



# How to Integrate a UMS Performance into Your Course

UMS believes that experiences with the performing arts can enrich and enliven academic inquiry across all disciplines. We are committed to creating uncommon learning opportunities for students and faculty, both inside and outside the classroom. This includes helping faculty integrate UMS performances into their courses.

For some faculty members, the idea of including live performance in their syllabi can seem risky. A performance might not be relevant to the course content, or relevant

enough. It might waste valuable time. It might require a certain expertise in the performing arts.

This guide is designed to address these concerns, and to support faculty who are interested in bringing performance into their courses. It provides both rationale for this integration and concrete strategies for its implementation. In addition, UMS Campus Engagement Specialist Shannon Fitzsimons Moen is available for individual consultation with faculty; together, you will craft unique plans for

incorporating UMS performances and arts-based learning strategies into classes across the university's disciplines. She is also the UMS contact person for all questions from U-M faculty.

Performance can enhance classes in a wide range of content areas, but it's important to note that performance isn't a good fit for every course. As one UMS Faculty Fellow put it, "Some classes make a much better link with performing arts than others."

## Why include performance?

How can engagement with live performance of music, theater, and dance enhance student learning of topics that are far removed from music, theater, and dance? Put another way, why include performance in your syllabus?

### LEARNING GOALS

Consider whether any of the following impacts of live performance overlap with your learning goals for students.

- Live performance *provides another mode for instruction*, an experiential one that can enliven the routine of reading, lecture, and note-taking. It can provide a new entry point into course material. It mobilizes unconventional, often non-verbal, modes of communication and sense-making. It has the capacity to enchant, to invite participation.
- Live performance *is always a cultural production in context*, speaking to a particular cross-section of time, place, culture, and personality.
- Live performance *asks students to absorb and analyze high degrees of complexity*. Performances are dynamic, complex systems, encompassing the interaction of performers with each other, performers with technical aspects of theater, performers with audience, performers with “text,” performance with the culture at large, and more. Students must pay attention to detail, and quickly assess which details are important.
- Live performance *requires physical and mental presence at an immediate, multi-sensory experience*; it is distinct from screen-based representation and abstract theory. As one professor says, “It’s live, and it’s real.”
- Live performance *demands a particular synthesis from the audience*. Students must actively engage in making sense rather than passively receiving information. This sense-making can itself be a creative act.
- Live performance often *supports multiple viable interpretations*. The outcome may be ambiguous, encouraging personal meaning-making for the individual, and questions and conversation among the group.
- Live performance *demonstrates innovation*. Performances are artists’ creative answers to questions; they are the embodiment of new ideas. Performance frames familiar issues in new ways, challenging students’ habits and certitude.
- Live performance *requires empathy*, an appreciation of the human condition, and recognition of the “other.” It invites audience members to inhabit worlds distant from their own.

- Live performance *can provide a memorable experience for students*, contributing to the development of the whole person. Many students have never seen a live music, theater, or dance performance in a concert hall.
- Live performance *builds community*. Students share a unique, unifying experience.

Performance impacts student audiences in some or all of these ways, encouraging them to cultivate skills and capacities that can be beneficial in disciplines as diverse as medicine, law, business, social work, and engineering. If any of these impacts are congruent with your goals for student learning, then integrating a UMS performance into your syllabus can substantially enhance your course.

## Choosing a UMS performance

Take into account logistical factors such as timing and the culture of your students when choosing which performance is best for your class. You will need to work around exams and other course landmarks. If scheduling conflicts are a concern for your students,

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consider choosing performances with multiple show-times — for example, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights — or allowing students to choose between two separate performance events, to accommodate as many students as possible. Note that where a performance falls in the trajectory of the academic term has some influence on how it functions within

your syllabus. A performance early in the semester can be a social ice-breaker or a way to jump-start student engagement, and has the potential to inform discussions and work throughout the term. Going to the theater later in the semester allows for a more solid contextual groundwork of course content and expectations.

