

Course Syllabus

Production Crew class, fall semester 2026-27

Required Course, 3 Units

Instructor: Melanie Holcomb

melanhh@andrew.cmu.edu

412-901-6080

Overview

Each semester, freshman vocal majors will be assigned to load-in, run crew and strike on the School of Music Opera productions. Producing live opera requires the collaboration of professionals in a wide range of disciplines. This Production Crew class is your 1st step in becoming a professional part of the opera world. Our productions will give you insights and experience in a variety of areas that are vital to a successful performance. One day, you will be the performers on the stage. Knowing the workings of the backstage area, the jobs involved and how they affect the performer, will help to inform your own work and enable you to more effectively communicate & work collaboratively as a professional artist.

Objectives

- To gain a working understanding of the procedures, processes & personnel involved in a collaborative theatrical production
- To understand, execute and maintain your assigned position on each production and to learn to work together as a whole to create a smooth performance for all involved.
- To understand and maintain professional punctuality, behavior and etiquette throughout staging rehearsals, technical rehearsals and performances
- To experience a variety of performance spaces and types of productions. To learn the ability to adapt to different environments & needs for each production.
- To understand and practice theatre workplace safety, production techniques and backstage operations to keep yourself and others safe.

Schedule

Crew will have call times. Students will report to the show's production manager or stage manager to sign in & out of their work calls. Crew calls are typically scheduled from 6:30 PM to 10:30 PM, with some daytime hours on weekends. Hours may vary depending upon each show's needs.

For all types of calls, the call begins at the time it is scheduled. Be checked in and ready for work at the top of the call (not in the bathroom or walking in the door). **Crews will be dismissed at the end of their call by their Production Manager or Stage Manager.**

Throughout the semester we will use the website here to communicate schedules, crew calls and requirements for each show. Please save this link and refer to it frequently:

<https://128.2.49.70/26-27/screw/>

The dates on the calendar below are ALL REQUIRED for this class. Please put them in your calendar & do not schedule anything to conflict with them. The calendar reflects dates for the school year as we know them. There may be updates to the Spring semester.

Definitions

Load-in happens before Technical & Dress Rehearsals. All elements of the show from each production area are brought into the performance space & installed; scenery, lighting, sound, wardrobe, props, etc. Students will work in various areas during load-in, to install these elements, with a crew head supervising each area.

Run Crew are the people working in each production area during the performance. Students will be assigned to one of the following areas: deck stage, fly rail, wardrobe, electrics/lighting, sound, supertitles. The Stage Manager is in charge of all crew members, but you may also have a crew head in your area. Run crew members will be assigned specific tasks to do during the run of the show and will learn & perform these tasks during technical/dress rehearsals and performances. NOTE: Those assigned to electrics crew may be asked to climb ladders, ascend in electric lifts, and perform tasks on the grid above the stage, all of which are likely to be a problem for anyone with issues being at heights. Please be sure to inform the instructor as soon as possible if you need to avoid being assigned to electrics.

Strike happens once the opera has completed all of its performances. All elements of the show are taken down and out of the theatre. Students will work in various areas during strike with a crew head supervising each area.

Each student will be given the opportunity to communicate their preference of crew prior to assignments being made. There is no guarantee that students will be given first choice of crew, but all efforts will be made to accommodate as many students' choices as possible.

Attendance

Students are expected to attend all calls, to be on time and be dressed to work.

Because of the teamwork and collaboration of live performance we all depend a great deal on each other. There is no one to replace you in your specific job. **Therefore, the penalties for unexcused absences are formidable. An unexcused absence is defined as any failure to appear for a crew call or a portion of a crew call which is not approved in advance. In addition, arriving late, departing early, or disappearing during the work call will lower your grade for the course. Absence during Tech/Show are not allowed.**

If conflicts are unresolvable, a student must ask for approval from the Instructor *in advance*. The student must also inform the crew head for whom they are working. **In the case of illness or emergency, notifications can be no later than 10:00 AM on the day of the call.** Excused absences will be made up at a 1 to 1 rate/hr, at a time determined by the Instructor.

