

Department of English & Writing Studies
Theatre Studies Program

Theatre + English 3581F (001) / SASAH 3393F (001)
Toronto: Culture and Performance
Fall 2026

1. Course Description (+ Some Key Intel About What We Are Doing Here...)

What's a "global city"? Is Toronto one? How does the theatre that appears on Toronto's stages contribute to, or maybe even contest, Toronto's urban aspirations?

What's an "intercultural city"? Is Toronto one? How do the performing arts help to shape the intercultural (or maybe even, slowly slowly, decolonizing...) structures that now identify Toronto to Torontonians, and to the world? For whom are those structures liberating – and whom do those structures still leave behind?

What does economics have to do with theatre? Is theatre a viable business? What does theatre economics have to do with other kinds of urban economics – like, say, real estate?

Or what about memory? How does the theatre shape our memories (personal, communal, historical) of the city and its inhabitants?

And what about labour? Who works in the creative economy in Toronto, what do they do, and how is their work valued (or not)?

These questions and more await us. Welcome to TOCAP!

2. Meet Kim (and contact her for help!)

Your instructor is **Professor Kim Solga**. (Call me Kim.) Kim's office is UC3425, above the north stairwell. It is a safe space – you can bring yourself to Kim's room, and she will be there to offer support, care, and kindness.

Office: UC3425

Contact: ksolga@uwo.ca*

Office Hours: in person **THURSDAYS 12:30-2:30**; on Zoom **WEDNESDAYS 11am-12pm**. No appointment necessary; use meeting ID 568 965 9592.

*Kim does not check email between 6pm Fridays and 8am Mondays.

3. Land Acknowledgement

Western's land acknowledgement + info about Indigenous initiatives on campus are here:

https://indigenous.uwo.ca/initiatives/land_acknowledgement.html#:~:text=We%2F%20acknowledged%20that%20Western,1796%20and%20the%20Dish%20with

The land acknowledgement currently used by the City of Toronto is here:

<https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/accessibility-human-rights/indigenous-affairs-office/land-acknowledgement/>

The Haudenosaunee word for the colonial “Toronto” is Tkaronto. Learn more about the Indigenous history of this word and this place here:

<https://guides.library.utoronto.ca/Toronto>

Tired of land acknowledgements that perform inaction and otherwise do f#%k all? Go here:

<https://www.indigenoustheatre.com/volunteer>

<https://itstartswithus-mmiw.com>

4. Course Objectives

Objectives are our shared goals, a promise to try to achieve a thing. We may not get all of them, or all of them perfectly, but we can strive toward them.

Our official course objectives are:

- ❖ To introduce our class community to a wide variety of theatre in Toronto right now, and to some of the talented people who make it;
- ❖ To ask challenging, sometimes uncomfortable questions about the social, political, and economic circumstances that shape urban theatre and performance communities;
- ❖ To introduce students to fresh perspectives about the “cultural work” theatre does in cities like Toronto today, and why that work matters to a socially-just society;
- ❖ To help students become critically attuned audience members, and in the process to help students to hone your critical reading, thinking, viewing, and writing skills;

But wait! There's more.

Above are our intellectual goals – things we hope to learn about the subject of our course. But every class also comes with some “meta” – some new skill development, some learning *about how to learn*, some improvement of our capacity to handle conflict, utter raging disaster, overwhelm, and uncertainty.

SO, if you engage with Kim, with each other, and with our course work whole-heartedly, you might also, by term's end, expect:

1. To be able to reflect critically on your own studenting experience, including by engaging independently with class material, and reflecting in and outside of class time on key ideas circulating in our classroom;
2. To build on your existing collaboration and teamwork skills;
3. To build on your existing analytical and critical thinking skills;
4. To make plenty of useful mistakes and have a lot of fun *not being perfect*.

Do you have an objective for yourself for our class? If so, put it in your Performance Journal!

5. Course Materials

You've already paid a fee of \$175 for this course, so there's nothing more to spend!*

(Unless you'd like to purchase your own copy of *Theatre & The City*, by Jen Harvie. Kim has ordered copies from the bookstore. See below for more!)

