

Course Information

Course Title: Fundamentals of Theatrical Design

Course Number: THET116-YS41

Term: *Summer 2026*

Credits: 3

Professors: Amir Mahdi Mahdavi, Katie Glenn,
Hannah Kelly,

Pronouns: Amir: he/him, Katie: They/She, Hannah:
she/her

Course Dates: July 13, 2026 - July 31, 2026

Course Times: MTuWThF 9:00am - 12:00pm

Classroom: PAC 2733

Emails: amirmm@umd.edu , kahglenn@umd.edu,
hkelly01@umd.edu

Office Hours:

Amir (By appointment)

Katie (By appointment)

Hannah (By appointment)

Course Description

The course is a beginning survey of Design for Live Performance. It will introduce the elements and principles of design as a compositional visual language for communicating clear and conceptually appropriate storytelling ideas for the stage. Through a variety of hands-on projects, discussions, and critiques students will learn the process and procedures to create theatrical designs in scenery, costume and lighting.

Learning Outcomes

After completing this course, students will be able to:

- Understand and participate in an abbreviated design process for each discipline covered.
- Make informed choices based on a concept statement that is created from script analysis and research from a designer perspective.
- Utilize standard theatrical design process techniques including research, conceptual development, and visual exploration in order to both critique and communicate artistic vision.
- Demonstrate an understanding of collaboration between designers, directors, and other members of the artistic team.

Required Resources

- Course Website: elms.umd.edu

This class also has a hands-on component which requires supplies. These supplies do not need to be brought to class every day. However, if you do not have them on the day they are needed it will affect your ability to participate in class. There are lockers available for storage through the Theatre Dept. The exact type and details of each item will be discussed on Day 1 and generally include:

- ***9 by 12 inch Sketchbook; student can decide between Sketch vs Drawing paper***

- [Drawing Pad](#)
- [Sketchbook](#)
- **9 by 12 inch Watercolor Sketchbook at least 20 pages.**
 - [Watercolor Paper](#)
- **Basic Watercolor Brush Set**
 - [Watercolor Brush Set](#)
- **Number 2 or HB Pencils Wooden or Mechanical**
- **1 Eraser**
 - [Eraser](#)
- **Tracing Paper Pad**
 - [Tracing Paper](#)

Total Estimated costs of required course materials: \$50.00

- Provided Texts:
 - ***The Visit to a Small Planet*** by Ellinor Fuchs
 - ***Heavier than...*** By Steve Yockey
 - ***The Snow Child*** By Tracy Wells
- *Any other course readings/materials will be uploaded and accessible through ELMS*

Course Structure

Classes will feature lectures, supervised studio time, discussions/critiques, and student presentations. Students will be given time in class to work on their projects, but they are expected to work independently outside the class.

Studio Workspace Expectations

THET116 is in part a studio class, and portions of the class projects can be done during class time. However, students are required to work on their respective projects outside the class time at home. Additionally, the Large Design Studio (CSPAC 2733) is available as a workspace for students at certain hours throughout the week. A schedule will be posted outside the classroom door. Students are responsible for keeping the studio in order and cleaning their workspaces after themselves. Students are also responsible for treating any borrowed tools and/or materials with respect and care. Repeat violators of these rules will be barred from using the studio and/or studio tools, which may affect their ability to complete course assignments.

Food and Drink

No food of any kind is allowed in the classroom. Drinks must be in a container with a sealed lid.

Electronic Devices

Students are allowed and encouraged to use laptops and/or tablets during class only to be used for research purposes. Students found to be repeatedly using their electronic devices for non-class reasons will be barred from using them in class.

