

BFA in Acting

SENIOR PROJECT HANDBOOK  
2020-2021

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# INTRODUCTION

The BFA in Acting Senior Project will be a one-person show based on a real person, living or dead. It should reflect not only the student's performance skills but also the careful research and preparation that supports all compelling acting performances.

This handbook contains guidelines for developing and presenting your project. It will serve as your primary resource for information about the process and what is expected of you.

PART I gives you an overview of the process. PART II lists the requirements for your project. PART III presents the production guidelines. PART IV covers how the project will be evaluated.

Any questions should be directed to your project advisor and/or the head of the FIU Theatre performance program.

This project can be the most challenging and rewarding experience of your time at FIU Theatre. Take ownership and enjoy the journey.

PART I  
THE PROCESS

# STEPS IN THE PROCESS

1. Early planning, research and faculty consultation should begin well in advance of project time.
2. Preparation and submission of the proposal by the due date in the semester prior to the project.
3. 1st meeting with assigned project advisor.
4. Registration for Senior Project course.
5. Completing 1st draft by the due date.
6. Regular meetings with advisor.
7. Script preparation.
8. Production organization, preparation of production schedule, establishing crew personnel.
9. Securing approval for all production elements.
10. Rehearsal, securing production elements, etc.
11. Preparation of publicity and program.
12. Presentation of project.
13. Post production: strike/cleanup, return of all borrowed material. Performing space returned to its original state.
14. Submission of the production book to faculty advisor.
15. Faculty evaluation of project.

# THE PROPOSAL

During the semester before the project is to be performed, students must present a written senior project proposal to the performance faculty. The proposal should answer the following questions:

1. Who would you like to base your senior project on?

2. Why is it important to tell this person’s story now?

3. Why do you feel connected to this person?

4. What key moments or key decisions in their life are you interested in exploring?

5. How are you planning to conduct your research? What sources have you identified?

6. Anything else you think the faculty should consider when reviewing your proposal.

7. List three preferred advisors.

Faculty will review and discuss all proposals. If a proposal is approved, the student is then assigned an advisor and can begin working on the project.

If the faculty does not approve the proposal, suggestions for changes in the project and/or the proposal may be made, or it may be recommended that the student plan another project. The student will then submit a new proposal for review.

Examples of effective past proposals are available for examination, but it is expected that each proposal will be unique.

# FACULTY ADVISORS

A faculty advisor will be assigned to each student. Students are strongly encouraged to consult with faculty members for advice while preparing the proposal. The advisor works closely with each student through regularly scheduled meetings, script development, and rehearsals. It is the candidate's responsibility to schedule and attend these meetings. Failure to do so will result in the project being postponed. During this phase of the process, students are still encouraged to consult with other faculty members when appropriate.

# TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL SENIOR PROJECT

**Pick someone with an interesting and compelling story.** Just because you admire someone and maybe even aspire to be them in your own life doesn’t mean they make a good subject for a senior project. Find someone whose story is compelling and will allow you to put into practice everything you’ve learned in your acting classes. Do they have a strong objective (something they’re fighting for)? Are they faced with seemingly insurmountable obstacles? Are they active as opposed to passive?

**An addiction doesn’t necessarily mean someone is a good subject.** Yes, dealing with addiction is tough, but there has to be more to the story. We’ve seen a lot of senior projects where this is the one compelling thing about the person and it gets repetitive. Is there another reason you want to explore this person’s story?

**Make sure your subject has enough research available.** Is there enough material out there about this person’s life? If the person is private and there isn’t a lot of information and details about their life, you’re going to have to end up assuming a lot of things. It’s perfectly fine to make inferences and take some (small) creative licenses, but an important part of this project is the research element.

**Don’t wait too long to start your first draft.** You’re going to have a shitty first draft. Guaranteed. Make peace with that. The good thing is a shitty first draft can lead to a so-so second draft, which can lead to a pretty good third draft, which can lead to a…you get the picture. Dive in knowing you won’t have to use a single word of what you put in your first draft, but its infinitely easier to work off of something that’s already on paper. Sometimes a single line that just came to you in the moment may be the thing that unlocks the whole project for you.

**Avoid the “history report” trap.** You don’t need to cover the person’s ENTIRE life in your project. “This happened and then this happened” projects will put the audience to sleep. Pick a moment you want to focus on. We’ll learn way more about your subject by seeing them deal with something specific than we will by seeing you gloss over everything that’s happened in their life.

**Give your character a strong objective with high stakes.** It all starts with a strong objective. Make sure your character is fighting for something IN THE MOMENT. Talking about how your childhood sucked and how your mom never loved you is not interesting. Watching you fight for your mother’s love in the moment could be interesting.