1. THEATRE TRIPS

Together, we'll be traveling to Toronto THREE times to go to the theatre.

On each of the following Thursdays, our theatre trip constitutes our "class". Instead of meeting in our classroom at 4:30pm, we will meet in front of Alumni Hall at 3:30pm to board the bus. We'll be returning from Toronto circa 10pm, arriving in London between 12am and 1am.

NOTE: our departure time is realistic – trust Kim (YEARS of experience). If you have a class at 3:30 and need help to be excused on our three travel dates, speak to her.

Thursday October 1: we're seeing *To A Flame*, Nightwood Theatre and 1S1 Theatre, at the Jackman Performing Arts Centre (877 Yonge Street)

Thursday October 22: we're seeing *Prophetess* at Tarragon Theatre (30 Bridgman Avenue)

Thursday November 19: we're seeing *Goodnight Desdemona, Good Morning Juliet* at Canadian Stage, Bluma Appel Theatre, St Lawrence Centre for the Arts (27 Front St East).

BUT WAIT THERE'S FOUR! We are also seeing *Dracula: A Comedy of Terrors* at London's Grand Theatre **on Thursday October 29**. Get yourself downtown in any fashion that suits you; Kim has your tix and will see you there.

2. OTHER STUFF (AKA READINGS)

To prepare our brains for the exhilarating work of reading theatre in its full socio-cultural context, Kim has put FOUR readings on Brightspace in the COURSE READINGS tab. These are, in the order they appear on our schedule:

Harvie, Jen. *Theatre & The City*. Palgrave/Red Globe, 2009.

McKinnie, Michael. "Urban National, Suburban Transnational: Civic Theatres and the Urban Development of Toronto's Downtowns." In *City Stages: Theatre and Urban Space in a Global City*. University of Toronto Press, 2007.

Bennett, Susan. "Toronto's Spectacular Stage." In *Theatre and Performance in Toronto*, ed. Laura Levin. Playwrights Canada Press, 2005.

Knowles, Ric. "Multicultural Text, Intercultural Performance." In *Performing the Intercultural City*. University of Michigan Press, 2017.

6. Grading and Assessment

Your final mark in our course will be composed of the following elements:

- ✓ Personal Performance Journal (30% of final grade)
- ✓ Two in-class critical reflections (15% each, or 30% of final grade)
- ✓ Final Project proposal (10%)
- ✓ Final project (30% of final grade)

Please see the "assignment rubrics" document in Brightspace for information about grading!

1. Personal Performance Journal (30%)*

DUE: October 8, November 5, December 3

LENGTH: you decide. (Let it be organic; let it evolve.)

(Citation: adapted from an assignment designed and built by Dr Stephanie Dennie, University of Alberta, sdennie@ualberta.ca)

***The PJ is a version of the Workbook, if you're in other Kim classes. With some differences.**

Your Performance Journal collects your thoughts on readings you do for our class, the performances we see together, independent research you do into individual performers, companies, theatres, and other artists we encounter, and reflections we complete together in class. It's a place where you show your work, reveal the extent of your investment in our class and its materials, and let Kim in on your trip through our class in all its twists and turns. Your PJ is a place to be curious, to be honest, to be thoughtful, to be contrarian (if you wish!), and above all to be creative. It's a snapshot of this place and time in your whole-life learning journey.

Your Performance Journal is about process, not product; it is a means to learn, not an end-point. We have good empirical evidence to show that "writing" (in its broadest sense – using our bodies to make things with ideas) is a form of "thinking"; in this sense, the PJ is a personal

thinking/writing space, where you do cool things with the stuff our class has got you thinking about and advance your understanding of our course material *through writing and doodling and otherwise notating about it*.

For this reason, I STRONGLY encourage you to get a physical notebook to act as your Performance Journal. A physical book will allow you to explore in a different way, enabling writing in a range of ways. Draw! Try cursive! Try ALL CAPS! Just use a pen or pencil. It's a whole different art form.