Tips for Success in this Course

- **Participate.** I invite you to engage deeply, ask questions, and talk about the course content with your classmates. You can learn a great deal from discussing ideas and perspectives with your peers and professor. Participation can also help you articulate your thoughts and develop critical thinking skills.
- **Manage your time.** Students are often very busy, and I understand that you have obligations outside of this class. However, students do best when they plan adequate time that is devoted to course work. Block your schedule and set aside plenty of time to complete assignments including extra time to handle any technology related problems.
- **Login regularly.** I recommend that you log in to ELMS-Canvas several times a week to view announcements, discussion posts and replies to your posts. You may need to log in multiple times a day when group submissions are due.
- **Do not fall behind.** This class moves at a quick pace and each week builds on the previous content. If you feel you are starting to fall behind, check in with the instructor as soon as possible so we can troubleshoot together. It will be hard to keep up with the course content if you fall behind in the pre-work or post-work.
- **Use ELMS-Canvas notification settings.** Pro tip! Canvas ELMS-Canvas can ensure you receive timely notifications in your email or via text. Be sure to enable announcements to be sent instantly or daily.
- **Ask for help if needed.** If you need help with ELMS-Canvas or other technology, IT Support. If you are struggling with a course concept, reach out to me and your classmates for support.

Policies and Resources for Undergraduate Courses

It is our shared responsibility to know and abide by the University of Maryland's policies that relate to all courses, which include topics like:

- Academic integrity
- Student and instructor conduct
- Accessibility and accommodations
- Attendance and excused absences
- Grades and appeals
- Copyright and intellectual property

Please reference and review the [Office of Undergraduate Studies' Course-Related Policies](#) and follow up with us if you have questions.

Course Guidelines

Names/Pronouns and Self-Identifications:

The University of Maryland recognizes the importance of a diverse student body, and we are committed to fostering inclusive and equitable classroom environments. I invite you, if you wish, to tell us how you want to be referred to in this class, both in terms of your name and your pronouns (he/him, she/her, they/them, etc.). Keep in mind that the pronouns someone uses are not necessarily indicative of their gender identity. For more information about names and gender markers, visit the [LGBTQ+ Equity Center](#).

Additionally, it is your choice whether to disclose how you identify in terms of your gender, race, class, sexuality, religion, and dis/ability, among all aspects of your identity (e.g., should it come up in classroom conversation about our experiences and perspectives) and should be self-identified, not presumed or imposed. I will do my best to address and refer to all students accordingly, and I ask you to do the same for all of your fellow Terps.

Video or Audio Recording:

Video or audio recording of class sessions, activities, or discussions is prohibited without advance permission from the professor. Maryland is one of 11 U.S. states that require [two-party, or all-party, consent](#) before it is permissible to record or otherwise intercept and/or capture communications (such as phone calls, in-person conversations, video conferences). This means that everyone participating in a conversation must give their consent before any communication is recorded. Read this UMD article on [Audiovisual Recording](#) for more information.

Communication with Instructor:

Email: If you need to reach out and communicate with us, please email us at amirmm@umd.edu, hkelly01@umd.edu and kahglenn@umd.edu. Please DO NOT email us with questions that are easily found in the syllabus or on ELMS (i.e. When is this assignment due? How much is it worth? etc.) but please DO reach out about personal, academic, and intellectual concerns/questions.

While we will do our best to respond to emails within 24 hours, you will more likely receive email responses Monday through Friday 10am-5pm EST. For best results, **email all three of us**, instead of just one.

ELMS: We will send IMPORTANT announcements via ELMS messaging. You must make sure that your email & announcement notifications (including changes in assignments and/or due dates) are enabled in ELMS so you do not miss any messages. You are responsible for checking your email and Canvas/ELMS inbox with regular frequency.

Attendance:

Attendance and participation are essential in this class, especially given its hands-on nature. Unexcused absences will impact a student's "Participation, Preparation, & Engagement" grade. If the student can foresee a need to miss a class, they should bring this to the instructors' attention at the earliest possible date so that any work that the

student will miss can be assigned. If you are sick please notify instructors *before the start of the class*. If there is an emergency, please notify instructors at your earliest convenience.

Communication with Peers:

With a diversity of perspectives and experience, we may find ourselves in disagreement and/or debate with one another. As such, it is important that we agree to conduct ourselves in a professional manner and that we work together to foster and preserve a virtual classroom environment in which we can respectfully discuss and deliberate controversial questions. I encourage you to confidently exercise your right to free speech—bearing in mind, of course, that you will be expected to craft and defend arguments that support your position. Keep in mind, that free speech has its limit and this course is NOT the space for hate speech, harassment, and derogatory language. I will make every reasonable attempt to create an atmosphere in which each student feels comfortable voicing their argument without fear of being personally attacked, mocked, demeaned, or devalued.

