



THTR 490 – Directed Research – Sound Design
63205D

Units: 4.0

Spring 2025, Wednesday 12-1:50

Location: DAB Sound Lab (Lecture) or Bing Lobby
(Musician session)

Instructor: Noel Nichols

Office: Jef 206

Office Hours: By appointment

Contact Info: noel.nichols@usc.edu , 623-249-1650 (personal number, texts preferred before a call)

Final Exam Date: 5/9 11a-1p

Live Music Sessions - 1/29, 2/12, 3/5, 3/26, 4/9

Course Description

THTR 490 will use practical experience to give students direct insight into mic'ing instruments for both live and studio performances. During 5-6 sessions with professional musicians, students will hear for themselves the impact of mic choice and placement/technique on the audience experience of the sound. Musician sessions will be spaced around additional sections where we learn about music theory, timbre and harmonics, musician communication, musical theatre and live music scheduling and production considerations.

Learning Objectives

Students will demonstrate an understanding of the impact of the technology in studio and reinforcement settings on the audience experience of various musical instruments, and will create their own personal preferences and ideas about how they will approach these tasks in their professional futures. Students will also have a developed vocabulary for communication with musicians and time management for equipment set up and tuning needs for live reinforcement.

Prerequisite(s): Limited to Junior and Senior Students. THTR 236, 336, 436 recommended.

Co-Requisite(s): N/A

Concurrent Enrollment: N/A

Recommended Preparation: THTR 236, 336, 436 recommended. Background familiarity with live sound reinforcement systems and digital consoles/DAWs required.

Course Notes

The course will split between remote learning experiences on Zoom, live in-person classroom sessions, and practical sessions with hired musicians. The musician dates will be set in advance of the course start, but the remote vs in-person for lecture based sessions will vary depending on the needs of the semester, and will be confirmed no later than 24 hours in advance of scheduled session.

Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required

Personal laptop computer with internet access and professional grade headphones are required for this course. A local DAW (ProTools, Reaper, Audition or Logic Pro) recommended for additional at-home recording and analysis.

Suggested Readings and Supplementary Materials

Assigned readings and video/listening materials will be provided and/or available online.

SUGGESTED TEXTS:

The Yamaha Sound Reinforcement Handbook
Gary Davis and Ralph Jones

Shure Microphone Techniques for Recording (Online Publication)

Textures and Timbre – An Orchestrators Handbook

MATERIALS:

- **USB memory stick with at least 8GB of memory space**
- **Pencil or pen and paper at each class meeting for note taking/drawing diagrams**

Description and Assessment of Assignments

This course will primarily be assessed on the basis of attendance and participation. While these assignments have been designed to supplement the live sessions, **all assignments are subject to change in their content** to match the needs of the group to meet the overall goals of this research course.

- Journals – See Below
- New Friends Project – Select an instrument outside of the musical theatre zeitgeist to learn all about and present back to us.
- Composition Project – Create a single measure motif, and then extrapolate into a short multi-instrumental composition
- Band Mic'ing Project – Create a plan for a small musical theatre ensemble with your choice of microphone

Lecture Journal Requirement (30 Points):

In addition to the assignments above, students are required to complete a journal of lecture notes from all in class lectures and presentations. This should be a typed and edited version of your handwritten notes; it must be legible and easy to follow, and it must be submitted electronically as a PDF File. In addition, you should write a summary and analysis of each reading assignment, which should be included with your journal. (Note - Your class notes should NOT be a copy of the lecture slides from class. Lecture slides are discussion topics only – your notes should include the pertinent information you acquired from each discussion topic.) There will be three submission dates:

Submission 1 – No later than 5pm Friday at the end of Week 5

Submission 2 – No later than 5pm Friday at the end of Week 10

Submission 3 – No later than 5pm Friday at the end of Week 15

Grading Breakdown

Assignment	Points	% of Grade
Journals	30	30
Class Participation	15	15
New Friends	5	5
Composition	10	10
Band Mic'ing	10	10
Live Exercises (6x5)	30	30
TOTAL	100	100

Grading Scale (Example)

Course final grades will be determined using the following scale

A	95-100
A-	90-94
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D+	67-69
D	63-66
D-	60-62
F	59 and below

Assignment Submission Policy

Assignments will be submitted and shared with class during assigned review sessions. Following group discussions, assignments should be submitted via email or on google drive per instructor request. As we are a directed research course, our assignments will remain off of blackboard. For feedback on course progress, please schedule appointment with instructor for review.

Sharing of course materials outside of the learning environment

USC policy prohibits sharing of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment.

SCampus Section 11.12(B)

Distribution or use of notes or recordings based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study is a violation of the USC Student Conduct Code. This includes, but is not limited to, providing materials for distribution by services publishing class notes. This restriction on unauthorized use also applies to all information, which had been distributed to students or in any way had been displayed for use in relationship to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the Internet or via any other media. (See Section C.1 Class Notes Policy).

Course evaluation

Course evaluation occurs at the end of the semester university-wide. It is an important review of students' experience in the class. You should expect to receive an email update once the system has launched to provide your feedback on this course. In addition, you are always welcome to connect with with me as the instructor to offer any feedback on the course.