More important than these practical considerations, though, is choosing performances from UMS’s season that best fit your learning goals. How they align with the impacts listed above will help determine your choice of performance:

### TO ENRICH COURSE CONTENT

If you want to provide a different entry point into the content of your course, or a way to enliven and broaden students’ experience of that content, consider choosing performances in UMS’s upcoming season whose themes overlap with those of your class. For example, comic theatrical works of all kinds can speak to *Topics in Classical Civilization: Comedy and Performance*, and UMS’s musical offerings work for *The Physics of Music*. One UMS Faculty Fellow notes,

“At least for some courses, not having a one-on-one match between the performance and your material will still make for a successful experience.” (Alternatively, several Faculty Fellows report having adjusted the content of a course to enable the integration of a UMS performance; for them, the benefits of performance merit that effort.)

A performance that shares content with your class becomes one more “text” through which to explore the themes of your class; this is an opportunity to bring the questions of your discipline to bear in another mode of inquiry. The performance may exemplify your topic or a larger category to which your topic belongs — perhaps originating from a different time or place — thus enabling fruitful comparison. How does the performance address something analogous or related to your class? In addition, performance offers opportunities to explore its diverse contextual aspects that might inform your topic. For example, one professor brought her German language writing course to an all-Beethoven concert. The concert was one of the students’ assigned writing topics, but they also read about the life of Beethoven and discussed the figure of the genius and Vienna as a cultural capital.

The content of some courses allows for a broader range of choices among performances—*Doing History*

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(all performances are artifacts of their time and place), *Psychology of Creativity* (all performances are creative products), and many writing courses (all performances are complex events that can be written about in many ways) are examples of this sort of course.

UMS staff can help determine which performances might work best for your class, providing information about shows in the upcoming season. However, in a few cases — such as for events early in the fall or new works that are premiering in Ann Arbor — there may be only limited information available about a show’s specific thematic content. This fact points to a broader reality about performance: every live performance carries an element of the unknown, and every audience experience lies on a spectrum of risk. The abundance or scarcity of advance information available about a given performance only helps determine its placement on that spectrum. You can’t know every detail about any performance, and attendance will probably raise ideas you had not anticipated.

### TO DEVELOP COGNITIVE CAPACITIES

If you include performance in your syllabus as a means to stimulate students’ tolerance for ambiguity, attention to physical detail, or any of the other cognitive capacities listed above, then the content becomes less important. Performances in a range of genres and styles will speak to the practices and dispositions you

# NUTS AND BOLTS— MANAGING TIME, MONEY, AND EXPECTATIONS

## Once you have chosen a performance,

- Email [umsclasstickets@umich.edu](mailto:umsclasstickets@umich.edu) to arrange classroom tickets for your course. For certain performances, the number of classroom tickets available may be limited. A detailed step-by-step guide to class tickets can be found at [ums.org/university](http://ums.org/university).
- All student tickets for UMS performances that are required for a class cost \$15. There are a number of ways to handle this cost.
  - o Students can buy their own tickets. The \$15 student ticket price reflects, on average, a two-thirds subsidy and is designed to make student tickets affordable. Simply put, performance has value just as textbooks do, and students should know that \$15 is a fair price for this important instructional “material.” If students will be buying their own tickets, note this expense in the syllabi and all course descriptions. Encourage students to talk to you if the \$15 ticket price represents a hardship.
  - o In many departments, you may be able to incorporate a “class fee,” also known as a “lab fee,” into your course; for example, the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts (LSA) Lab Fees Policy specifically allows these fees to cover admission for a performance. With a class fee, students are aware of the additional ticket fees at the time they register for the course, allowing them to prepare for this expense. However, your department must have an open Project Grant intended solely for the use of lab fees (Program Code 10000). If it does not, there is a separate procedure for opening a new Project Grant. Then, the Request for Approval of Class Fees (<http://www.ro.umich.edu/forms/req-lab-fee-form.pdf>) must be submitted according to a rolling deadline.

