toward experiencing, critiquing, and analyzing artistic expression across a variety of disciplines.

We will focus on the following learning objectives:

- **Aesthetic Sensibilities.** Creative reflections on the nature and history of beauty and art.
 - *We will foster aesthetic sensibilities through in-class discussions of musicals and primary resources. We will discuss formal and dramatic elements of the musicals we read and listen to, and relate this discussion to issues of social, cultural, economic, and political engagement. As such, one of the things you will be able to connect art to the world in which it lives.*
- **Communications Skills.** Interchanging ideas and information through writing, speech, and digital media.
 - *Students will work on their communications skills through formal papers, regular class discussion, collaborative/experiential presentations, and teaching modules.*
- **Diverse Perspectives and Experience.** Acquiring knowledge and analytical skills to understand a variety of perspectives and experiences, including those that have emerged from scholarship on ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation/identity, mental illness, and social class.
 - *We will encounter musicals that consider each of these perspectives/experiences, and understand the changing ways in which creative artists take on or avoid—explicitly or implicitly—issues of diversity and inclusion. We will foster this understanding through discussion and specific topics in selected teaching modules.*
- **Innovative Thinking.** Venturing beyond established patterns of thought in imaginative and creative ways.
 - *All of our assignments will challenge our expectations for musical theatre’s audiences, practitioners, and creators.*
- **Information Literacy.** Locating, evaluating, citing, and effectively using information.
 - *Throughout the semester we will form a shared vocabulary for reviewing sources and analyzing performance materials. Effective use of this information will be evaluated in teaching modules and end-of-semester papers.*

MATERIALS AND ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

Please set aside a lab fee for photocopying materials and purchasing tickets.

Our course’s Blackboard site have submission pages for assignments and our course gradebook. We will primarily use a separate course site via American University’s EdSpace. The URL for our specific page is <https://edspace.american.edu/nblustein/course-pages/perf-220>, but you can also access this page via blustein.org.

All libretti, cast recordings, and videos will be put on reserve in the Bender library; they also will be posted on the course page if possible. Additional readings or viewings will be posted on the course page or otherwise available online. For your group presentations and final paper, you are responsible for acquiring the libretto (“book” and lyrics) of each musical you research.

(Materials and Additional Requirements, Continued)

For your one-page responses (see below), you must attend: (1) a performance of *Assassins* (book by John Weidman, music and lyrics by Stephen Sondheim) in the American University Department of Performing Arts (8pm on February 15–16; 2 pm and 8pm on February 17), and (2) a performance of *The Wiz* (book by William F. Brown, music and lyrics by Charlie Smalls) at Ford's Theatre at 511 10th St NW (opening Friday, March 9).

At Ford's Theatre, patrons under 35 can purchase \$20 tickets using the promo code UNDER3518 for performances of *The Wiz* every Friday (March 9, 16, 23, 30; April 6, 13, 20). Please see <https://www.fords.org/performance/discounts> for other information on discounts.

ATTENDANCE, TARDINESS, AND PARTICIPATION IN CLASS

Attendance is mandatory. Regardless of whether or not you are present, you are responsible for all of the information given, including handouts and audio/visual excerpts. If you must miss class, please let me know ahead of time, and turn in any assignments in advance.

Should you accrue more than two unexcused absences, your final grade will be lowered by one-third of a letter grade (e.g. A to A–, B+ to B). Each additional absence will continue to lower your grade by one-third of a letter. Arriving late or leaving early three times is equal to one absence.

Excused absences due to illness will usually require documentation from a physician. Generally only illness, family emergencies, and university-approved conflicts will be considered excused absences. In the case of a university-approved conflict on the day of a quiz, you are responsible for arranging an alternate time for that quiz with me as early as possible.

In advance of every class, I will post discussion questions to our course page (accessible via <https://www.blustein.org>). You are expected to come to class having answered these questions to your own satisfaction.

Unless classwork requires you to look up something on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and/or Snapchat (such occasions will be rare indeed), please refrain from using a laptop/tablet/phone for anything besides taking notes and other relevant work during class.

