Shakespeare for Scientists:
University Workshop Building Scientist’s Presentation Tools Through the Application of Theatre Pedagogy for Shakespearean Text

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SEEDS You Choose Leadership Award Application
1. Abstract
This SEEDS application is seeking funding to implement a workshop that will build interdisciplinary relationships between the sciences and the theatre arts. *Shakespeare for Scientists* is a workshop that helps scientists and future scientists develop skills for presenting dynamic and comprehensive scientific presentations by applying performance techniques used when speaking Shakespearean texts. Scientific presentations are similar to performing Shakespeare text because both deal with complex language, comparison of antithetical ideas, and ask the audience to consider outcomes that challenge traditional theories. This will be a two-day, interactive workshop that will foster interests in the performing arts for the scientific mind. It will build pathways to help scientists understand how to connect the work of the performing artist to that of the scientist, and encourage faculty and students to find more diverse methods of study within academic pursuits.

2. Activity Goals:
The goal of implementing this program at the University of Miami is to expand the breadth of scientist this work may be able to serve while encouraging scientific scholars to build an appreciation for the technical skills of the performing arts as well as an understanding of how to apply these skills in their own scientific fields. This work began for me as a graduate student studying Acting at the University of Virginia. I was invited by UVa’s Department of Chemistry to help the students improve presentational skills of research projects.

The first students I did this work with were presenting on improvements in chemotherapy that would make treatment for cancer more successful and bearable for patients. Having lost my mother to cancer, I was deeply moved by the work of these young scientists; however, initially, I had no idea what the projects represented due to a severe lack of presentation skills. The students had in common several areas needing improvement: rushing through unfamiliar Latin-based research language so quickly as to be incomprehensible, sinking in the hips while slouching in the shoulders, and presenting a generally apathetic attitude toward the greater idea of the research presented. I immediately recognized this behavior as similar to that of the young actor attempting to perform Shakespeare. As I prodded the young chemistry students to take pride in their research, I discovered that humbleness and fear of public speaking blocked my ability to immediately apply performance coaching to the student’s work. I took a different route, and I asked the students to learn a Shakespearean monologue or soliloquy. This ultimately became the solution to improving the students’ presence when presenting research.

The ability to research and practice technical-presentational skills is necessary to performing Shakespeare coherently. To speak it clearly (and in a way that the audience can understand the story) the performer must do more than understand the plot. The
performer must hone the following technical skills for speaking in order to be understood by the audience:

- Speaking in the rhythm of iambic pentameter (a verse line with five metrical feet consisting of unstressed and stressed syllables)
- Strengthening the muscles of the lips and jaw in order to value the vowels and consonants of complex words
- Building control of the diaphragm in order to create breath control
- Practicing standing in physical positions that support the ideas of the text and creates presence in the performer’s body
- Understanding and passionately believing in the power of large, complex ideas to the point that the performer can move the audience to care about the subject

The chemistry students were self-conscious when first applying these skills to the words written for their presentations, but when they were able to practice these skills with Shakespeare, they improved swiftly and noticeably. The research element and technical exercises we practiced seemed to appease the logical/scientific minds among us and gave students the courage to apply these skills to their own work. Thus began the development of this workshop.

For implementation at the University of Miami, the workshop is designed as a two-day weekend workshop, sixteen hours (8 hours each day) with a one-hour lunch break provided on each day. The workshop will be interactive and also feature two guest speakers. The outline for the weekend is as follows:

- Morning of day one will feature two guest speakers, an artist and a scientist, both scholars and practitioners discussing the importance of the interdisciplinary relationship of the fine arts and the sciences.
- Afternoon of day one: participates will engage in exercises that train the body and voice to perform Shakespearean text.
- Morning of day two: participates will continue focusing on technical skills by engaging in physical exercises to build physical presence.
- Afternoon of day two: participates will be invited to present research presentations currently in development and will receive feedback.
- The workshop will conclude with a group discussion.

This workshop will benefit from speakers Dr. Rebecca Schneider, Ph.D., Professor of Theatre Arts and Performance Studies at Brown University (former Chair and Head of the Performance Studies PhD at Brown University) and Dr. Marietta Cameron, Ph.D., Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Computer Science at the University of North Carolina-Asheville.
Finally, the ultimate goal of this workshop is to provide an opportunity for interdisciplinary exchange between the sciences and the theatre arts in the hopes of fostering more collaborated programs in the future.

3. Personal Goals:
The practical application of performance pedagogy in performance is the focus of my creative-artistic research. Although this research immediately focuses on the theatre artist, in the past year it has expanded to working with people in other careers. Scientists in particular have sought me out for this work to prepare for events such as, but not limited to, doctoral defense presentations, conference presentations, and job interviews. This workshop allows me to expand and strengthen my skills as an internationally recognized presentation/performance coach, acquire data for research, and foster relationships with scholars in disciplines that ought not be so distant from my own.

4. Budget:

$2500

- $1000 (round-trip flights for two outside speakers)
- $700 (accommodations for two outside speakers, Marriott Courtyard, Coconut Grove)
- $600 (Honorarium for Speakers)
- $200 (coffee and snacks for two days)