Does this mean no laptops, Kim? Laptops are welcome in class, if they aid your engagement with our work. You may find that taking notes on your laptop is easier; that's fine. But if you do use a laptop in class, remember to transfer any relevant components to your PJ afterward. OR, spend 10 minutes reflecting on what you typed in class, and then write about it in your PJ! That's an A+ performance journal move.

Required components:

If you look at the assignment rubrics in Brightspace, you'll note that your PJ's comprehensiveness (you do all the things) and its consistency (you do them all the time) are directly keyed to your success. No grades here for grammar, or sheer brilliance; **success here is all about graft and commitment.**

1. **PREPARING FOR CLASS.** *Is a reading assigned?* Take notes on it, OR set a timer and write for 15 minutes after you're finished reading. *Are we going to the theatre?* Investigate. What is this theatre? Who is performing? What company made this show? Who wrote it? Pick a different angle each time; do a deep dive. *Have we recently been to the theatre?* Make sure you've journaled about the show and your experience going to see it!
2. **PREPARING FOR A VISIT TO THE THEATRE.** See above. Just because we're "going on a field trip" doesn't mean you shouldn't prepare ahead. Cosplay a different kind of theatregoer each time; what would you like to investigate about this show before we see it?
3. **DURING/AFTER A VISIT TO THE THEATRE.** See above. I leave it up to you to decide if you'd like to make notes during the shows we see (if you do, be discrete; some performers find seeing scribblers stressful), but absolutely be sure to spend at least 15 minutes after the show ends (on the bus? The morning after?) reflecting on your experience. You can include thoughts on the show, on the theatre space itself, on the part of the city we've visited, on the discomfort of the bus ride... it's all part of the experience.
4. **REFLECTING IN CLASS.** Kim runs an active learning space. You'll get the hang of it! During our in-class time we'll do a fair bit of thinking/writing in semi-structured reflection exercises. Include your responses to these in your Performance Journal. If you have to miss a class, be sure to catch up on Brightspace, and do the writing exercises listed there.

Format:

You may format your PJ however works best for you – your neurotypicality is specific to you!

HOWEVER, to help Kim navigate your PJ, please label your entries like this:

Date X, week X, prepping for class

Date Y, week Y, after the theatre

...and so on.

How will Kim assess this?

You will hand your PJ in for formative assessment twice (Oct 8; Nov 5, along with your first critical reflection) and for summative assessment, including a grade, at the end of term (Dec 3).

In October and November, Kim will offer you feedback on where you are slaying and where you need to improve. No grades will be attached to this feedback, but Kim will give you an indication of where you are at, according to the marking rubric (go read the rubric!).

At the end of term, before your final PJ hand-in, we will go through a self-assessment exercise together. You will have the opportunity to provide a thorough assessment of your own work, to state the grade you believe your work has earned, and to write a justification for that grade. **Kim will take your judgement and feedback for yourself into account when she assesses your PJ for marks, so don't miss the class where we do this work!**

2. Two Critical Reflection(s) (15% each, 30% total)

DUE: November 5 and November 26, IN CLASS

LENGTH: whatever you're able to write in 45-60 minutes.

For each of these two in-class writing exercises, you will select a critical moment from one of the performances we have experienced so far. Then, you'll put that moment into conversation with a moment, or an idea, from one of our four class readings (Harvie, McKinnie, Bennett, Knowles) or from a piece of critical writing about your chosen performance that you have explored during your class prep labour.

A critical moment is one that grabs you unexpectedly, makes you think in fresh ways; it is a small but pertinent detail that leads to some solid critical thinking.

Ask yourself: Why is this moment significant for me? How does it advance the work of the play? Does this moment reveal something key about the piece's relationship to the place it is being performed, the city as a whole? Does it speak to other issues we've discussed in class – social or political?

Format:

We will complete these writing assignments in the FIRST HOUR of November 5 and November 26. You will be given exam booklets (don't be triggered – it's not an exam!) and will be asked to put all your devices AND your Performance Journal away for the duration of the write.