OFFICE HOURS

Once during the semester, you are required to meet with me during office hours for a 20-minute one-on-one meeting. Failure to meet for an office hours appointment will lower your participation grade by 30 points. You may sign up for office hours at the times above via the course site, but if you have regular conflicts Tuesday and Friday midday, I'm happy to arrange an outside time to meet.

QUIZZES

Quizzes will begin exactly at 9:45am. Should you arrive late, do not expect to have extra hearings for any questions that involve listening to excerpts. On the day of a quiz, if you leave before the end of class you will receive a zero on that quiz.

If there is no planned quiz or assignment due on a given day, I may give a 5-point bonus quiz based on the prepared reading and listening.

WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS

Unless explicitly stated, written assignments and projects are due at the start of class on the due date. If an assignment is turned in after it is due, 10% of the grade will be deducted *every 24 hours*. Late assignments can only be submitted electronically. Assignments left at my office door will not be accepted.

You may redo and resubmit any written assignment through the last day of classes (Friday, April 27) for an improved grade. I suggest budgeting your time carefully, and not saving multiple resubmissions for the deadline. This policy does not apply to group work.

CLASS HELP

Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you need help/would like feedback on an assignment—or if you feel unclear about policies, scheduling, or course materials. I am happy to suggest additional materials and studying strategies.

The written assignments in this class are substantial. Writing *well* in the Creative Arts area involves expectations different from what you may be used to. If one of your New Year's resolutions is to improve your writing, contact the **Writing Center** in the Library First Floor Commons, x2991. Appointments can be scheduled by phone or at <https://american.mywconline.net>.

All students may take advantage of the **Academic Support and Access Center (ASAC)** for individual academic skills counseling, workshops, Tutoring and Writing Lab appointments, peer tutor referrals, and supplemental instruction. The ASAC is located in Mary Graydon Center, Room 243 (email: asac@american.edu, phone: x3660). A more complete list of campus-wide resources is available in the ASAC.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

If you wish to receive accommodations for a disability, please notify me with a letter from the Academic Support and Access Center. Accommodations are not retroactive. I strongly recommend timely notification at the start of the semester. To register with a disability or for questions about disability accommodations, contact the **Academic Support and Access Center** in Mary Gradyon Center, Room 243 (email: asac@american.edu; phone: x3660).

ABSENCES DUE TO OBSERVANCES

Provisions can be made if an assignment or quiz conflicts with an observance or other event. If you foresee any such conflicts, please notify me *within the first two weeks of the semester* so we can arrange reasonable accommodations.

WITHDRAWALS AND INCOMPLETES

The last day to drop a course or change a grade option is **Friday, March 23**. A grade of incomplete (I) is reserved for serious circumstances at or near the end of the semester. If you feel that you are in such circumstances, get in touch with me immediately.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

I encourage you to discuss ideas and issues in this course with your classmates, as emphasized above. In *preparing* for assignments, you are welcome to keep this discussion going—but once you

(Academic Integrity, Continued)

put pencil to paper (literally or figuratively), *all work must be your own*. If you have questions or concerns, ask me.

All students must act in accordance with the American University Academic Integrity Code (<https://www.american.edu/academics/integrity/code.cfm>). Academic integrity demands that students not engage in or tolerate acts of falsification, misrepresentation, deception, and plagiarism. Evidence of academic misconduct will be taken seriously and dealt with swiftly.

ASSIGNMENT LIST AND GRADING BREAKDOWN

WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS: 225 points

First written assignment (below): 50

One-page responses (25 points each): 75

Group project (Individual essay component): 25

Final essay: 75

QUIZZES/EXAMS: 210 points

Five listening quizzes (30 points each): 150

Final exam: 60

PREPARED SPEAKING/CLASS WORK: 165 points

Student teaching modules (25 points each): 50

Group project (Presentation component): 50

Class participation and preparation: 65

TOTAL: 600 points

GRADING RUBRIC

A: Reflects outstanding overall effort, dedication to exemplary work, and comprehensive mastery of course material. An “A” student exceeds all aforementioned class requirements and demonstrates continued evidence of dutiful scholarship, original thinking, and creativity. They take seriously their role as a citizen of the classroom community by proactively engaging in all activities. Improvement over the semester in these areas will be considered for final evaluation.