Additional Policies

Attendance – As we are a once-a-week class with a small class size, there can be no unexcused absences. If you need to miss a class for any reason, please inform the instructor by email or text as soon as possible so that we can pivot accordingly. It is especially important that you are present to work with our live musicians.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

	Topics/Daily Activities	Deliverable/ Due Dates
Week 1 LIVE	Introduction and Review, Review Mic Specs and Techniques, Timbre	ASSIGN: Lecture Journal
Week 2 LIVE	Musical orchestration, Brass Family,	
Week 3 LIVE	LIVE SESSION #1 – Brass	
Week 4 LIVE	Sheet Music Reading Review woodwinds and brass, instrument families	ASSIGN: New Friend Project
Week 5 LIVE	LIVE SESSION #2 – Woodwinds	DUE: Journal #1
Week 6 REMOTE	Review woodwindss, review new friend project, intro to strings	DUE: New friend project
Week 7 REMOTE	NO CLASS	ASSIGN: Composition project pt.1
Week 8 LIVE	LIVE SESSION #3 – String Quartet	
Week 9 LIVE	Intervals, Harmony, Melody, Key-Pianos/Keys	DUE: Composition Project pt. 1 ASSIGN: Pt. 2
Week --	NO CLASS – Spring Break	
Week 10 LIVE	LIVE SESSION #4 – Piano/Keys	DUE: Journal #2
Week 11 ASYNCH	Roles in composition/ music production. Percussion/Rhythm	DUE: Composition Project pt 2
Week 12 LIVE	LIVE SESSION #5 – Bass and Percussion w/ Something Rotten pit	
Week 13 LIVE	Review percussion, DI's, Transcription	ASSIGN: Band Mic'ing Project
Week 14 REMOTE	LIVE SESSION ALTERNATE/ No Class	
Week 15 LIVE	MIDI Methods	DUE: Journal #3

FINAL	Date: For the date and time of the final for this class, consult the USC <i>Schedule of Classes</i> at classes.usc.edu .	DUE: Mic'ing Project
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SDA PRODUCTIONS, ISPS, AND EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

SDA productions, ISPs and Extracurricular Activities* will not excuse you from any class work. There will be no exceptions made for absences in class, missed or delayed assignments, homework or lack of class participation resulting from your involvement in any of the above. Your grade will reflect your work in this class, independent from work in any other class or activity.

*Activities that have been officially sanctioned by the larger university (such as marching band, song girls, or varsity sports) are exempt. You must submit official documentation to your professor regarding your participation in an event prior to your absence.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct:

Plagiarism – presenting someone else's ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Part B, Section 11, "Behavior Violating University Standards" policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

Statement for Students with Disabilities

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from OSAS. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me (or to TA) as early in the semester as possible. OSAS is located in GFS 120 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Website for OSAS and contact information: (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 814-4618 (Vidoe Phone), (213) 740-8216 (FAX) ability@usc.edu.

Emergency Preparedness/Course Continuity in a Crisis

In case of a declared emergency if travel to campus is not feasible, USC executive leadership will announce an electronic way for instructors to teach students in their residence halls or homes using a combination of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technologies. See the university's site on Campus Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

Equity, Diversity & Inclusion + Intimacy in Theater Consent Culture Statement:

Through our pluralistic approach of diverse pedagogies, methodologies, ideologies, and modalities of artistic expression, we invite(engage) and challenge students to expand their breadth and depth of knowledge, complexity, and range of the human experience. Even though we nurture, guide, and challenge our students to embrace the unknown or unfamiliar and step outside of their comfort zones through storytelling/art, we aim to practice effective strategies and offer tools to students mindful of their physical, psychological, social, and emotional wellbeing. In alignment with professional and industry standards, we will integrate core principles and techniques of Intimacy in Theater and Building Cultures of Affirmative Consent. This will provide agency, offer resources and support to the teachers, students, directors, and staff to establish healthy boundaries of consent when working on material that is physically, intimately, or emotionally charged content in both the classroom and production.

SDA Student Support & Reporting Form:

To facilitate a supportive environment of accountability, SDA has created an internal system of reporting for students to address issues/concerns and to offer feedback or suggestions for improvement. This mechanism provides a pathway for reporting and offering feedback without fear of retaliation or judgment. Any submission filed through this form will be reviewed and processed accordingly through SDA Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion.

To file a report, please visit: <https://bit.ly/SDAstudentreporting>

Support Systems:

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call
studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call
suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press “0” after hours – 24/7 on call

studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED) - (213) 740-5086 | Title IX – (213) 821-8298
equity.usc.edu, titleix.usc.edu

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298
usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care_report

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office of Equity and Diversity | Title IX for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Student Accessibility Services - (213) 740-0776

<https://osas.usc.edu>

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

USC Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 821-4710

campussupport.usc.edu

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity at USC - (213) 740-2101

diversity.usc.edu

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost’s Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call

dps.usc.edu, emergency.usc.edu

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call

dps.usc.edu

Non-emergency assistance or information.