Unexcused Crew Absence

When an unexcused absence from crew occurs, the student must schedule a meeting with Melanie Holcomb and the Head of Opera, Crystal Manich. After discussion of the absence, the student will either be removed from the class & repeat it another semester, receive a failing grade in the class or take a C for the class and be given a makeup crew assignment at a time to be determined by the Instructor, though this is not always possible.

Any absence or lateness to the makeup assignment will lead to a failing grade. Any further absence from crew calls will trigger automatic failure in the class.

Conduct & Safety

A theatre can be a dangerous place. **Students will be working in circumstances where serious injury is a possibility, your behavior must reflect your awareness of this fact.** Horseplay of any kind will not be tolerated. Students are to be attentive to safety at all times and must watch out for each other as well as themselves. Safety procedures are for the protection of you and those working around you. They are not flexible.

Personal electronic devices, are not to be used to the detriment of safe awareness of your surroundings or any production or run call. You are responsible for being on time for your cues and attentive to safety around you. **Inattention or missed cues may result in loss of electronic device privileges. If your electronics become a distraction or a problem they will be held by Production Management until the end of the call.**

Appropriate Dress for work calls

For Load-in & Strike calls, students will wear long pants and flat, closed toed work shoes. Loose fitting/flowing clothing is not permitted as it may become snagged. Students with long hair must tie it back.

For Tech/Dress & Performance calls, students must wear black long pants, black shirt (with no logo or writing), black shoes appropriate to their assignment, and black socks. (Unless otherwise informed by stage management) Items with logos can be taped over with black tape for the show. Please speak with your Stage Manager about specifics. Don't buy a whole new wardrobe for this.

Anyone arriving at a call inappropriately dressed will be sent to change for safety and considered late for the call.

Grading

Scores are assessed per the matrix below & the view of the instructor. Evaluations from Crew Heads, Staff/Faculty and Stage Management will be collected at the end of each production. Reasons for poor scores may be based on tardiness, disregard of safety or stage procedures, undisciplined or unprofessional behavior or frequent required reinforcement of concepts or procedures.

Evaluation Matrix

Score	Participation	Score	Mastery of Concepts	Score	Demonstration of Skills
20	A dependable, enthusiastic leader or participant. Always on time, ready to work, attentive.	5	Exceeds course content. Is able to explain & contextualize concepts for peers.	5	Is consistently able to properly demonstrate and debug skills for others.
18	Does good work, stays busy, inquisitive. Shows some leadership. Requires occasional redirection.	4	Shows ability to synthesize concepts, can apply learning to other areas. Some reminding.	4	Consistently applies proper skills, some mistakes, recognizes errors in work and can correct.
16	Completes basic tasks, shows some initiative, requires frequent redirection	3	Is able to correctly discuss course concepts, some mistakes, frequent reminding.	3	Applies proper method with some errors in work. Requires correction, redemonstration.
14	Shows up late, not ready to work, skips instructions, not dependable.	2	Can sometimes explain course concepts, frequent errors and reminding.	2	Requires frequent reminding of methods, frequent correction, not consistent work.

<u>Points</u>	<u>Grade</u>
27-30	A – Excellent work
24-26	B – Good
21-23	C – Satisfactory
18-20	D – Passing
17 and below	R – Failing

Any student not understanding any grade they have received is encouraged to make an appointment to discuss the work, the expectations, and their performance.

Taking care of yourself

In any theatrical profession, you are your most valuable instrument. Your health, safety and wellbeing are what support your ability to fulfill your creative pursuits. Please do your best to care for yourself during the long days. Sleep, eat well, take breaks and please reach out for conversation if you have any concerns. Really.

All of us benefit from support during times of struggle. You are not alone. There are many helpful resources available on campus and an important part of the college experience is learning how to ask for help. Asking for support sooner rather than later is helpful.

If you or anyone you know experiences academic stress, difficult life events, or feelings like anxiety or depression, we strongly encourage you to seek support. **Counseling and Psychological Services (CaPS) is here to help: call 412-268-2922 and visit their website at <http://www.cmu.edu/counseling/>.**

Consider reaching out to a friend, faculty or family member you trust for help getting connected to the support that can help you.