The assignment is designed to be doable in 45 minutes, but you can have up to 60 minutes before Kim will make you surrender your booklet. You can go to the bathroom, eat, be chill. Again: not an exam. We're doing this because AI; otherwise, it's open book.

But, Kim, it's not actually open book, right?

You are correct. HOWEVER, think of it this way. If you have been using your Performance Journal as intended, you'll have already aced the prep for this task! You've probably already decided what moments you're going to put together, and you've probably already written about the connection between them in your PJ! I ask you not to come to class and copy out pre-written work, however. Rewrite the idea(s) of it here, now, and see what new stuff you discover in the process. (That's "thinking/writing", babies!)

3. Final Project Proposal (10%)

DUE: November 19, 11:59pm, on Brightspace

LENGTH: 500 words

Your final project details are below. Your proposal is your chance a) to get ahead and be settled on a topic and a format THREE WHOLE WEEKS before the FP is due; and b) to show Kim that you have a viable idea and a plan to execute it.

Your proposal requirements vary depending upon the topic and format you've chosen.

1. If you're writing a research essay (options 1 or 2 below), your proposal will include a tentative title, the name(s) of the performance(s) you're focusing on, 3-4 basic, curiosity-driven research questions, a draft (DRAFT) introduction, and a working bibliography, including sample secondary sources. Please also indicate the chosen format of your final project (written, video essay, other).
2. If you're creating a review package or writing a review essay, your proposal will include a tentative title, the names of the performances you'll review, and a sample of one of those reviews. (This sample can be draft-y and incomplete. Just give Kim a sense of your reviewing chops.) Please also indicate the chosen format of your final project (written, podcast style, other).
3. If you're making an art thing (script, treatment, etc in response to a specific play/performance we've seen), your proposal will include a tentative title, the name of the performance you're responding to, a rationale for what you're doing and what will be included in your final project, and a timeline for getting your project completed. The timeline is important, because if you leave too little time to execute an artistic vision it will seriously impact the quality of what you give Kim, and thus your grade. Kim can help you tweak your timeline accordingly.

4. Final Project (30%)

DUE: 10 December, 11:59pm, on Brightspace

LENGTH: 6-8 minutes of audio, video, live performance (talk to Kim), OR 2000 words*

***Ask yourself: how much time and effort would I invest in a 2000 word essay? Invest that. What you make, you make. If you think you “need more stuff”, you probably do. If you’re utterly confused, ask Kim. (But do this thought exercise first!)**

Your final project gives you the chance to cosplay one of the following: an urban performance scholar; a thoughtful, ethical theatre critic; a theatre maker. Pick an identity and run with it.

Your final project can take a variety of forms. It can be trad-essay-style (think written research essay!), or it can be a video essay. It can be “review-essay-style” (aka, imagine a review essay in an old-fashioned magazine), or it can be podcast-style. It can be a play script (aka, written), or it can be recorded, performed, mocked up. You decide.

If you hate all the options below, come pitch an alternative to Kim – BEFORE your final project proposal is due.

1. Create a research essay that puts two or more of the performances we have seen this term into conversation with one another. This is a “close reading” challenge – plenty of detail from each performance, and plenty of detail from at least three secondary sources, is required. These sources can be academic (an article on the play?) or “grey lit” (a profile of the playwright? The director? A collection of reviews? A verified social media thread?). They must, however, be properly cited in your Works Cited, MLA 8th edition, along with the performances themselves.
2. Create a research essay that puts one of the performances we have seen this term into conversation with the theatre and the district in which we saw it. Here you’re drawing inspiration from Harvie, Bennett, McKinnie: this is theatre / lit scholar meets urban geographer or economist. This is a close reading challenge of a different kind, and it also requires at least three secondary sources. They may be academic, “grey lit”, or other. Policy documents online at the City of Toronto’s website, anyone? Or maybe you want to try booking a chat with one of the people who runs one of our theatres...? Do not forget your Works Cited, MLA 8th edition.
3. Create a package of reviews, using the learning that Liam Donovan will provide for us during our Reviewing Workshop on November 12. This can take the form of EITHER three separate reviews of three shows, or a review “essay” that takes in three or all four of our shows together. Remember that format is your oyster; these need not be written conventionally. However: Kim does not recommend this option if you did not attend the November 12 workshop.
4. You’re a playwright/maker who just saw this cool show with the class and you want to make a new piece of performance in response to it. Maybe it’s your own take on the material; maybe it’s the same topic/theme but from an alt perspective. Write a script! Or imagine a treatment, a proposal for a new play. Maybe you are an artist and you want to make a maquette of the set and draw the costumes? Don’t forget the basics, though: if this isn’t a script, you need to tell us what the inspiration is, what the overall idea is, and