**Don’t wait too long to get on your feet and off book.** At a certain point you have to stop editing the script in your head and find the story on its feet. By now, you know that the big discoveries in any rehearsal process happen when you know the words and they’re in your body. Don’t short change that process.

**Be self-motivated.** Keep up with the work and don’t put it off. Your adviser shouldn’t have to hunt you down to make sure you’re staying on top of your process and deadlines. Do the work…plain and simple.

**Keep your design concept simple.** This is an acting senior project. Make sure the bulk of your energy goes into that work. This doesn’t mean you can’t be creative with how you stage it, but don’t let the design elements take too much of your attention.

**Be gentle with yourself.** There may come many times during your process where you think you’ll never get there. It may seem like you’re lost and will never be able to come even close to the project you imagined when you started it all. Breathe and be gentle with yourself. Nothing good will come from beating yourself up. Take it step by step and trust in the magic of the process.

PART II

REQUIREMENTS

# PLAYING TIME FOR ONE-PERSON SHOWS

There is a strict limit on project playing of 15 minutes. This time is not to be exceeded. It is important that the student, working with his/her advisor, carefully establish a consistent playing time.

The first step is to select the subject. The most important consideration is a strong interest in the person. People whose lives have conflicts and climactic incidents lead to a script that has a strong dramatic shape.

There must be sufficient material available on the person. Preliminary research will help determine this. Letters, articles and/or interviews are especially useful because they can provide the subjects voice and possible dialogue. Biographies alone may be insufficient. Consult with faculty and others.

The dramatic structure of the script should reflect basic understanding of exposition, rising dramatic action through conflict, a crisis and climax and a resolution. Where and when does your play take place? Why is the person speaking? The feed-back from the advisor and others will help to move from a rough draft through revisions to the finished script.

The project is a one-person show. Students should use other actors in it only as practical support, and only after other options have been explored.

# CREATIVE ASSISTANCE

The script, direction and the minimal production elements are the responsibility of the student. He/she may receive advice from faculty, students or others, and during the rehearsal process the advisor and others may attend and provide feed-back. There is to be no director in the usual sense of that function. The student is responsible for all creative decisions.

# PROJECT PRODUCTION BOOK

The candidate will prepare a production book which is to be submitted to the faculty advisor. The final grade will not be given until this book has been reviewed.

The following are to be included in the Production Book:

1. **Research.** A complete bibliography, in proper form. A detailed character analysis giving background and history. Notes on concept development ideas. Personal interviews as research should be submitted in written transcription. Students may also include pictures and other visual material.
2. **The Script.** The script should contain all stage directions, and cues. Early drafts may also be included.
3. **Given Circumstances.** Provide a comprehensive list of the GIVEN CIRCUMSTANCES of your character in this play. Answer in detail all the WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, WHY AND HOWs pertaining to your character’s situation.
4. **The Acting Score.** The score should include the following for your character:
   1. SUPER OBJECTIVE for the play
   2. OBSTACLE(S) to achieving that objective.
   3. STAKES: Specifically, what does your character have to WIN? What does your character have to LOSE?
   4. Divide the script into larger SECTIONS and smaller BEATS. Name each section. Each beat shall have listed in the left side margin, the OBJECTIVE, TACTIC AND OBSTACLE.
   5. Mark DISCOVERIES or realizations with a D at the point in the text where the discovery is made. The discovery should be described in the left side margin.

See Appendix A for an example

1. **The Movement Score.** Complete the Movement Score that you will find in Appendix B.
2. **Character Development.** An account should be given of how the character was developed vocally, physically and emotionally.
3. **Rehearsal Log.** A detailed log that covers each rehearsal should be kept. It should identify goals for each rehearsal, evaluation of how they were met.
4. **Production Crew.** A list of the names and phone numbers of all crew should be provided in a clear, directory form.
5. **Ground plan.** A neat, correct-to-scale ground plan should be submitted.
6. **Publicity.** Samples of all publicity material and the program should be included.

PART III

PRODUCTION GUIDELINES

# SCALE OF PRODUCTION

The emphasis of the projects should be on the performance. Production guidelines are formulated to limit the scale of productions. They are to be followed. Requests to exceed their limitations will be denied.

All production and technical elements, and rehearsal schedules must be approved by the Technical Director.

