What is the Actor Training Program?
Each incoming BFA class, numbering 20 students, moves as a group through the four years of training forming a company, with a strong emphasis on the idea of ensemble. Students take courses in acting, voice, speech and a variety of classes with a movement focus. The training each year builds upon the foundation work from the previous academic year.

The BFA program also has an international component to its training. Through the University of Minnesota’s study abroad program, students spend fall semester of their junior year abroad participating in academic courses and continuing their core training as a company. Previous experiences have included intensive work with the Globe Theatre, the National Theatre as well as the British-Amercian Drama Association in London.

This program is unique in many ways, as it combines a core of theatre courses within a liberal arts curriculum, merging the University of Minnesota’s outstanding academics with the world of professional theatre under the auspices of the acclaimed Guthrie Theater.

Why Did They Require Study Abroad?
• The program was created together with the University of Minnesota Theater Department and the Guthrie Theater. The unique collaboration of the University with the Guthrie provided many theater contacts on an international level and the goal of the program was to utilize these contacts in the best way possible.

• To create a unique program that would attract students nation-wide, both with the Guthrie connection and with the international component.

• The offering of a full semester in London was considered a strong incentive for students to audition for the program and has been used as a recruiting tool.

Creative Ideas From Thinking Outside the Box
• Idea to work with the Guthrie Theater for the creation of the Actor Training program was the beginning. How to incorporate the international component was the next step.

• Contacted the Learning Abroad Center (LAC) to see what types of programs were available.

• LAC negotiated with CAPA (Center for Academic Programs Abroad) their on-site provider in London to tweak their existing program.

• CAPA allowed the BFA students to take two of the regular class offerings as well as all of the housing, meal plan and excursions the “regular” students took but refunded to the BFA program cost of two instructors so BFA was able to use those funds to pay for their own special faculty.

• Not trying to create a whole new program saved the students money and gave them a full semester’s academic experience.

Unique Excursions
A group of students visited Stonehenge on an program excursion.

Cost Issues for the Department
• Small additional program fee added to help offset departmental costs.

• Because the semester is built in to students’ program from the very beginning faculty on campus are prepared for teaching shift every fall when new cohort leaves.

• Negotiating with on-site provider allowed for additional rebated funding to be used for hiring theater professionals in London.

Advantages
• Student retention. Knowing that their junior year will provide them with a semester in London keeps students in the program.

• Incorporating it directly into their 4-year plan allows the continued progress in their “lock-step” program keeping them on track for graduation.

• Used as a recruitment tool nationally.

• Provides students with international experience for their Resumes.

• Students are challenged in ways not possible on campus.

• Builds on relationships within the cohort.

Why Study Abroad?
• Students are exposed to new ideas and methods and gain a completely new perspective on their art.

• International experience gives them a “leg-up” in their job search.

• Contact with renown British faculty that is unavailable in the U.S.

• Opportunities to see British theater productions weekly.

• Personal and emotional independence and growth.

Cost Issues for Students
• Costs were held down by combining the Actor Training Program with an already established study abroad program in London that was willing to “tweak” their curriculum to allow for the unique requirements of the group.

• Scholarships are available.

• Costs relatively comparable to studying at the U of M. For out-of-state students the cost is actually somewhat less.

• Department contribution helps.

• Because students know they are going to London from the very beginning of their freshman year they start planning/ saving two years in advance.

Testimonials
“As a BFA student in Minneapolis, I feel like I’ve been able to garner a knowledge and understanding of theater on a national scale in this country, and even internationally in the semester spent studying our craft in England, while still getting very special, individualized attention in a comfortable nurturing environment, blending the best of both worlds: comfortable family and challenging new experiences and insights.”

Betsy Retz
BFA Class of 2005