B: Reflects positive effort, generally excellent work, and demonstrates mastery of the majority of core concepts addressed in course. A “B” student meets and occasionally exceeds all aforementioned class requirements and demonstrates periodic evidence of dutiful scholarship, original thinking, and creativity. They are committed to improving their involvement in the classroom community. Concerted efforts for development in these areas over the semester will be considered for final evaluation.

C: Reflects a neutral/occasionally passive effort, generally satisfactory work, and demonstrates mastery of most core concepts addressed in course. A “C” student approaches or casually meets aforementioned class requirements, although frequently needs to be prompted for full participation in classroom activities.

(Grading Rubric, Continued)

D or F: Reflects insufficient efforts both inside and outside of class, and student has not achieved the majority of course learning goals and objectives to an acceptable standard. Student has fallen significantly short of “passing” criteria in some or all stated requirements.

GRADING SCALE

You must receive at least a grade of C (435 points) *and complete the final paper* to pass the course.

A+	585–600	A	555–584	A–	540–554
B+	525–539	B	495–524	B–	480–494
C+	465–479	C	435–464	C–	420–434
D	360–419	F	359 or lower		

SEMESTER OVERVIEW (* = teaching modules)

Overture

Week 1

January 16 Intro/Pulitzer discussion/survey and contract

Unit 1: Welcome to Broadway

January 19 Early musical theatre
Assignment due: “American Dream” paper

Week 2

January 23 How to read a scene
Preparation: read/listen to/view scenes

January 26 Broadway’s artistic/commercial/geographic history
Assignment due: Film or live show one-page response

Week 3

January 30* ***How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying (1961)***
Preparation: Watch musical film

February 2 *How to Succeed...* continued
Preparation: Watch *Mad Men*, Episodes 1 & 2
Quiz 1: Early Musical Theatre; *How to Succeed*

Unit 2: Making Art

Week 4

February 6* ***A Chorus Line (1975)***
Preparation: Read libretto (“book” and lyrics)/listen to cast recording

February 9* *A Chorus Line* continued
Preparation: Watch *Every Little Step*

Week 5

February 13* ***Sunday in the Park with George (1984)***
Preparation: Watch live musical film

(Semester Overview, Continued)

February 16 *Sunday in the Park...* continued
 Preparation: Watch documentaries on Seurat and Sondheim (excerpts)
 Quiz 2: *A Chorus Line* and *Sunday in the Park...*

Week 6

February 20 *Assassins* discussion
 Assignment due: *Assassins* one-page response

Unit 3: New York, I _____ You

February 23* ***Fiorello! (1959)***
 Preparation: Read libretto/listen to cast recording

Week 7

February 27 *Fiorello!* continued
 Preparation: Read *Life with Fiorello* (excerpts)
 Group 1 presentation: *Gyps & Dolls* (1950)

March 2* ***Rent (1996)***
 Preparation: Watch live musical film

Week 8

March 6 *Rent* continued
 Preparation: Watch/read New York documentaries (excerpts)
 Group 2 presentation: *Gospel at Colonus*

March 9 *Rent* continued
 Preparation: Watch *La bohème* (excerpts)
 Quiz 3: *Fiorello!* and *Rent*

March 13 *Spring Break!*
 March 16 *Still Spring Break!*

Unit 4: Making a Home

Week 9

March 20* ***South Pacific (1949)***
 Preparation: Watch musical film

March 23* *South Pacific* continued
 Preparation: Read *Tales of the South Pacific* (excerpts)

Week 10

March 27 *South Pacific* continued
 Preparation: Watch *The War: A Deadly Calling*
 Group 3 presentation: *On the Town* (1944)

(Semester Overview, Continued)

March 30* ***Next to Normal* (2009)**
Preparation: Read libretto/listen to cast recording

Week 11

April 3 *Next to Normal* continued
Preparation: Watch TBD
Group 4 presentation: *In the Heights* (2008)

April 6 *Next to Normal* continued
Preparation: Read articles on mental illness and media
Quiz 4: *South Pacific* and *Next to Normal*

Unit 5: Do You Hear the People Sing?

