where imagination dances with personal transformation, and creative excellence...

...acts with a social conscience

The department’s MISSION emphasizes the value of performance as a vital means of working for social justice and personal transformation.

We invite majors and non-majors alike to explore the power of performance to raise awareness, create community, foster self-expression, challenge stereotypes, evoke compassion, and represent diverse perspectives.
Gustavus PERFORMANCE EVENTS entertain and challenge audiences with innovative approaches to Shakespeare and other classics, cutting edge contemporary plays, musicals, award-winning modern dance, and devised performances.

The department offers students unique opportunities for creative collaboration with faculty, intensive workshops with guest artists, and independent, student-created work.

Performance
For the 21st Century

Through our program of classes and hands-on experience, we train and nurture THINKING ARTISTS who have both the technique and the insight to create high-quality and compelling performance for the 21st century.
“In the Gustavus Department of Theatre and Dance, we always explore the historiographical ideas and concepts behind each and every work we tackle. This means that every role I’ve played, from Hamm in Samuel Beckett’s masterwork *Endgame* or Lady Bracknell in Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest* to Bottom in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, has taken on a deeper **CONTEXTUAL MEANING**.

I’ve been able to branch out from my acting focus to directing, stage management, design, and dramaturgy. You only need to ask, and the department finds a way to accommodate anything you want to do! Coming to Gustavus was one of the best decisions I’ve ever made.”

— Thomas Buan, Theatre Honors Major

Theatre classes emphasize contemporary performance techniques, including physical theatre, devised theatre, improvisation, and Theatre of the Oppressed. Students learn to analyze not only the “what” and “how” but also the “why” of performance through illuminating courses in history, theory, directing, playwriting, and social justice theatre.

Minors and non-majors are welcome to audition for the season of faculty-directed shows each year. Additional performance opportunities are available through the Theatre Gallery and other student showcases.
“The way that I think about dance has completely shifted in my time with the Gustavus dance program. My professors have always shown an interest in my personal growth and constantly push me to EXPLORE MOVEMENT, choreography, and technique in new ways—and all the opportunities to choreograph, attend conferences, and work with incredible guest artists such as La Gringa Danza—have really deepened my understanding of dance.”

— McKayla Murphy, Communication Studies Major, Dance Minor

The Gustavus Dance program provides a welcoming environment—encouraging all students to explore movement, whether as a first-time dancer or as a more experienced mover. Strongly rooted in Modern technique, with classes in Ballet and Jazz, our curriculum includes composition, choreography and performance projects, international techniques, dance history, and the science of movement. Our approach develops a deep understanding of dance as embodied knowledge, creative expression, and transformational awareness.
“The most unique aspect of my Gustavus Theatre & Dance experience was individualized attention and curriculum, along with opportunities to design for mainstage shows like Hair. Theatre is one of the few deeply collaborative art forms in which every voice, regardless of social standing, can be heard equally. With what I’ve learned as a designer about communication, management, and collaboration, I feel like I could succeed in a multitude of work environments.”

— Jessica Van Kempen, Theatre Major, Costume Design

Jessica is pursuing an MFA program in costume design at the University of California, Irvine. She is currently designing off-Broadway for a company in New York City.

Gustavus offers exciting opportunities to learn about design and stagecraft—in the classroom and in production. Students may focus on Scenic Design, with opportunities to work on our thrust stage and new black box theatre. Students interested in Costumes and Make-up learn how to dress characters from period and contemporary plays in our season. Lighting and Sound design students have cutting-edge technology at their fingertips.
Teaching and Performance Spaces

In the fall of 2019, the $70 million Nobel Hall expansion and renovation connected Nobel Hall and the Schaefer Fine Arts Center with the brand new ROB AND JUDY GARDNER LABORATORY THEATRE.

In the true spirit of our interdisciplinary liberal arts approach, the laboratory theatre enables students to experiment with new modes of creation, encouraging them to perform, choreograph, design, devise, direct, and write for the future.

The new space provides flexibility for classes and performances combined with CUTTING-EDGE TECHNOLOGY.

In addition, departmental facilities include the 270-seat thrust stage Evan and Evelyn Anderson Theatre, two dance studios, a 50-seat black box theatre, well-equipped scenery and costume shops, and specialized classrooms.
“Art is such a powerful medium; it reaches people in ways they can’t even articulate. All they know is that the world for them is somehow a bit changed when they walk out of that theatre. It seems clear, then, that we need to use art as the vehicle for social change.”

— Mallory Waytashek, Psychological Science Major, Dance Minor

EVELYN ANDERSON SCHOLARSHIPS

Scholarships are available for demonstrated excellence in theatre and dance. Students may apply for a scholarship in Acting/Directing, Design and Technology, Dance, and Social Justice Performance. To apply, visit apply.gustavus.edu/register/theatredancescholarship or call the admission office at 1-800-Gustavus.

FACULTY

Kimberly Braun, Visiting Assistant Professor
Acting, Movement, Voice
braun@gustavus.edu | 507-933-7553

Lydia Frances, Visiting Assistant Professor
Scenic Design, Scenic Painting, Stage Management, Prop Design
lfranc2@gustavus.edu | 507-933-7344

Henry McCarthy, Associate Professor
Physical Theatre, Musical Theatre, Latin American Studies
hmccarri@gustavus.edu | 507-933-7352

Larissa McConnell, Continuing Assistant Professor
Costume and Makeup Design, Fabric Arts
lmcconne@gustavus.edu | 507-933-7343

Matt Rightmire, Visiting Assistant Professor
Technical Director, Stagecraft, Scenic Construction
rightmire@gustavus.edu | 507-933-7046

Melissa Rolnick, Associate Professor
Modern Technique, Composition, Social Justice Performance
mrolnick@gustavus.edu | 507-933-7642

Michele Rusinko, Professor
Ballet and Modern Technique, Somatics, Storytelling
mrusinko@gustavus.edu | 507-933-7351

Sue Gunness, Senior Continuing Instructor; Sarah Hauss, Adjunct Assistant Professor; Giselle Mejia, Visiting Instructor; and Jill Patterson, Visiting Assistant Professor
Modern Dance, Ballet, Jazz, Global

Terena Wilkens, Continuing Assistant Professor
Lighting and Sound Design, Computer-Aided Drafting
tech1@gustavus.edu | 507-933-6280
LIKE “Gustavus Theatre & Dance” on Facebook, FOLLOW “GAC Theatre & Dance” on Twitter, and FOLLOW “gustavustheatredance” on Instagram to learn more about future performances and department news!