Theater: Contemporary Performance MFA

The MFA Theater: Contemporary Performance program is committed to creating a laboratory for the research of new techniques, aesthetics, and pedagogies based on an understanding of the evolution of traditional forms from Eastern and Western lineages. The program provides tools for the self-generative artist to both create and disseminate about performative work as active social and cultural entrepreneurs.

This 48-credit, two-year program is the first graduate program of its type combining performance-making with contemplative practices to encourage and explore authenticity in the arts. Students are plugged into an immersive studio environment, engaging the body, mind, and voice in performance-making.

Production work and learning to speak eloquently about what we experience on stage as performers and observers are also central to the development of well-rounded and engaged practitioners.

The curriculum centers around training the body, voice, and mind for performance-making, including:

- Contemplative arts and meditation training
- Performance-making techniques, including a unique perspective on The Viewpoints training as created by Wendell Beavers and Mary Overlie
- Alternative modes of generating text for performance and playwriting, including arbitrary systems in performance, frames theory, site-specific work, and meta-cognitive writing techniques as developed by Jeffrey Sichel
- Extended Vocal Technique, based on the work of Roy Hart, applied to spoken and sung text
- Body-centered somatic techniques, including BMC and experiential anatomy
- The artist as social and cultural entrepreneur
- Exploration of global engagement, social justice, and intercultural performance traditions

Our program is a laboratory, ensemble-based training in which you will work in close collaboration with your cohort of 12. Learning is student-driven, with special attention given to each individual’s talents and interests. While you may choose to focus on a particular discipline, the training is interdisciplinary by nature, encouraging cross-pollination and the exploration of hybrid forms.

We are interested in encouraging artists to take their place as entrepreneurs, leaders in contemporary performance, and educators, developing and presenting socially, politically, and culturally relevant works in a national and global context.

Naropa is a founding member of the UNESCO-ITI Network for Performing Arts in Higher Education. As the only affiliated graduate program in the U.S., we’re leading the way in global engagement through the arts.

Degree Requirements

The following outline is subject to change based on guest artists in residence each year. Training in contemplative practice, physical performance techniques, acting, directing, design, scripting, dance, performance-making, voice, and practice as research are ongoing throughout the curriculum. Students take 12 credits per semester, for a total of 48 credits.

First Year

Contemplative Training
- Meditation Practice and View
- Contemplative Dance Practice and Pedagogy

Physical Performance Techniques
- Somatic Foundations and Experiential Anatomy Lab
- Developmental Technique

Performance-Making
- Foundations in Acting
- Intensive on the Viewpoints (offered every other year)
- Guest Artist Workshops and Residencies with leading National and International Professionals in the field (Academic Year 16/17 has included artists from China, India, Iran, Israel, Mexico, The Philippines, South Africa, Russia, and The United States)
- Alternative Modes of Contemporary Performance-Making
- Modes of Text Analysis and Self-Scripting
- First Year Project Presentations
- Ensemble Development, Performance Project
- Silent Playwrighting Retreat

Voice
- Introduction to Extended Voice in the tradition of Roy Hart Theatre
- Vocal Intensive: Application to classical texts and musical forms
- Knight-Thompson speech & dialect training

Experiential Research
- Theory and Context
- Practice as Research and Dissemination
- Intercultural Performance
- Social and Cultural Entrepreneurship

SUBTOTAL 24 credits (12 Fall, 12 Spring)

Second Year

Contemplative Training
- Meditation Practice and View II
- Deepening Mindfulness/Awareness Practice
- Contemplative Dance

Physical Performance Techniques
- Somatic Applications
- Developmental Technique II
• Contact Improvisation

Performance-Making
• Advanced Acting [styles including classical forms]
• Advanced Developmental [Physical] Technique
• The Viewpoints: Composition, Directing, and Performance
  [offered every other year]
• Moment Work as developed by Tectonic Theatre Project
  [every other year]
• Guest Artist Workshops and Residencies with leading National
  and International Professionals in the field [Academic Year
  16/17 has included artists from China, India, Iran, Israel,
  Mexico, The Philippines, South Africa, Russia, and The United
  States]
• Musical Composition
• Second Year Ensemble Development, Performance Project
• Embodied Poetics
• Site-Specific Performance

Technique
• Modes of Text Analysis and Self-Scripting
• Alternative Modes of Contemporary Performance-Making

Voice
• Extended Voice: Application to Performance
• Vocal Pedagogy and Practice

Experiential Research
• Theory and Context
• Practice as Research and Dissemination
• Social and Cultural Entrepreneurship
• Intercultural Performance
• Somatic Pedagogy
• Pedagogy of the Viewpoints [every other year]
• Voice Pedagogy

Thesis
• Thesis Practicum
• Thesis Project

SUBTOTAL 24 credits [12 Fall, 12 Spring]

TOTAL CREDITS 48