- o Arts at Michigan’s Course Connections program can provide grants of up to \$500 for instructors to incorporate arts-based learning activities into their courses. These funds may be used to buy student tickets for a performance. Note that there are rolling deadlines for application and that these funds are limited; it is advantageous to apply early, especially for Winter semester. Please visit the Arts at Michigan site (<http://artsatmichigan.umich.edu/funding/faculty/>) for application information, as well as to learn about additional faculty funding opportunities for arts-integrated learning.
- o UMS Course Development grants are available to offset the cost of student tickets (<http://ums.org/education/university-programs/>). The deadline for application is in April.
- o Your department may have funds available to cover student tickets.
- Plan classroom activities and assignments that will enhance students’ experience of the performance. The “Before the performance” and “After the performance” sections in this guide can aid this process, as can consultation with UMS staff.
- List the performance prominently in your syllabus — as a required or optional event, as related to any assignments, and/or on your week-by-week schedule or topical outline. Make your expectations of student attendance and accountability clear.
- Even if attendance at the performance is required, there may be student scheduling conflicts because performances usually take place in the evening and/or on the weekend, outside of regular class time. Be prepared to offer an alternative, such as attending a different performance altogether, to students who approach you with an irresolvable conflict. Have students who attended the planned performance and those who attended an alternate one share their experiences.
- Consider linking students to UMS’s “What to Expect” page (<http://ums.org/visit/what-to-expect/>) and discussing it with your students before the performance, keeping in mind that some students have never been to a live performance and may have questions.
- If verifying student attendance is important to you, ask students to save their ticket stubs and submit them to you after the event.
- Most UMS performances take place on campus; there is no need to arrange student transportation.

hope to foster in your students. Again, staff at UMS is available for consultation to determine the best fit for your classroom culture and goals.

## Activities and assignments around performance

The activities and assignments you give to students can both enhance students’ overall experience in the theater and help them contextualize the performance within your course. The nature of the classroom experiences you design should, again, reflect your learning goals for the performance.

### BEFORE THE PERFORMANCE

While some instructors prefer to have their students attend the performance without any preconceptions and require neither advance research nor discussion, many choose to be explicit with their students about what they hope to get out of the performance. Some instructors do in-class activities or assign homework in preparation for the performance; these activities and assignments generally function in two ways.

First, if your students are attending the performance to enhance the content of your course, a preparatory assignment can broaden their knowledge base. The more entry points students have into the theatrical work — information about artists, performance history, time, place, and culture — the richer their experience of the performance and the more readily they can make connections to course material. In addition, classroom activities and assignments can ready students for their

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experience in the theater, calibrating expectations and heightening receptivity — to the performance broadly and, if desired, to specific aspects of it.

### Possible assignments and activities that fulfill these functions include:

- Research. Students can consult histories, commentaries, promotional materials, and reviews to learn more about the work, the time and place in which it was created, its themes, and the artists involved. This research can be in the form of assigned readings or viewings, or as an investigation in which students seek out relevant materials. For example, in preparation for their attendance at a UMS showing of *On the Waterfront* (accompanied live by the New York Philharmonic), history students read a wide variety of materials, including excerpts from 1940s journalism that inspired the screenplay, and Elia Kazan’s statement about his decision to offer names to the House Un-American Activities Commission.

- Artist visits. In some cases, UMS can arrange to have an artist involved in the performance visit your class. Requests for visiting artists should be made as far in advance as possible. Faculty and graduate students from across the university can also share their expertise with your class. Visiting artists and scholars might present a brief lecture, engage your students in discussion about particular aspects of the work, or offer experiential activities for the class. These visits grant unique insight into the performance and can provide your students with a personal, human connection to something that may be unfamiliar.
- Discussion. This can be a good time to articulate expectations of the performance, creating a useful reference point for comparison after the performance. Many instructors find transparency productive at this point, and share their learning goals with students. You might also prompt students to “be present,” reminding them that live performance requires their active attention. Being present and open in the theater allows students to access to the many layers of live performance and opens up the possibility of profound and wondrous experiences.
- UMS events. Watch for scheduled events around the performance such as Penny Stamps lectures, pre-show talks, artist Q&A sessions, and the You Can Dance series at the YMCA. These events are usually free of charge and lend insight into the performance even as they bring students into the greater sphere of learning outside your classroom.

### AFTER THE PERFORMANCE

Reflection on a performance, and articulation of a response to it, is almost as important as attending the performance. It is in formulating a response and sharing responses with a group that many of the broader learning goals are realized; impressions are solidified or modified, multiple perspectives must be honored, and individual meaning-making informs the whole group’s understanding. Holding students accountable to even a brief performance response in writing or orally (for example, you might ask students to come to class prepared with one discussion point) primes them to attend more closely to events in the theater. Depending on your learning goals, your response prompts might be open-ended or focused on specific connections to course material. In any case, encourage students to articulate reasons for their reactions to and impressions of the show, grounding their responses in description of the events onstage. The same description can evoke differing responses, allowing for a fruitful exchange of ideas.