If you are worried about affording food or feeling insecure about food, there are resources on campus that can help. Email the CMU Food Pantry Coordinator to schedule an appointment. It is easy, no judgement, they really want to help.

Pantry Coordinator: cmu-pantry@andrew.cmu.edu or 412-268-8704 (SLICE office)

CFA Office of Engagement and Belonging

The Office of Engagement and Belonging for the College of Fine Arts serves as the centralized resource for programming, professional development, consultation and resources that foster wellbeing, belonging, continuous learning and creative collaboration across the CFA community.

We offer a variety of services grounded in identity development and support of expanding understanding of what it means to live and work in a pluralistic society.

- Programming support for student events and engagement opportunities,
- Mentoring and coaching for students, faculty and staff,
- Continuous learning opportunities for our CFA community
- Oversight and management of the Concern Navigation Pathway

For questions or more information, email cfa-oeb@andrew.cmu.edu.

The Office of Engagement & Belonging is located at Hall of Arts 132.

CMU Bias Reporting

Carnegie Mellon is committed to fostering an environment where our community can grow, learn and ultimately thrive together. Sometimes things impact our community that don't violate any formal policies or require disciplinary action, but still cause harm and necessitate thoughtful education and restoration. To that end, the [Campus Climate and Bias Reporting Protocol \(CCBRP\)](#) is a non-disciplinary mechanism for reporting and informally resolving incidents of alleged bias focusing on education, restoration, and strengthening and upholding our core values as a university community. A student, staff, faculty member, third party, or campus visitor may report a Bias Incident to the Office for Institutional Equity. If you need guidance or are uncertain as to what your options are, please feel free to contact CFA's Office for Engagement & Belonging prior to submitting a report.

TLDR

DO

- Show up on time, ready to work.
- Pay attention to what's going on around you.
- Learn your job & take responsibility for it. Be proud of your work. Help others.
- Build on your knowledge with each new task/show.
- Take initiative, ask questions, be curious.
- Understand that safety is important in a theatre. Follow procedures.
- Keep a good calendar.

DON'T

- Be late. Early is on time, on time is late.
- Play around & not listen. This can be dangerous & is disrespectful of everyone's time.
- Think your job isn't important. The show can't happen without every element.
- 'Get through it' and not learn from the experience.
- 'Be basic', minimal basic work is "C" work at CMU.
- Make other people do your adulting. Show up, know your schedule.
- If you read this far, email me a picture of your favorite snack food. For real.

26-27 Opera Season Calendar

SUBJECT TO CHANGE - Check production webpage for updates

August						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	24	25	26	27	28	29
	1st Day of Classes					

September						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Aug 30	Aug 31	Sept 1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
	Labor Day No school	"TOTS" 1st rehearsal Studio B 6:30pm				
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
	Load-in - 6:30-10:30pm - WQED Studio A					
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
	Load-in - 6:30-10:30pm - WQED Studio A					
27	28	29	30			
	Load-in 6:30-10:30	Tech rehearsal 6:30-10:30				

October						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1	2	3
						Dress rehearsal 2:00-6:00pm
				Tech rehearsal 6:30-10:30		
Family weekend						
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
OFF	Dress rehearsal 6:30-10:30pm	Show 8pm	Show 8pm	Show 8pm	Show 8pm	
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
	Fall Break					
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
	STRIKE 6:30-10:30pm					
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

November						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
		Election Day No classes				
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
	"H&G" 1st rehearsal Studio B 6:30pm					
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
			Thanksgiving Break			
29	30					

December						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1	2	3	4	5
					Last day of class	
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Finals						
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
Winter Break						
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
Winter Break						
27	28	29	30	31		
Winter Break						

January						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					1	2
					Winter Break	
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Winter Break						
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Winter Break						
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
	MLK Day	1st day of Class				Dress rehearsal 2:00-6:00pm
		Load-in 6:30-10:30pm Chosky Theatre Purnell bldg		Tech rehearsal 6:30-10:30		
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
	Tech rehearsal 6:30-10:30pm	Tech rehearsal 6:30-10:30		Show 8pm	Show 8pm	Show 8pm

February						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Jan 31	1	2	3	4	5	6
Show 2pm Matinee		Strike 6:30-10:30pm WQED Studio A				
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27