Any behavior (including harassment, sexual harassment, and racially and/or culturally derogatory language) that threatens this atmosphere will not be tolerated. Please alert me immediately if you feel threatened, dismissed, or silenced at any point during our semester together and/or if your engagement in discussion has been in some way hindered by the learning environment.

Major Assignments

Participation, Preparation, & Engagement

- As noted earlier, class participation is a vital component of this course. The ability to effectively present your design ideas utilizing evocative visual language is critical in the development of the designer's skills. Active and constructive participation during discussions, in-class projects, critique, and feedback of other students' work is a core value of this course.
- Preparedness for class is equally vital given the hands-on nature of this course. This includes both having the materials needed for in-class work sessions **and** completing work outside the class as needed in order to move forward with the activity assigned that day.
- Absences, lateness, and lack of preparedness will inadvertently have a negative effect on your ability to participate in class, and thus impact this portion of your grade.

Homework Assignments

★ Play Readings - Introduce the plays we will be designing this semester. You will design:

- *Heavier Than...* by Steve Yockey
- *The Snow Child* by Tracy Wells

Scenic:

- **Scenic Research/Moodboard**

This project introduces you to one part of the scenic design process: visual research. You will create one emotional research (mood) board that captures the overall feeling of the play, along with 2–3 conceptual

and historical research boards that will inspire your design. All boards should be collaged and can be created using any software of your choice. Each board must include at least four visual reference images.

- **Scenic Sketching/Rendering**

This project introduces you to the process of translating research and ideas into scenic design. Using your research boards as inspiration, you will create a series of scenic sketches that explore different design ideas. These sketches may be created by hand or digitally. You will then develop one full-color scenic rendering that communicates your final design concept, which would be for your final project. The final rendering may be created using any medium.

You must include at least 2 human figures in your scenic design sketches and the final rendering.

Costumes:

- **Costumes based on Shapes**

Students will be provided a few silhouettes and will choose one to create a design around. An example will be provided on ELMS and worked on in class.

- **Costume Research**

This project introduces you to one part of the costume design process: visual research. You will create one emotional research (mood) board that captures the overall feeling of the play, along with 2–3 conceptual and historical research boards that will inspire your design. All boards should be collaged and can be created using any software of your choice. Each board must include at least four visual reference images.

- **Costume Sketching/Rendering and Swatches**

This project introduces you to the process of translating research and ideas into costume design. Using your research boards as inspiration, you will create a series of costume sketches that explore different design ideas. These sketches may be created by hand or digitally. You will then develop **3-5 full-color costume renderings** that communicate your final design concept, which would be for your final project. The final renderings may be created using any medium. You must also provide at least **3 swatches** per rendering explaining the fabric choices you will be making for your garments.

Lighting:

- **Lighting Observations**

Students will observe the world around them and take photographs of lighting situations in order to further their understanding of lighting and its effect on environments. Further details will be provided on the ELMS site.

- **Lighting Research**

This project introduces you to one part of the lighting design process: visual research. You will create one emotional research (mood) board that captures the overall feeling of the play, along with 3–4 conceptual and observational research boards that will inspire your design. Each board should have 3 descriptive words/phrases describing your lighting looks. All boards should be collaged and can be created using any software of your choice. Each board must include at least four visual reference images.

- **Light Lab**

This project introduces you to the process of translating research and ideas into lighting design. Using your research boards as inspiration, you will create a series of lighting looks that explore different design ideas. You will use different light fixtures, brightness, texture, and color in order to reflect your designs for the play.

Team Project

You will be assigned small groups to create a mini “production team”. Everyone will have read *The Snow Child* by Tracy Wells and will have prepared some preliminary research and ideas. In class and on your own time, together you will decide on a concept for your group and will put together preliminary mood boards/research/sketches/etc that represent all 3 design areas (scenic, costumes, lighting). How you decide to divide the roles within your team and how you choose to present your material is up to you. We don’t expect anything perfect or fully formed, but a clear idea should be there and you should have enough information to be able to effectively communicate your ideas. Your group will present your concept and preliminary materials to the class and we will engage in a class talkback.