# SCENERY/PROPERTIES GUIDELINES

1. Scenic elements will be limited to a few pieces of acting class furniture and/or blocks. Props should be similarly limited. Approval of all scenery/properties is entirely at the discretion of the staff and faculty. Students cannot bring anything into the theatre space without prior permission.
2. The scene shop, materials and equipment may not be used for projects.
3. Tools and certain perishables (such as gaffer's tape) must be checked out through the staff technical director. All borrowed items must be returned immediately after use.
4. No painting may be done on the stock scenery, props or floor.
5. Approved scenic elements must not interfere with any classes. All projects must be completely struck immediately after the performance. Any items brought in and not removed during strike will be thrown away.

# LIGHTING GUIDELINES

1. No lighting equipment which is not part of the permanent plot of the theatre space is allowed.
2. A time must be scheduled before the technical rehearsals with the TD staff to review the operation of the lighting control board.
3. Lighting is limited to a few cues including lights up and lights down. Approval of all lighting choices is entirely at the discretion of the staff and faculty.

# SOUND GUIDELINES

All sound elements are under the supervision of the staff technical director. Meetings and sound recording sessions must be scheduled in advance.

1. Sound elements are limited to a few cues including pre and post show. Approval of all sound choices are entirely at the discretion of the staff and faculty.
2. The sound set-up in DM 150 is to be used as is. A time should be scheduled with the TD staff for instruction on operating the system.

# COSTUME GUIDELINES

When considering a costume for your senior project, you should do your best to capture the feel of the character while understanding that there are some constraints in terms of what you can get.

You may check out some pieces from the costume shop, but you will likely not be able to check out a full costume.

You must make an appointment to consult with Marina and Blair. You should fill out the form attached as Appendix C and bring it with you to your meeting along with some research images. The form will ask you to list all costume pieces you will want to wear.

During that meeting you will come up with a plan for how you will obtain your costume pieces. The costume shop will allow you to check out only select costume pieces, they will also help you come up with a plan for how you will obtain the rest.

Any costume piece checked out from the costume shop must be treated with care and respect. At the conclusion of your project, you will need to have your pieces cleaned (some pieces may require dry cleaning) and returned to the costume shop. Blair will then sign off that you have returned all pieces in good condition. You will not receive a grade until all materials have been returned.

The costume shop will not make any alterations to checked out pieces. You may make minor alterations yourself so long as you have approval from the costume shop.

# PUBLICITY AND PROGRAMS

The student must produce publicity for their projects. They may do so individually or in conjunction with their classmates. The publicity may consist of poster/flyers, social media, etc. and programs.

# PERFORMANCE

After each individual project performance the audience will remain in the house. Acknowledgements and thanks can be addressed in the program. The performers may choose to take a group bow at the end of the evening.

# STRIKE

Senior Project shows must be struck immediately after the performance. Borrowed items must be returned to their proper storage. All items brought in from off-campus are to be removed during strike. The theatre space is to be left in a clean and orderly condition. The advisors will check that the strike is complete and that all items have been removed and/or returned. No grade will be given until all is complete.

PART IV

EVALUATION

# Grading Criteria

The Senior Project grade is assigned by the project faculty advisor based upon the following considerations:

1. The performance skills shown, including the level of artistic insight and practical technical skills.
2. The consistent creative development shown during the project, including the amount of time given to mature script, performance and production ideas.
3. The written presentation of research, whether it is of sufficient quantity and quality and whether it is presented in a clear, correct form.
4. The presentation of the production book, whether it contains the necessary elements and is clearly, correctly and neatly produced.
5. The efficient planning and organization of all production details; whether scheduled deadlines were consistently met.
6. The respect shown for the theatre space, production equipment and prop and costume items during rehearsal and strike.
7. The professional working attitude shown with peers and faculty and staff. Especially important is the working relationship created between the student and his/her production team members.

Appendix A  
Example of an Acting Score

Appendix B

Movement Score

CHARACTER

Character’s Name:

Archetype:

Animal:

Image:

Movement Restrictions:

Gesture:

Personal Tick:

Personal space:

DEPORTMENT & MANNERS

Stance:

Posture:

Walk:

Sit & Rise:

Greetings:

Space:

Time:

Weight:

Dimensional Scale (high, deep) Usage:

Shape:

Effort Action (i.e. punch wring):

Main Element (i.e. Fire, Water etc.):

Chekhov:

Qualities of Movement-Do they have one that dominates? (Molding, Flying, Radiating , Floating, Legato & Staccato):

Four Brothers(i.e. whole, ease, beauty, form):

Three Sisters(i.e. balancing, floating, falling):

Color:

Physical Center(i.e. point of the nose):

Three-Fold Body /Do they have one that dominates?(i.e. heart, pelvis and intellect):

Atmosphere(i.e. external and internal):

Imaginary Body(include a drawing):

Psychological Gesture(i.e. expand, contract, push, pull etc.):

Additional Notes (Rehearsal Discoveries):