M.F.A. in Theatre – Arts Leadership Program

Structure
Over the three-year period of the program, each student will work closely with Amanda Nelson, the program’s primary advisor, and have available the knowledge and talent of the entire Theatre Arts faculty whose members contribute to the student’s program of study. M.F.A. students may also utilize resources and take courses from other departments across the Virginia Tech campus.

Led by the primary advisor and in consultation with the student’s graduate committee, the student will develop a personalized plan of study specifically tailored to her/his own experience, needs, and goals.

Each student is evaluated and graded on how well she/he achieves the program of study by demonstrating growth and development in the overarching areas. The evaluation is an on-going process and includes graded class projects and assignments. End of semester graduate committee reviews provide another method of evaluation.

The degree requires a minimum of 54 graduate credit hours and a B or better grade average. To maintain assistantship support, students must be enrolled in at least 12 credit hours each semester.

Practical, hands-on projects form the foundation of the program, challenging students to think critically, problem solve, and respond creatively.

Service to the School and Hands-On Learning
A key area of practical experience is provided through assistantships. Typically, in the first year of the program, students in the Arts Leadership program will be assigned to work 20 hours a week in the Management Office of the School of Performing Arts. The Management Office is responsible for marketing/publicity and the front of house for School productions. In the second year of the program, an assistantship in the Center for the Arts at Virginia Tech is possible, providing practical experience in a professional arts center.

Theatre and Event Production and the Arts Leadership Program
Elemental to the program is the direct connection of theory to practice. To ensure that students in the Arts Leadership program have the opportunity for study and experience in multiple facets of theatre production:

- All students in the M.F.A. program will participate in the Graduate Seminar during their first two years (see description in “Studios” section below for more details).
- Students may be assigned assistantships in the management office, costume or scene shop, or students may serve as a graduate teaching assistant in the classroom. (Students are placed “where” needed.)
- Coursework will, when possible, be directly tied to and connected with productions or projects in the School of Performing Arts.
- Students are encouraged to attend in departmental Production meetings.
- Elective courses in other areas of Theatre are open to Arts Leadership students, including directing and stage management.
- Each summer, students are strongly encouraged to find work and/or volunteer opportunities with a theatre or performing arts organization in a role consistent with career goals.

Studios
Studios are weekly tutorials with the primary advisor, School of Performing Arts faculty, or when appropriate other members of the Virginia Tech faculty. Studios serve to provide both practical experience and in-depth study. Studios may be conducted one-on-one or in small groups and may be 3-6 credit hours each. Arts
Leadership small group studios are specifically designed to promote discussion, examination, and exploration of topics relevant to today’s arts sector.

An Immersion Studio (6 credits) is required for all incoming arts leadership students. The semester-long Immersion Studio is designed to introduce leadership and management terms and concepts; develop collaborative work habits among members of the cohort; explore community engagement through hands-on work at the Center for the Arts; and identify particular areas of interest and areas for professional growth through in-depth assessment of individual skills and strengths. The Immersion Studio also incorporates one of the Studio topics noted below.

Following are courses in our core curriculum. Please note that due to the intimate size of our program, and to ensure that each cohort has the opportunity to study these core areas, these Studios are offered on a rotating basis (topics may be repeated to allow for more in-depth study and practice over time).

Arts Advocacy and Political Change- Studying historical approaches and researching current models to enhance understanding and form new paradigms in arts advocacy and policy.

Financial Management in the Arts- Practicing budget development and examining financial reporting for nonprofit and commercial performing arts organizations.

Development- Surveying fundraising strategies in the non-profit arts sector and learning about investor strategies for start-ups and commercial enterprises.

Arts Marketing and Publicity- Garnering practical field experience with both traditional marketing strategies and new media.

Strategic Management and Long-Range Planning in the Arts- Studying current practices in strategic management, analyzing planning processes and new trends in developing and implementing organizational strategies (including capacity building, change capital, and balancing artistic and administrative initiatives).

Human Resources in the Arts- Examining a range of topics including: team building and organizational culture; organizational structures; recruitment and hiring; terminations and layoffs; managing volunteers; succession and succession planning; and contract and union negotiation.

Artistic Management and Decision Making- Exploring the practice of artistic selection including designing a season and the fundamentals of casting performers, hiring staff, and managing artistic collaborations.

The Studios noted above will be offered on a rotating basis, as determined by the primary advisor, to ensure that all cohorts have the opportunity to study these core topics.

All M.F.A. in Theatre students participate in the Graduate Seminar, a two-year, weekly seminar that examines issues and topics in the field. This series of courses provides students from all of the M.F.A. in Theatre program areas to study and collaborate together.

Students also have the opportunity to focus their study through Special Topics designed to foster a student’s individual interests. A total of at least 3 Special Topics should be incorporated into each student’s program plan. Special Topics of Study may be repeated over several semesters to allow for in-depth exploration and research. Special Topics may be 3-6 credit hours each.
Following are suggested areas of exploration. *Students may also design their own areas of study with advisor approval or select courses from other departments to fulfill this requirement.*

**Technology Trends** - Surveying current trends in technology and the arts and their impact on marketing and development as well as on artistic and educational practices in the field.

**Governance and Volunteer Structures and Practices** - Examining Board structures and volunteer programs in arts organizations.

**Ensembles and Community Partnerships in Arts Making** - Surveying historical approaches and current models with specific emphasis on examining governance and organisational structures in ensemble and community arts making.

**Law and Ethics in the Arts** - Learning about legal structures including procedures for incorporation, maintenance of tax-exempt status, intellectual property rights in the 21st century; labor and unions; contracts; and examining theoretical and practical approaches to ethics in the field.

**Business Communication** – Developing presentation and negotiation skills for marketing, development, and labor relations. (*This studio may be combined with the studio on Grant and Proposal Writing listed below for a total of 6 credit hours in one semester.*)

**Grant and Proposal Writing** - Strengthening writing and editing skills. (*This studio may be combined with the studio on Development listed above for a total of 6 credit hours in one semester.*)

**Arts Education/Community Outreach** -- Exploring current trends and models for in-school and afterschool programs for youths; programs for seniors; and/or distance learning programs.

**Producing** - Exploring the roles and responsibilities of producing. As an assigned producer for a School production or workshop, the student will work with key faculty and staff to manage and track the production budget; develop a marketing/publicity plan; and observe auditions and select rehearsals.

**Electives**
The program allows for exploration across fields, and students are encouraged to develop a Plan of Study that encompasses courses from the School of Performing Arts and from programs across campus including classes in Business, Communication, Leadership and Social Change, Management, and Urban Affairs and Planning.

**Internship**
The M.F.A. program requires, at minimum, a full semester internship designed to provide professional practice and strong positioning for career advancement upon graduation. The internship is typically conducted in the third year of the program.

**Final Project**
The M.F.A. program culminates with a final project that integrates the practical and academic experiences of the student synthesizing skills acquired through the program. Both a written report and oral presentation of the project are required.