Final Project

Your final project is something you will be working on incrementally in class and as homework throughout the semester as you learn about the various aspects of a production design. You will design a full production design for the play provided with various supporting research and design elements. As you complete these assignments for classwork or homework, we will provide feedback on your design elements, you may be asked to make revisions on various aspects of your design and the final project should reflect these developments.

The elements of your full production design should include (but are not limited to):

- ***Scene Breakdown***

- ***Scene by scene breakdown of entire play***

- *Location*
- *Environmental cues*
- *Design elements noted in dialogue or stage directions*
- *Characters in the scene*

- ***Scenic Design***

- **Research**
 - *Emotional Research board*
 - *Documentary Research board*
- **Rendering**
 - *A fully colored rendering that reflects your scenic design*
 - *At least two human figures in your rendering*
- **Costume Design**
 - **Research**
 - *A emotional research for costumes overall*
 - *A research board each for a minimum 5 different looks*
 - *Each board should include the title of the show, title of the board, headshot of actor (if applicable), act and scene (if applicable), and your name*
 - **Renderings**
 - *A minimum of 3 fully colored costume renderings of the looks reflected in your research*
 - *Paper size: Between 8.5" x11" and 11" x 17"*
 - *Figure and features rendered must be reflective of the cast you choose.*
 - *No blank faces and no hidden hands! Don't forget to consider hair.*
 - **Swatches**
 - *A minimum of 3 different fabric swatches that reflect the garments in your costume rendering*
 - *Each swatch no smaller than 2"x2"*
 - *Swatches must be stapled to cardstock*
- **Lighting Design**
 - **Research**
 - *5 boards of light research*
 - *Each board should have 3 descriptive words/phrases*

Grading Structure

Assignment	Percentage %
Homework	35%
Participation/Engagement	20%
Team Project	20%
Final Project	25%
Total	100%

Academic Integrity







For this course, some of your assignments will be collected via Turnitin on our course ELMS page. I have chosen to use this tool because it can help you improve your scholarly writing and help me verify the integrity of student work. For information about Turnitin, how it works, and the feedback reports you may have access to, visit [Turnitin Originality Checker for Students](#).

The University's Code of Academic Integrity is designed to ensure that the principles of academic honesty and integrity are upheld. In accordance with this code, the University of Maryland does not tolerate academic dishonesty. Please ensure that you fully understand this code and its implications because all acts of academic dishonesty will be dealt with in accordance with the provisions of this code. All students are expected to adhere to this Code. It is your responsibility to read it and know what it says, so you can start your professional life on the right path. **As future professionals, your commitment to high ethical standards and honesty begins with your time at the University of Maryland.**

It is important to note that course assistance websites, such as CourseHero, are not permitted sources unless the instructor explicitly gives permission. Material taken or copied from these sites can be deemed unauthorized material and a violation of academic integrity. These sites offer information that might be inaccurate, and most importantly, relying on restricted sources will hamper your learning process, particularly the critical thinking steps necessary for college-level assignments.

Additionally, students may naturally choose to use online forums for course-wide discussions (e.g., Group lists or chats) to discuss concepts in the course. However, collaboration on graded assignments is strictly prohibited unless otherwise stated. Examples of prohibited collaboration include: asking classmates for answers on quizzes or exams, asking for access codes to clicker polls, etc. Please visit the [Office of Undergraduate Studies' full list of campus-wide policies](#) and reach out if you have questions.

Finally, on each exam or assignment you must write out and sign the following pledge: ***"I pledge on my honor that I have not given or received any unauthorized assistance on this exam/assignment."*** If you ever feel pressured to comply with someone else's academic integrity violation, please reach out to me straight away. Also, ***if you are ever unclear*** about acceptable levels of collaboration, ***please ask!*** To help you avoid unintentional violations, ***the following table*** lists levels of collaboration that are acceptable for each graded exercise. Each assignment will contain more specific information regarding acceptable levels of collaboration.

	 OPEN NOTES	 USE BOOK	 LEARN ONLINE	 GATHER CONTENT With AI	 ASK FRIENDS	 WORK IN GROUPS
Homework Assignments	✓	✓	✓	---	---	---
Team Project	✓	✓	✓	---	✓	✓
Final Project	✓	✓	✓	---	---	---

AI use is prohibited

AI assistance (TerpAI, ChatGPT, Gemini, Grammarly, etc.) is not permitted for coding, research, writing, editing, or any other part of the assignment process. Even though you may use these tools in the future, this approach will help you build a solid understanding of the subject matter. If you have questions or suggestions for potential exceptions, please contact me, and I would be happy to talk more.

