

Ohio University Division of Theater
Professional Director Training Program
Realism Project Guidelines and Focus

The Realism Project is intended as a first-step introduction to the process of putting up a theatrical production at Ohio University Division of Theater, from script selection, conceptualization and design to casting, rehearsal and final realization of the script onstage.

The general philosophy of the Realism Projects includes the following:

- The productions are to be simply conceived, with a primary focus being on the director's ability to analyze and interpret a script, from its structural elements and its major thematic strands to the nature and extent of the script's sub-text.
- Another important focus is the director's relationship to and communication skills with the actors. I'm looking particularly at your ability to *clearly communicate your ideas to the actor*, whether they are directly in line with what you feel the playwright is asking for, or whether they take a conceptual detour from what is apparent on the page. In the end, I need to know that you are capable of getting performances from actors that tell the story you want to tell (and that you feel the playwright has intended).
- Finally, I need to know that you are competent, generous and organized in your collaboration with designers, stage managers, and other members of your production support staff, knowing when to lend a guiding hand, when to let individuals do their work in isolation, and when to seek advice from me and/or other members of the Theater Division faculty.

Among the many factors to be considered are:

- **Budget.** And let's get right to the point – it's very small. The Realism Projects are not intended to be fully-funded in the same way that your Thesis or even your Style Project will be. So in your search for scripts, you should be asking yourself, "Can I do this without having to build walls and fully-realistic interiors? Does this play have unusual set, costume, makeup, props or lighting requirements and, if so, can I execute them without spending a lot of money or taxing the limited shop support I will receive?"
- **Casting/Cast Size.** The Realism Projects are fully supported by the Performance Area. What do I mean by that? I mean that you are not on the bottom rung of the casting ladder and expected to deal only with cast-offs from the main stage productions. I will be in on every aspect of your casting process, from the School of Theater General Auditions to callbacks, and your first "final casting meeting" experience will reassure you that it is fair, equitable, and considerate of everyone's needs, including yours. That said, I think it's important for you to understand that even though *Inherit the Wind* for example is, strictly speaking, a realistic play, it is a very unrealistic candidate for the Realism Project slot. The cast demands are unreasonable, not only in terms of cast size but because of the requirement for older character actors, which could not be met by the casting pool at Ohio University.

Therefore I would say that, in general, you should be looking at small-cast or medium-size cast scripts, ranging from 2 to 7-8 characters – any more than that and we begin to run into serious problems getting costumes on the actors. (Considering our current talent pool, I encourage you to keep the cast size for these shows 5 and under, with a real eye toward finding a play with strong female characters and less dependence on male characters.) And I also feel that these projects should not be about you herding a large group of actors about the stage. Staging issues are always important but, again, my primary concern is that I can see your work with individuals or small groups of actors rather than large ensembles. Please keep in mind that you are encouraged to use your imaginations when it comes to race, gender and age, and that I encourage inventive approaches to casting as long as they support the overall production concept. You certainly don't do yourself a service by choosing a play that requires three or four men or women over sixty years of age, not does it make sense to select a script that needs Asian, Hispanic or African-American actors if the current acting pool doesn't fulfill that need. Your ability to cast outside the Theater Division is extremely limited, so keep your casting pool in mind.

- **Stylistic Elements.** The term Realism Project is literal – you should be looking for plays that are generally realistic in nature. Things to avoid include:
 - plotlines with a dependence on ghosts, supernatural entities, alien invaders, talking animals, and so forth;
 - heightened language demands (such as Shakespeare and his contemporaries), or plays written in verse, rhymed couplets, etc.;
 - period pieces with lots of costumes and myriad dialect requirements (even though they may be essentially realistic in tone).

Again, your rehearsal schedule is brief, your actors may (in some cases) be doing their very first college production, and style should be reserved for your second year Style Project. In the end, this shouldn't leave you in dismay – there are literally thousands of plays that meet the demands of this project.

- **Designers.** Design support on these projects can change from year to year, depending on the demands of the mainstage as well as the talent pool of designers. Keep in mind that these designers are young and somewhat limited in experience. Therefore a great deal of what we focus on with the Realism Projects is your ability to make your concept clear and logical to the designers, and then *to guide them through the process of expressing that concept on paper and on stage*. It's a great challenge, but the experience should be a gratifying one for you and your collaborators. Always keep this in mind – money, time and manpower are limited. Keep the design elements simple and workable.
- **Production.** One thing you will surely learn through the course of this work is that you will be hands-on throughout, assisting your inexperienced stage managers in their work, supporting your young designers in theirs, and collaborating with your students actors, who are going through actor training throughout the duration of rehearsal. Add onto this the fact that production support is minimal at best, and that you are expected to recruit labor and coordinate things like put-in, tech rehearsals and strike without expecting that

these things will be done for you. This is where the advice and experience of the 2nd and/or 3rd year directors will be invaluable, as they have survived this crucible of fire already. Part of learning how to be a good director is covering all the bases for yourself, and not blaming others when you get down to cue-to-cue only to discover that there are no speakers in the air or that the lights haven't been gelled. Assumption of responsibility is key to this project, and we will have weekly meetings about what you are required to do in order to ensure that the production is on track.

There are no doubt other elements of the process that you'll have questions about, but this should serve as a good beginning. Above all, I think it's clear that your choice of script is all-important (as always), and that you should arrive in late August with a final short list of possibilities (arrived at through our ongoing discussions this summer) so that we can quickly determine what the strongest candidates are and make a final decision in order to facilitate casting, production concept, and the design process.

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