how you envision it being executed. Devil is in the details, as always. Think, what would I want to share with an Artistic Director, if I had the chance to really pitch this?

7. Accommodations and Flexibility

You are all adults, as is Kim. We will trust each other. That means if you need help, just be brave and ask for it, and Kim will be as flexible as possible to help accommodate your needs. There is no such thing as an academic emergency.

What happens if you don't come to class? There is no "attendance" mark in our class, but Kim is keeping track, because attendance matters. If you miss class a lot, it will have a big impact on your ability to complete your Performance Journal assignment. If something is going on for you that makes it hard for you to be in class (for example, a chronic illness or a mental health challenge), come talk to Kim. We will figure out how to create an alternative scaffold that lets you participate according to your ability.

What happens if you show up to class but haven't read/watched The Thing? You'll be bored, I wager. Others will probably notice. At a certain point, Kim will become Really Annoyed because the work she's done to prepare for a good class discussion will be wasted. And, you'll miss out on a great opportunity to read or watch or listen to some amazing shit made by some really committed artists who are thinking about the kind of stuff that makes life, well, not suck! **In other words: try your best. Some prep is better than no prep.** We will be a learning community; let's work for each other, to make sure we all have the best possible class experience together.

What happens if I miss a day when we're doing a critical reflection? Try not to: if it's in your power, be there. Of course, illness happens, life happens, s*#t happens. If you have to miss, be in touch with Kim so that she can set you a make-up write during her office hours, or at another mutually suitable time.

What happens if I don't hand in my Performance Journal on October 8 or November 5? You'll miss getting valuable formative feedback from Kim, feedback that can help you get a much better grade down the line.

What happens if I don't hand in my Final Project Proposal on time? Every day late, your FPP is working less and less for you. The sooner you get it in, the sooner Kim can get you valuable formative feedback that will help you make a better Final Project.

What happens if I don't hand in my Final Project on time? The FP deadline – December 10 – is a hard deadline. If you need to miss it, you either need blanket accommodation covering deadlines from Accessible Education, or a note from your academic counsellor.

Do you identify as disabled or living with a disability? Students with disabilities are encouraged to register with Accessible Education at the earliest opportunity. This simply gives Kim a formal mechanism to grant you blanket accommodation and never have to ask you what is up; less paperwork is always a blessing! Go to https://academicsupport.uwo.ca/accessible_education/ for more.

8. Other Important Stuff, including re Claude And Friends

PLAGIARISM: Work that you create must be your own. Written work you hand in that gives Kim the impression you maybe didn't write it yourself will be scrutinized. (Kim knows people who work in AI, just saying.) If you are found to have taken language from elsewhere without attribution (this includes AI – see below – as well as old fashioned stealing from other humans) Kim reserves the right to pass your case to the Chair of Undergraduate Studies in EWS, Jane Toswell, who will determine next steps. (NB: Jane is a HARDASS.)

UWO's Scholastic Offenses policy is below; if you've never read it, you should.
https://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_offences.pdf

DEVICES: Can you bring your phone, computer, tablet to class and use it? Yes of course. Kim gets texts sometimes while teaching. She tries not to look. Turn the ringer off, turn the phone over, and it's all good. Use "I'm at dinner with a friend" rules (aka DO NOT DISTURB!) – your device is not more important than our shared, embodied conversation.

