MA program in Theatre Arts: frequently asked questions

1. **How big is your program? How big are the classes?**

There are about 20-25 graduate students in some phase of the program but an entering class is generally 8-10. Consequently, the graduate seminars are small (6-12 students). Enrollment in the upper division undergraduate electives (which might account for about half of your MA coursework) varies depending on the class but they are generally 2 to 3 times as large as graduate seminars.

2. **How long does it take to finish the program?**

This depends on whether you attend as a full time or part time student. Graduate students range in need from a person who takes two years to finish to a person who takes one class each quarter and takes 5 years to finish. Many students finish all their courses in two years and complete the thesis/project either in spring quarter following completion of classes (during year two), or in the following year (during Fall of year three). Most students take 2-3 classes a quarter while also working. Few elective options offered by other departments are scheduled in the summer. The ideal program is two years (five academic quarters beginning in fall) of coursework. Work on thesis [TA 599] is in the spring term and students might complete in spring, or work on thesis over the summer and complete in the fall.

3. **Can I enter the program winter, spring, or summer quarter?**

Normally students enter in Fall, but some enter in Winter or Spring. However, TAD 500, the introduction to graduate studies, is only offered in the fall and must be taken before the other 4 required graduate seminars. Entering in the fall is the most efficient way to move through the program. Besides the seminars, students take about 6-7 elective courses at the graduate or upper division undergraduate level and can begin these any quarter.

4. **Will I be able to work and take classes?**

Almost all the students at CSULA work and go to school. The seminars meet once a week in the late afternoon (4:20-8:10) in order to facilitate work and teaching schedules.

5. **Are there TA or teaching positions available?**

Yes. Teaching Associate positions are highly competitive. Students are encouraged to take TA 510, which involves working with either the head of the acting program or another professor to mentor the graduate student to teach acting (TA 141), introduction to theatre (TA 152) or other undergraduate classes in theatre or dance. 100 or 200 level classes are sometimes available for graduate students to apply to.

6. **Why do you require a writing sample in the application?**

Graduate seminars have a heavy writing component and we expect a certain level of writing competency for these seminars. You need to have mastered certain academic writing skills to be successful in your graduate classes. Submit any
undergraduate research paper in any subject as your writing sample. Five to ten pages is ideal.

7. How many performance opportunities are there in the program?

The program is primarily academic, but we have several performance opportunities in the department, and many of the seminars and academic classes have a performance component. There are 5 required seminars and about 7 elective classes at least 2 to 4 of which can be performance related (e.g. directing, playwriting, designing, performance, dramaturgy). People who come to LA with the desire to be actors have found the program frustrating because of the emphasis of seminars is upon reading and writing. They should be in MFA programs so we rarely admit them. However, we often accept people in the program who have acting careers and who want to return to school to learn about theory, history and criticism in order to be able to teach. The culminating activity is either a thesis or a thesis project. About 90% of our students do the project: acting, directing, playwriting, etc and write a project report.

8. My undergraduate degree is not in theatre. Will this keep me out of your program?

About 50% of the students who enter our MA program do not have a BA in theatre. You will need to take some prerequisite classes, usually theatre history if you haven’t had it, but often the prerequisite courses are co-requisites that can be taken along with the courses in the MA program.

9. My g.p.a. is under 3.0. Can I still apply?

This depends on how far below a 3.0 your g.p.a. is and why. Some students are returning to school after as much as a decade and have grown up and regret the folly of their youth. Some come from extremely rigorous undergraduate majors. Students who fall short of the required 3.0 g.p.a. but meet other application requirements can be admitted as Conditional Graduate Students and are required to raise the g.p.a. through coursework selected by a graduate advisor. Upon successful completion of this coursework, they may be admitted as regular graduate students.

10. What can I do with an MA degree?

Students come into our program for various reasons. A few want to go on into PhD programs. The program will prepare them to be competitive in applying for doctoral programs. In fact, we have an excellent track record in placing our graduates in the PhD programs of their choice. Some of our students are working actors who want to return to school and get an advanced degree to be able to teach in community colleges. Some of our students are high school teachers who find themselves running drama programs their undergraduate degrees did not prepare them for. Furthermore, high school teachers can raise their salaries by getting an MA degree.

11. I’m over 30. Will I feel uncomfortable in your program?

The student population at CSULA and in our MA program is diverse. We have students from all over the world and students’ ages range from about 20 to 60.