

**FIRST-YEAR SEMINAR COURSE PROPOSAL**  
UNIVERSITY OF MARY WASHINGTON

Use this form to submit **FSEM 100 topics** courses for review **or any other existing course** that you wish to have designated to meet the first-year seminar requirement.

<b>COURSE NUMBER:</b>	<b>FSEM100XX</b>		
<b>COURSE TITLE:</b>	<b>THEATRE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE</b>		
<b>SUBMITTED BY:</b>	Eve Kagan	<b>DATE:</b>	2/5/2015
<i>This course proposal has the department's approval. (Put a check in the box to the right.)</i>			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

**COURSE DESCRIPTION.** In the space below, provide a one- to two-sentence description of this class. The description will be entered in Banner and will also be used in other publications about the first-year seminar program (such as the “Eagle Essentials” booklet).

**In this course students will investigate theatre as a medium for social justice. Does theatre provide a space for alternative voices to be heard? What impact might those voices have beyond the stage? Class members will discuss and debate documentary plays taken from interviews with real subjects in the context of contemporary social conflicts. The course will culminate in a final performance addressing a relevant social issue.**

**RATIONALE.** Include short statement addressing how this course meets the FSEM’s basic components and new student learning outcomes (see FSEM call above), and why this course should be

This course seeks to fulfill the FSEM pedagogical goals of participatory and exploratory learning by engaging students in an active inquiry of the role of theatre for social change in contemporary society. Students will encounter plays based on primary sources and interviews thus stepping beyond the typical framework of theatre as fiction. This course engages theatre within a variety of controversial contemporary contexts touching on topics of racism, terrorism, homosexuality/homophobia, and feminism, requiring students to delve into moral complexity relinquishing right/wrong and black/white dichotomies. For the writing component, students will write a short midterm paper on the ethical implications of ethnographic work - what responsibility does the artist have when using primary source material? Students will conduct a brief interview with either a documentary theatre artist or anthropologist to use as a primary source of research. This paper will be returned with instructor feedback to be revised and expanded upon for the final analysis. For the culminating performance students will work as an ensemble to create a piece of documentary theatre addressing a relevant social issue synthesizing all they have learned through the plays investigated in class. Students will research the chosen topic, conduct interviews (primary sources), collect primary source documents, and collaborate on all aspects of creating an original performance from writing, editing, rehearsing, and performing. For the writing/research component, students will expand the midterm paper applying those ethical guidelines to the social issue chosen for the culminating performance. Students will include the entire transcript of their interview/s along with the edited final monologue/s. Acting as dramaturges, students will analyze their edits: why choose to cut/keep those particular lines in that particular order? What is the intended effect on the audience? What are the ethical implications of those edits? The final performance transforms student understanding from the page to the stage. Communication, active learning, and collaboration will be essential components of this course both in class discussions and in the creation of a performance.

approved to meet the FSEM General Education requirement

# THEATRE & SOCIAL JUSTICE

FSEM with Eve Kagan (kagan.class@gmail.com)

Fall 2015

**Course Description:** In this course students will investigate theatre as a medium for social justice. Does theatre provide a space for alternative voices to be heard? What impact might those voices have beyond the stage? Class members will discuss and debate documentary plays taken from interviews with real subjects in the context of contemporary social conflicts. The course will culminate in a final performance addressing a relevant social issue.

**Course Goals:** This course seeks to fulfill the FSEM pedagogical goals of participatory and exploratory learning by engaging students in an active inquiry of the role of theatre for social justice in contemporary society. Students will encounter documentary plays based on primary sources and interviews thus stepping beyond the typical framework of theatre as fiction. This course engages theatre within a variety of controversial contemporary contexts touching on topics of racism, terrorism, homosexuality/homophobia, and feminism. Each play will expose multiple viewpoints regarding these topics. Students will develop skills in research, acting, and dramaturgy necessary to create performances out of documentary materials including interviews, letters, diaries, newspapers and other historical sources. Initially students will study the techniques in documentary performance used by artists like Anna Deveare Smith, Moisés Kaufman and the Tectonic Theatre Project, Robin Soans and the Out of Joint Company, Roger Guenvere Smith, Nilaja Sun, Eve Ensler, Dario Fo, Franca Rame, Alan Rickman, etc. For the midterm, students will write a short paper on the ethical implications of documentary performance and revise/expand that paper into the final analysis of their culminating project. The culminating project will be an original documentary performance devised by the students on a relevant social issue: students will conduct research on the given topic using interviews as primary sources and craft a performance based on those interviews, as well as other documentary sources, that has social justice at the forefront. Communication, active learning, and collaboration will be essential components of this course both in class discussions and in the creation of a performance.

