STEP Fellowship Proposal: Summer Acting Programs

“Actor by accident” has become my proverbial description to describe my time in the theater. Needing a fine arts credit to apply to the University of California schools, I signed up to take AP Art History my senior year of high school. The Theater Gods were on my side that summer, for an insufficient number of students signed up for the class. Administration cancelled the AP Art History, and a subconscious, burning desire to get the heck on stage prompted me to sign up for Acting I instead. Two and a half years later, I satiate my soul full of shiny happy feelings performing in front of Columbus area school children acting like a fool onstage (That is, a professional Fool, playing Touchstone in Ohio State’s As You Like It School Tour). I’d like to think that I satiate the kids’ souls too, full of shiny happy thoughts.

Well, I guess that I’ve recently found the unconventional career that I’ve always sought: a career in the theater. Thus, for my STEP Fellowship, I want to develop my technical skills as an actor, meet and learn from well-respected and reputable theater practitioners with deep ties to the industry, and surround myself with students as interested in the art as I am by participating in one of several summer theater programs.

While different in philosophy and location, all of the theater programs I am interested in introduce their students to the professional world of acting through coursework and performance. These programs include (but are not limited to): the New Jersey Shakespeare Festival Apprentice Company, the Williamstown Theater Festival Apprentice Company, the School at Steppenwolf, the Atlantic Theater School Summer Intensive, Maggie Flanigan Studio’s Summer Intensive, and Stella Adler’s Summer Conservatory. My aim is to do one of these programs in summer 2015. All of the aforementioned programs are similar in that they follow a curriculum based in their method of acting and are taught by well-respected professionals. They all range from about $2,000- $4,000 (I will pay the difference in the program cost), they range from a five to eleven week curriculum, about a 20 to 25 hour work week, and they are all contingent on an application, and an interview and/ or audition. (I include a table with all of the general information regarding the programs on the last page of the proposal.) While the possible theater programs share many commonalities, the New Jersey Shakespeare program is the most comprehensive acting apprenticeship program, and the School at Steppenwolf is the most comprehensive acting summer intensive program. Thus, for the rest of my proposal, I will use these two programs to illustrate the intended learning, the mechanisms for accomplishing that learning, and the range of costs associated with the programs.

The New Jersey Shakespeare Festival Apprenticeship combines class work, crew work, and performance work, introducing young actors to a professional life in theater at one of the premier summer theaters in the country. The cost of tuition is $3,750, which includes housing as well as tuition/fees. The actual festival is located at Drew University in Madison, New Jersey, only 30 miles away from Manhattan, and I would thus live on the campus of Drew University. Classes are held five days a week, and the classes include: acting/scene study, voice and speech, movement, stage combat and text analysis. These classes are taught by acclaimed acting and professionals at the festival, including artistic director Bonnie J. Monte. Additional workshops
and classes taught by acclaimed guest artists are sprinkled in throughout the summer. These classes broaden the technical skills of the actor.

Crew assignments supplement classwork. Crew assignments include scenic construction, costumes/wardrobe, electrics, sound, props, scenic painting and administration. Crew assignments meet three days a week, and they help the technical aspects of the Festival’s main stage productions. Crew assignments broaden the scope of an actor’s work in and around the theater.

Lastly, the performance aspect of the program completes the curriculum: “All apprentices perform in three scene-night presentations in the Theatre's Late-Nite Series. Apprentices are also eligible to perform in independent Late-Nite projects created by members of the Intern Company or in the annual Late-Nite Cabaret.” This culminates in a final project, where the apprentices perform an abridged version of a Shakespeare play. Performance opportunities provide the actor with experience most true to that of an actor’s job... Acting!

Most exciting of all are the main stage performance opportunities: “Main Stage performance opportunities may be available to apprentices depending upon the casting needs of each production. Although The Shakespeare Theatre does not guarantee the casting of apprentices on the Main Stage, the size of the casts often allows apprentices to be cast in small roles, providing further opportunity to work with seasoned professionals.” If cast, I would receive Equity points and begin my accumulation of points to enroll in the professional actor’s union.

The New Jersey Shakespeare Festival Apprentice Company requires both an application followed by an audition. I am confident both in my talent as an actor as well as my work ethic to prepare and successfully perform a monologue for the admission process. Applications are due by April 25th.

The Williamstown Theater Festival has a similar curriculum to New Jersey Shakespeare, combining class work, crew work, and performance. While New Jersey focuses on Shakespeare technique, Williamstown focuses on a more modern acting technique.

The summer intensives differ in that they are mainly in-class work accompanied by a bit of performance (but without any crew work.) My top choice for a summer intensive program is The School at Steppenwolf. The School at Steppenwolf is a “10-week residency for experienced actors who want to learn more about ensemble traditions, values and methods that make Steppenwolf unique.” Organized by the world-renowned Steppenwolf Theatre in Chicago and taught by Steppenwolf ensemble members, for ten weeks, (which are broken up into three trimesters with a tenth week cross-disciplinary showcase) students are in class from 8:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. learning different disciplines of acting. These include: Meisner (probably the most widely used acting technique in the country), Improvisation, Viewpoints, Feldenkrais (two movement techniques), Text Analysis, Voice, On-Camera, Monologues, and Professional Seminar. Past instructors include Steppenwolf Ensemble member, actor and director Yasen Payenkov, Obie Award winner and Steppenwolf Ensemble member Tim Hopper, and Tony Award winning director and Steppenwolf Ensemble member Anna D. Shapiro.