[See the University of Maryland guidelines on Generative AI for Teaching & Learning](#) for more information

Grades

Campus Policy dictates that you must specify:

- How final letter grades will be determined. This should include a breakdown of all graded assessments, their weight in the course, and whether final grades will include +/- descriptors.
- How students will have access to their grades throughout the semester, and how they can review their work (including the final exam).

Late work will not be accepted for course credit so please plan to have it submitted well before the scheduled deadline. We are happy to discuss any of your grades with you, and if we have made a mistake we will immediately correct it. Any formal grade disputes must be submitted in writing and within one week of receiving the grade. Final letter grades are assigned based on the percentage of total assessment points earned. To be fair to everyone I have to establish clear standards and apply them consistently, so please understand that being close to a cutoff is not the same as making the cut (89.99 \neq 90.00). It would be unethical to make exceptions for some and not others.

A table of the assessments and point values can be a concise way to convey all of the graded elements and their relative weight in the course. If you are using weighted percentages (e.g., exams = 30%, paper = 20%) be sure to clarify the number of assessments within each category... is there one exam worth 30% or are there three exams that are each worth 10.

All assessment scores will be posted on the course ELMS page. If you would like to review any of your grades, or have questions about how something was scored, please email me to schedule a time for us to meet and discuss.

It is essential that you articulate in your syllabus how final letter grades will be assigned. There is no campus policy on percentages and letter grades, nor is there a requirement that you utilize a points-based scheme. Here is one sample, which you are welcome to use or edit to reflect your grading policies:

Final Grade Cutoffs									
A+	97.00%	B+	87.00%	C+	77.00%	D+	67.00%	F+	
A	94.00%	B	84.00%	C	74.00%	D	64.00%	F	<60.0%
A-	90.00%	B-	80.00%	C-	70.00%	D-	60.00%	F-	

Course Outline

Class #	Topic	Deliverable	Assigned
1 7/13	Syllabus What is theater? How to read a script? <i>Visit to a Small Planet (SP)</i>		Read " <i>Heavier Than...</i> "
2 7/14	Play Discussion Scene Breakdown Elements of Design & Principles of Composition	Have Read " <i>Heavier Than...</i> "	Scene Breakdown
3 7/15	Scenic Design - Introduction What do Scenic Designers do? Script Analysis/Research/MoodBoard		Scenic Research/Moodboard
4 7/16	Scenic Design - Ideation and Rendering Generating Ideas from your Research/MB Design tools Sketches/Collages/Bash Model Renderings/Scale Models Studio Time	Scenic Research/Moodboard	Scenic Sketch/Rendering

5 7/17	Scenic Design - Technical Aspects Technical Drawings/Elevations/Venues Collaboration/Production Meetings/Budget Visit to Scene Shop and Venues! Studio Time	Scenic Sketch/Rendering Progress	
6 7/20	Scenic Design Scenic Design Presentations!	Completed Scenic Rendering Completed Scenic Research/MB	
7 7/21	Costume- Introduction Intro to Costume Paperwork What is a costume shop? What is a costume rendering? Fabrics Talks! What is a swatch? Costume Shape Project		Costume Shapes Project Costume Research
8 7/22	Costume- Research and What it Means Taking Your Research to your rendering and Costume Rendering Styles What are our Rendering Materials? Research for Class Script Costume Sketches	Costume Shapes Project Costume Research	Costume Renderings
9 7/23	Costume- Fabrics and Their Importance Picking Out Our Swatches! Swatch Test! Studio Time	Costume Renderings Progress Swatches Progress	
10 7/24	Costume- Critique, Discuss and Show Studio Time Costume Presentations!	Completed Costume Renderings and Swatches	
11 7/27	Lighting - Fundamentals Channeling Light Lab tour Build looks		
12 7/28	Lighting - People & Research Visit to shops, talk through "org chart" Script Analysis & Research - in class exercise Creating Shifts		Research
13 7/29	Lighting - Building Your Eye Paperwork sneak peek Research Practice Build New Looks	Research	Lighting Observations
14	Lighting - Defend & Experiment	Lighting Observations	Read <i>The Snow Child</i>

7/30	Studio time Show Looks, Critique	Light Lab Presentations	
15 7/31	Final Project Marathon	Have read <i>The Snow Child</i>	

Note: This is a tentative schedule, and subject to change as necessary – monitor the course ELMS page for current deadlines. In the unlikely event of a prolonged university closing, or an extended absence from the university, adjustments to the course schedule, deadlines, and assignments will be made based on the duration of the closing and the specific dates missed.