- Discussion. Classroom discussion is a great opportunity for students to share impressions of the event and make connections together. One UMS Faculty Fellow reports that when discussion of a performance is open-ended, she faces a rush of talk, a forest of hands popping up. Consider providing a space for discussion that is oriented to your learning goals as well as for open-ended

discussion, including any negative reactions students may have had. This might entail leaving a longer time for discussion, or providing two different forums for discussion — one open and one focused. For example, groups of three or four people might talk about the parts that really stood out to them for five minutes, followed by a guided discussion with the whole class.

Keep in mind that “discussion” can also encompass diverse venues for talk outside your classroom. UMS-sponsored Q&A sessions after performance, online discussions, and blog posts are opportunities for students to share ideas about the performance with communities beyond the classroom.

- Written assignments. While some instructors prefer to preserve the performance experience as a treat — informing discussion and future projects but not attached to graded work — others devise written assignments around the performance. Low-stakes writing assignments such as a blog post, the first paragraph of a review, or an answer to a specific question require students to critically engage with the performance but also allow space for them to take risks in their thinking and approach.

How you structure and evaluate assignments will, again, reflect your learning goals for the performance. For example, if you want to heighten students’ attention to detail in the moment, ask them to make a list of specific physical aspects of the performance they noticed. With open-ended or reflective written responses like this, completion points — analogous to participation points in a discussion — are appropriate. However, you might have more specific goals for your students, asking them, for instance, to notice how the playwright addresses themes of your course and then relate the performance to their assigned reading. Evaluation of an assignment like this usually entails a more specific evaluation rubric, perhaps using metrics like “expresses ideas clearly” or “uses specific examples.”

Making written responses accessible to the whole class — on a class blog or simply by exchanging papers in a small group — expands student understanding of the experience, sourcing knowledge from within the classroom community.

- Interaction with artists. Post-show talks or Q&A sessions provide an opportunity to hear artists’ perspectives and to exchange ideas within the audience community. Visiting artists or experts from the university community who visit your class after the performance can help students unpack their experience in the theater.

# PERFORMANCE IN THE — CLASSROOM

The performance you and your students attend is another resource for your classroom, like a text or a slide presentation. You can use familiar classroom activities — reading, writing, discussion — to go deeper into it and get more out of it. However, performance can also become a classroom activity itself when, for example, students take parts reading dialogue or try music or movement activities. When students participate in creative, hands-on experiences, they often find unique insight into the performance as well as your course content.

There is no standard template for constructing such activities for the classroom. Successful ones take into account your capacities as an instructor, your goals for the class, the content of your course, the performance itself, student predispositions, and more. UMS staff can consult with you on all of these factors and collaborate on the creation of hands-on activities, sometimes connecting you to visiting artists and SMTD scholars who can co-teach a class session. Examples of successful in-class activities devised by UMS Faculty Fellows include writing new dialogue for a play's main characters and performing it in class, expressing a theme from the performance in students' choice of medium (poem, photo, drawing, essay, video, music, etc.), and trying out music or movement forms in class. In activities like these, students need to be reminded that virtuoso performance is not expected, that the classroom experience is about play, and that process is far more important than product here.

For those faculty who may be hesitant — out of shyness or unfamiliarity — to bring performance into the classroom in these ways, consider how performance is already present in the classroom. In the lecture you present and in the dialogue you have with students in discussion, you and your students are performing certain roles, following different scripts, and moving expressively, all of which the class witnesses and interprets. There is, then, a spectrum of performance in the classroom — you can move from that which is already happening toward the more intentional, vibrant, and nuanced.

## You're not alone

UMS's Campus Engagement Specialist is available to help you choose a performance, obtain tickets for your class, and construct assignments and activities to enhance student learning. In addition, UMS Course Development Grants provide opportunities for faculty to go deeper into the process and connect with colleagues across campus who are also exploring performance in the classroom.

We are interested in hearing about your arts-integration experience and how we can better support it.

*This guide was written by Veronica D. Stanich, PhD.*