



**School of Communication**

*Water Tower Campus*

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To the Search Committee:

I am writing in support of Seth Panitch's application for a position in your Department of Drama. I am aware of the exacting standards for research, service, and teaching expected of tenured and tenure-track faculty and have no doubt that Mr. Panitch would be an excellent addition to your institution. Having observed and worked with him directly, I can attest both to his excellence as a teacher and to the value of his professional and creative work.

I first met Mr. Panitch at the University of Alabama over four years ago when we arranged to join our classes for a couple sessions. I was teaching a class in the Department of Telecommunication and Film on screen directing for film and TV and Panitch, who was teaching an acting styles class, generously agreed to speak to my class on directing actors and to prepare his students to work on some of the short projects they were producing. Even in just a couple short class sessions, the tips he was able to share with my students on directing, both from the experience of a seasoned director AND as an actor with screen credits, proved invaluable.

Overall, that experience was so positive that we formalized and extended these sessions the next year, joining and co-teaching our classes for a full four weeks of the semester. The projects that were the fruits of these joint sessions were the best to come out of my screen directing class in the five years I offered the course at Alabama. Had I not left the University after that year, we would have institutionalized and continued this arrangement, which I think had proved to be a boon for both of our students.

Co-teaching with Panitch was also a personally gratifying and educational experience. It is always a pleasure to witness an effective and impassioned educator in person. Whether working with my students—to whom he had no previous allegiance or responsibility—or working with his students, Panitch was always extremely well prepared, both demanding and encouraging, engaged and engaging. He is extremely generous with his time and knowledge—there was frequently a line of students waiting at his door whenever we met in his office—and takes personal responsibility for his students' growth and success, pushing them to work hard, prepare well and get the most out of their talents.

I should also point out that the fact that Panitch agreed at all to this co-teaching arrangement is evidence of his collegiality, his commitment to his students (and the larger student body) and his abilities as a teacher (I had proposed and engaged in similar projects with other colleagues at UA with much less success). Co-teaching and/or joining classes across departments is often very difficult to manage both pedagogically and logistically. The success of our experience is in large part a testament to Panitch's

flexibility, openness to change (no small thing at a University) and organizational abilities.

I have also had an opportunity to work with and observe Mr. Panitch professionally. In part born from our early discussions on teaching, Panitch and I co-wrote and produced an educational documentary, *A Night in the Theatre*, exploring the experience of live performance for an audience. We were both amazed that there had been relatively little work examining the experience of theater from the perspective of audiences and the significance of that live interaction on the work that's done in theater.

We produced the 23-minute documentary at UA, taping during a production of Mr. Panitch's *Dammit Shakespeare*. The documentary was ultimately picked-up for distribution by Insight Media, one of the largest distributors of educational videos in the world, and has proved a successful title for them, selling to dozens of schools and Universities around the country.

For my part, the documentary gave me another opportunity to pick Panitch's brain about the arts of acting and directing, as well as to be exposed to HIS writing, acting and directing in the production of *Dammit Shakespeare*. I am confident that the committee is well aware of Mr. Panitch's productivity as a director, both in productions at the University of Alabama as well as his work professionally. However, I urge you not to overlook his talents and successes as a writer. Panitch is a successful writer because his work, as exemplified by *Dammit Shakespeare*, is witty, smart and makes big ideas accessible. The fact that Seth has had both stage and screen work produced or optioned, and has experienced critical success with that work, speaks volumes to the breadth of his talents as a storyteller.

Finally, my experience documenting Mr. Panitch in his groundbreaking work with Cuban theater has further cemented my high opinion of him. I spent four weeks observing and filming Panitch as he overcame the incredibly steep obstacles of language, culture and politics to become the first American director to work in Cuba since the beginning of the embargo. His focus, drive and endurance were incredible. Once again, it required remarkable organization, flexibility and skill on his part just to get the project launched.

Once in rehearsal, I was daily reminded of Mr. Panitch's skill as a director. Even while working with actors in an unfamiliar language, he was able to effectively communicate his vision for the production and coach them to their best performances. He combined a vast assortment of directorial tools: improvisation, demonstration, staging, side-coaching, text analysis, and old-fashioned prodding, to successfully prepare his actors for the production. For me, watching and filming his rehearsals daily was like attending an advanced seminar on directing craft.

I was not the only one to benefit from the experience of watching and working with Mr. Panitch during this process. I interviewed more than a dozen of his collaborators on this production. Both on and off the record, the Cubans universally praised his talents and his commitment. Many of the Cuban actors, both young and seasoned, commented on how

much they had learned from Panitch about acting and had grown professionally from the experience of working with him.

In the end, he staged an extremely moving and well-received production of *The Merchant of Venice* in Cuba. To create such an effective production of a difficult, Shakespearean play, with actors who had no prior experience doing Shakespeare (a distinct and challenging acting style) would be laudable under any circumstances. Doing it in such a small amount of time, in unfamiliar and difficult "terrain," in a language you don't speak: simply amazing.

Throughout this process of teaching, collaborating and working with Seth Panitch, I have had a unique opportunity to witness up close his contributions both to his field and to his students. I think it is fair to say that I have as deep and broad a view of his work as one can have for a colleague in another discipline and, in short, I believe unequivocally that he would make an excellent colleague and contribution to your department.

I thank the committee for considering my letter of support and encourage you to contact me if you have any questions or need further information from me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Greer', written in a cursive style.

Aaron Greer  
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