Accompanying the technical skills gained from the School at Steppenwolf (Meisner, Improvisation, Viewpoints, etc.) are the professional connections made throughout the process. Firstly, as aforementioned, the instructors are well-recognized, nationally acclaimed theater professionals. Especially in Chicago (which is where I want to begin my career,) these theatre professionals know casting directors, are directors themselves, and mentor the actors to become a
professional actor in Chicago. Since the cohort of actors for each class is only about twenty four people, the classes are very ensemble based (a trademark of Steppenwolf,) and they are very personal. On top of the professional contacts I would make are the twenty three other actors who would be in my cohort. I would meet and (hopefully) befriend twenty three actors who strive and work diligently to succeed in the craft of acting, with the prospect of creating theater with the other fellow actors following the program.

The cost of tuition for the School at Steppenwolf is $4,000. A perk of attending the School at Steppenwolf is that I would be able to live from home and attend the school without any housing costs.

While similar, the other summer intensive programs differ in the techniques they teach, the duration of the programs, and, of course, the theater professionals that teach them. The other summer intensives are less comprehensive, mainly teaching the acting technique in which the program specializes in. The Atlantic Studio Summer Intensive introduces the actor to a technique created by David Mamet and William H. Macy called Practical Aesthetics. This technique is characterized by its “simple, honest, and straightforward” approach to acting. Maggie Flanigan’s studio introduces the actor to Meisner. Lastly, Stella Adler’s Summer Conservatory is a foundation-building curriculum introducing the actor to more basic Acting Technique. All of these programs are reputable programs taught by experienced theater professionals. Since all of these are located in New York City, I would stay with my aunt and uncle who live just outside of the city, in New Rochelle, Westchester County, NY.

While I am confident in my ability as an actor, and more importantly, my will to become a better actor, since all of the programs I listed are dependent on an audition and/or interview, I must address the hypothetical: what if I do not get into any of the programs. In such a situation, I will strategically create a bundle of individual classes offered by various theaters that address some of my needs as an actor. An example of classes I may choose to take is the Advanced Scene Study class at Profiles Theatre taught by Darrell Cox (or the lower level Intermediate Scene Study class), Improvisation classes at the Second City Training Center, Gately/Poole acting intensives in Chicago, and/or classes at the Piven Theatre Workshop in Evanston, IL.

In terms of reporting my experience, I will firstly provide STEP with an acceptance letter/ email confirming my acceptance and matriculation into one of the aforementioned programs (or a program that is easily seen as an equal.) Throughout my experience, I will create an electronic portfolio that will include a description/ possible blog posts of my experience, photographs/ videos of class work I was in, photographs of any production/ scene I was in, photographs of friends I made, and my acting résumé with my training program indicated. This portfolio will have multiple uses. One use, of course, is to directly report back to STEP. A second, more important, use is to have my portfolio available to acting graduate programs, future apprentice programs, and theaters around the country. Lastly, I want to invite my faculty adviser, Ross MacDonald, and the rest of my cohort to a presentation of a monologue/ several monologues/ a workshop that highlights technical skills I learned through the program. We, perhaps, can then have a food party celebrating each other’s accomplishments!

With admission to any of the aforementioned programs, I would gain technical skill, professional contacts, and friends who love to make and perform theater. Through the help of the STEP Fellowship, I hope that the skills and contacts I gain from the programs will help kick start and sustain a professional career in theater for the rest of my life.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Cost</th>
<th>Duration (w/ dates.)</th>
<th>Application Deadline</th>
<th>Audition Date</th>
<th>Specialization</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey Shakespeare Festival Apprenticeship</td>
<td>Madison, NJ</td>
<td>$3,750</td>
<td>11 weeks, May 25-August 11</td>
<td>April 25</td>
<td>Early April</td>
<td>Shakespeare Technique, performance opportunities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Williamstown Theatre Festival Apprenticeship</td>
<td>Williamstown, MA</td>
<td>$3,950</td>
<td>8-9 weeks, mid-June-late August</td>
<td>March 15</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Classes and workshops taught by New York based actors, performance opportunities</td>
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<tr>
<td>School at Steppenwolf</td>
<td>Chicago, IL</td>
<td>$4,000</td>
<td>10 weeks, June 9-August 15</td>
<td>February 7</td>
<td>March 3-7, 17-19, 24</td>
<td>Ensemble based training, including: Meisner, Movement, Voice</td>
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<td>Atlantic Theater School Summer Intensive</td>
<td>New York, NY</td>
<td>$3,295</td>
<td>6 weeks, July 7-August</td>
<td>May 5</td>
<td>June</td>
<td>Practical Aesthetics</td>
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<td>Maggie Flanigan’s Studio Summer Intensive</td>
<td>New York, NY</td>
<td>$1,300</td>
<td>6 weeks, Mid June-End of July</td>
<td>Rolling Basis</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Meisner</td>
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<td>Stella Adler Summer Conservatory</td>
<td>New York, NY</td>
<td>$3,500</td>
<td>10 weeks, June 2-August 8</td>
<td>April 1</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Basic Acting Technique</td>
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