Week 12

April 10* ***Of Thee I Sing***
Preparation: Read libretto/listen to cast recording

April 13 *Of Thee I Sing* continued
Preparation: Read *Let 'Em Eat Cake*
Group 5 presentation: *Porgy and Bess* (1935)

Week 13

April 17* ***Hamilton***
Preparation: Read libretto/listen to cast recording

April 20 *Hamilton* continued
Preparation: Listen to *Hamilton Mixtape* etc.
Group 6: *Fun Home* (2015)

Week 14

April 24 *Hamilton* continued
Watch *Hamilton's America*
Quiz 5: *Of Thee I Sing* and *Hamilton*

April 27 *The Wiz* discussion
Assignment due: *The Wiz* one-page response

Finale/Bows/Exit Music

TBD Assignment due: Final essay
TBD Final exam

FIRST WRITING ASSIGNMENT

Due date: January 19. Minimum: 550 words; maximum: 750 words.

What does it mean to be an American, and how would you define the American Dream? Make your answer personal. You may be pragmatic or idealistic, patriotic or cynical, witty or

(First Writing Assignment, Continued)

impassioned. Be specific and detailed both in your definitions and in your use of personal examples/connection. Please provide at least one example from the arts—visual arts, theatre, dance, music, film—that exemplifies, encapsulates, or inspires your definition. Specifically describe (or quote from) the art work and explain why you chose it.

You will be graded on (1) your personal investment and (2) the persuasiveness and clarity of your writing. Write what you feel and believe, rather than attempting to give me the answer you think I want. Invest of yourself. Write well.

Remember: Twelve-point Times New Roman. One-inch margins. Include a header with your name and ID, a title (more creative than “Writing Assignment” or “My American Dream”), and the course number. Please upload your assignment to Blackboard.

ADDITIONAL CAMPUS RESOURCES

Center for Diversity and Inclusion: Mary Graydon Center, Room 201, x3651. The CDI is dedicated to enhancing LGBTQ, Multicultural, First Generation, and Women’s experiences on campus and to enhance AU’s commitment to respecting and valuing diversity by serving as a resource and liaison to students, staff, and faculty on issues of equity through education, outreach, and advocacy.

Counseling Center: Mary Graydon Center, Room 214, x3500. The Counseling Center helps students make the most of their university experience, both personally and academically.

The center offers counseling, self-help resources, referrals to private care, workshops, and discussion groups to help students gain the skills and insights they need to overcome adversity and thrive in their life and learning. Any student with a concern they would like to discuss is welcome. For example, students come to the Counseling Center with concerns about their relationships, health, happiness, motivation, behaviors, stress, trauma, or life decisions. Meeting with a clinician is a chance to explore one’s hopes and fears, and determine possible courses of action or resolution in a respectful and confidential setting.

International Student and Scholar Services: Butler Pavilion, Room 410, x3550. ISSS has resources to support academic success and participation in campus life including academic counseling, support for second language learners, response to questions about visas, immigration status, employment and intercultural programs, clubs, and other helpful campus resources.

Office of Advocacy Services for Interpersonal and Sexual Violence: Wellness Center, McCabe Hall 123, x7070. OASIS provides free and confidential advocacy services for anyone in the campus community who experiences sexual assault, dating or domestic violence, or stalking.

Student Health Center: McCabe, First Floor, x3380. For a full description of services offered, link to Student Health Portal, and other resources, go to:
<http://www.american.edu/ocl/healthcenter/>.