Resources & Accommodations

Accessibility and Disability Services

The University of Maryland is committed to creating and maintaining a welcoming and inclusive educational, working, and living environment for people of all abilities. The University of Maryland is also committed to the principle that no qualified individual with a disability shall, on the basis of disability, be excluded from participation in or be denied the benefits of the services, programs, or activities of the University, or be subjected to discrimination. The [Accessibility & Disability Service \(ADS\)](#) provides reasonable accommodations to qualified individuals to provide equal access to services, programs and activities. ADS cannot assist retroactively, so it is generally best to request accommodations several weeks before the semester begins or as soon as a disability becomes known. Any student who needs accommodations should contact me as soon as possible so that I have sufficient time to make arrangements.

For assistance in obtaining an accommodation, contact Accessibility and Disability Service at 301-314-7682, or email them at adsfrontdesk@umd.edu.

Emergency Preparedness

Emergencies on campus can happen at any time. To prepare, visit prepare.umd.edu or use the emergency symbol in the UMD App to review information. Resources for persons with disabilities are available on the [emergency preparedness page of the ADA Coordinator's website](#).

Student Resources and Services

Taking personal responsibility for your own learning means acknowledging when your performance does not match your goals and doing something about it. I hope you will come talk to me so that I can help you find the right approach to success in this course, and I encourage you to visit [UMD's Student Academic Support Services website](#) to learn more about the wide range of campus resources available to you.

In particular, everyone can use some help sharpening their communication skills (and improving their grade) by visiting [UMD's Writing Center](#) and schedule an appointment with the campus Writing Center.

You should also know there are a wide range of resources to support you with whatever you might need ([UMD's Student Resources and Services website](#) may help). If you feel it would be helpful to have someone to talk to, visit [UMD's Counseling Center](#).

Basic Needs Security

If you have difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or lack a safe and stable place to live, please visit [UMD's Division of Student Affairs website](#) for information about resources the campus offers you and let me know if I can help in any way.

Veteran Resources

UMD provides some additional support to our student veterans. You can access those resources at the office of [Veteran Student life](#) and the [Counseling Center](#). Veterans and active duty military personnel with special circumstances (e.g., upcoming deployments, drill requirements, disabilities) are welcome and encouraged to communicate these, in advance if possible, to the instructor.

Notice of Mandatory Reporting

Notice of mandatory reporting of sexual assault, sexual harassment, interpersonal violence, and stalking: As a faculty member, I am designated as a "Responsible University Employee," and I must report all disclosures of sexual assault, sexual harassment, interpersonal violence, and stalking to UMD's Title IX Coordinator per University Policy on Sexual Harassment and Other Sexual Misconduct.

If you wish to speak with someone confidentially, please contact one of UMD's confidential resources, such as [CARE to Stop Violence](#) (located on the Ground Floor of the Health Center) at 301-741-3442 or the [Counseling Center](#) (located at the Shoemaker Building) at 301-314-7651.

You may also seek assistance or supportive measures from UMD's Title IX Coordinator, Angela Nastase, by calling 301-405-1142, or emailing titleIXcoordinator@umd.edu.

To view further information on the above, please visit the [Office of Civil Rights and Sexual Misconduct](#).

Course Evaluation

Please submit a course evaluation through Student Feedback on Course Experiences in order to help faculty and administrators improve teaching and learning at Maryland. All information submitted to Course Experiences is confidential. Campus will notify you when Student Feedback on Course Experiences is open for you to complete your evaluations at the end of the semester. Please go directly to the [Student Feedback on Course Experiences](#) to complete your evaluations. You may access the evaluation reports for courses for which 70% or more students submitted their evaluations.

Copyright Notice

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