As with all FSEM courses, upon successful completion students will:

- Utilize a variety of research techniques to retrieve information efficiently, evaluate retrieved information, and synthesize information effectively to support their messages or arguments;
- Improve development and organization of written arguments;
- Demonstrate the ability to edit and revise in the writing process;
- Apply the basic theories and principles of oral communication; and
- Communicate effectively in a variety of settings, including public speaking and group discussion.

**Course Requirements:** Participation is of the utmost importance in this course. Students are expected to attend all classes, read all assigned texts, complete all writing assignments (journal/midterm/culminating analysis), engage fellow classmates in an open and respectful manner, and collaborate in devising and performing the culminating project. Attendance is mandatory – unexcused absences will be penalized.

**Texts**

*A Director Prepares: Seven Essays on the Art of Directing* by Anne Bogart

*Theatre of the Oppressed* by Augusto Boal

### **Plays/Videos**

“*A Huey P. Newton Story*” by Roger Guenvere Smith

“*Aftermath*” by Jessica Blank & Erik Jensen

“*My Name is Rachel Corrie*” by Alan Rickman

“*No Child...*” by Nilaja Sun

“*Talking to Terrorists*” by Robin Soans and the Out of Joint Company

“*The Exonerated: A Play*” by Jessica Blank & Erik Jensen

“*The Good Body*” by Eve Ensler

“*The Laramie Project*” by Moisés Kaufman and the Tectonic Theatre Company

“*Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*” by Anna Deveare Smith

### **Grading System:**

Participation: 30%    Journal/Provocations: 15%    Midterm: 20%

Culminating Performance/Analysis: 35%

**Participation:** Participation is based on attendance and contribution to class discussion as well as collaboration in the culminating project. Students are expected to attend each class prepared to engage each other in active inquiry and provoke each other in respectful ways.

**Journal/Provocations:** Students will keep an ongoing journal recording their reactions/inspirations/ideas provoked by the readings. The journal can take on a variety including both visual and text-based inquiries. Students will attend each class with a provocation to share: a piece of the chosen text that moved them in some way to spark discussion amongst the group.

**Midterm:** Students will write a short paper on the ethical implications of ethnographic work - what responsibility does the artist have when using primary source material? Students will conduct a brief interview with either a documentary theatre artist or an anthropologist to use as a primary source for this paper (contacts provided by the instructor). The midterm will be returned with instructor feedback to be revised and expanded upon for the culminating analysis.

**Culminating Performance/Analysis:** Students will work as an ensemble to create a piece of documentary theatre addressing a relevant social issue. Students will research the chosen topic, conduct interviews, collect primary documents, and collaborate on all aspects of creating an original performance from writing, editing, rehearsing, and performing.

For the writing/research component, students will expand the midterm paper into a culminating analysis, applying the ethical guidelines to the social issue chosen for the culminating performance. Students will include the entire transcript of their interview/s along with the edited final monologue/s. Acting as dramaturges, students will analyze their edits: why choose to cut/keep those particular lines in that particular order? What is the intended effect on the audience? What are the ethical implications of those edits? How does this monologue fit into the greater piece? How does this performance fit into the social context of this conflict/issue? What is the intended impact of the performance? How is this piece of theatre connected to social justice?

**Syllabus:** *(to be revised/adapted at my discretion)*

Week 1: Introduction – does theatre have a role in social justice? *Theatre of the Oppressed*

Weeks 2-4: Race/Stereotype – *A Director Prepares/Twilight/The Exonerated*

Weeks 5-7: Gender/Sexuality – *The Laramie Project/The Good Body*

Weeks 8-10: New Voices – *Talking to Terrorists/Aftermath*

Week 11: Solo Pieces – *My Name is Rachel Corrie/A Huey P. Newton Story*

Weeks 12-15: Culminating Performance rehearsal/performance

The Culminating Performance will take place over Finals Week