GENERATIVE AI: Can you use Claude and his pals in our class? Yes, of course. We are all using generative AI all the time now; it's hard to escape. It's no longer a question of *if* but of *how*.

Our class has one hard and fast rule around AI: if you use it in any meaningful way to support the creation of your assignments, you need to show your work. (See "plagiarism" above.)

This means citing your AI pathway in any assignments that include material supported by generative AI and detailing its use in a disclaimer at the end of your assignment, or in footnotes along the way, as appropriate.

Use AI as a research tool responsibly and treat it as a research source. Ask the same questions of it that you'd ask of any source: *where did this come from? Can I trust it? Where should I go next to deepen my engagement?*

Remember that Claude and friends do NOT write better than you do – I promise. Your unique voice is what makes your work yours. Our classroom has been designed to welcome and reward YOUR voice, not Chat GPT's. Trust your voice.

9. Do You Need Some Extra Help?

Mental Health Support: Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western (go to this link: <https://uwo.ca/health/>) for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Gender-based and sexual violence: Western University is committed to providing compassionate support to anyone who is going through or has gone through these traumatic events. If you are experiencing or have experienced GBSV (either recently or in the past), you will find information about support services for survivors, including emergency contacts at the following website:

https://www.provost.uwo.ca/plans_and_initiatives/projects_and_initiatives/gbsv/. To connect with a case manager or set up an appointment, please contact support@uwo.ca.

Academic advising: Your Home Faculty's Academic Advising Office will support or refer whenever you have an issue that is affecting your studies. Do not hesitate to reach out to them if you are struggling and unsure where to go for help. Contact info for all Faculties is here: <https://registrar.uwo.ca/facultyacademiccounselling.html>. For A&H, reach out to <https://www.uwo.ca/arts/advising/index.html>

Learning Development and Success: Counsellors at the Learning Development and Success Centre are ready to help you improve your learning skills in all kinds of areas! Visit this link: <https://learning.uwo.ca>.

10. Weekly Schedule

WEEK T-1: SEPTEMBER 10

All things introduction!

READ: your syllabus and explore our Brightspace!

WEEK 1: SEPTEMBER 17

What are we doing here, and how will we do it? Practicing the art of reading urban theatre.

READ: Harvie (yes, the whole book!)

WEEK 2: SEPTEMBER 24

Three different approaches to reading theatre in the city; or, what Harvie was talking about, in detail with examples.

READ: McKinnie; Bennett; Knowles

WEEK 3: OCTOBER 1

Theatre trip #1: *To A Flame*

Meet at Alumni Hall 3:30pm sharp!

WEEK 4: OCTOBER 8

What just happened?! Debriefing our trip to *To A Flame*; possible guest artist visit! (FINGERS CROSSED!!!)

WEEK FIVE (October 13 + 15) IS READING WEEK!

WEEK 6: OCTOBER 22

Theatre trip #2: *Prophetess*
Meet at Alumni Hall 3:30pm sharp!

WEEK 7: OCTOBER 29

Theatre trip #3: *Dracula: A Comedy of Terrors*
Meet Kim at The Grand no later than 7:15pm!

WEEK 8: NOVEMBER 5

In class critical reflection 1

Here we go again! Debriefing our last TWO theatre visits, together... (Compare and contrast, people!)

WEEK 9: NOVEMBER 12

What even IS a good theatre review in 2026? With *Intermission Magazine*'s Liam Donovan!

WEEK 10: NOVEMBER 19

Theatre trip #4: *Goodnight Desdemona, Good Morning Juliet*
Meet at Alumni Hall 3:30pm sharp!

WEEK 11: NOVEMBER 26

In class critical reflection 2

Once more for the cheap seats in the back! Thinking about revival; thinking about downtowns; connections across our visits (GDGJ connects to all of them!).

WEEK 12: DECEMBER 3

Performance Journal self-assessment exercise. Final project work: sharing work in progress, asking questions, spending time refining/perfecting/freaking out. Plus cake!