

Visitor's Report
University of Wisconsin
Department of Theatre and Drama
School of Education
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External Evaluators

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Acknowledgements

The visiting team wishes to thank the School of Education's Dean's Office and the faculty, staff, and students of the Department of Theatre and Drama at the University of Wisconsin for their wonderful hospitality. Our visit was extremely well scheduled and without exception, everyone we spoke to was open, gracious, and forthcoming.

Our comments and recommendations are based on a careful reading of the self-study, departmental webpage, additional material that was provided, and observations gained during two days of interviews on the University of Wisconsin, Madison campus. We do not presume to know all the complexities of the Department, the School of Education (SOE), nor the challenges facing the campus. The comments below are offered as suggestions, with the visiting team working to be as informed as possible in the time allowed.

Background

The Department of Theatre and Drama has experienced a number of major changes in the last five years. Chief among these are the failed attempt to create a College of the Arts at the University of Wisconsin; the division of the Department; and subsequent move of the production faculty and staff to the School of Education. These events in tandem with budget cuts, loss of student enrollment and faculty positions (with two performance faculty moving into administrative positions) have had a negative impact on the Department's operations and ability to provide cohesive programs.

Despite these setbacks, the Department does have the rare opportunity to reinvent itself both in terms of curriculum and the way in which it provides new opportunities for students. The SOE's Dean's office seems very open, committed, and willing to help the theatre unit establish itself and prosper in the School. While Departmental faculty have been through difficult changes and do not agree on all issues regarding the future direction of the Department, it still appears that all are able to voice their opinions, are engaged in the planning process, and care about the outcome.

The self-study included a number of questions that we have tried to address in this report, although some we did not feel we had the knowledge base to address fully.

1. Are the mission and the student learning outcomes clear and focused?
2. Do our current curriculum/requirements and faculty/staff configurations set up our students for success in meeting our learning outcomes? If not, what changes should we consider?

3. Do the department's facilities and performance spaces support the curriculum and student learning outcomes?
4. Are we offering a balanced opportunity for undergraduates to participate in productions while maintaining a robust graduate program?
5. What recommendations do you have for increasing undergraduate enrollment?
6. What methods do you suggest the Department use to facilitate communication with alumni?
7. Do current program offerings (BS in Theatre and Drama) fulfill the students' demand for undergraduate theatre education at UW-Madison? Should other degree offerings be considered at the undergraduate level?

Vision and Identity

With the number of recent changes it was clear to the visiting team that the Department is seeking to define its vision and core values. Creating a new Departmental identity will take faculty working together – asking how the Department might design a program to meet student needs in the 21st century. Creating clear goals and aspirations will define the use of resources, curriculum, and how the Department recruits, retains, and educates students.

The self-study contains the Department's Mission, Vision, and Learning Outcomes statements and some of the proposed curriculum addresses these aspirations and outcomes. We were charged with looking at the undergraduate program, and it is our observation that a clearer vision and sense of what identifies theatre studies at UW is important to create and communicate with current and prospective students. The Department should also work through the curriculum and production opportunities to build a stronger Departmental community. It was noted by several faculty that other institutions in the state are able to recruit students more effectively than UW.

Student Opportunities to Practice Theatre

The Department has taken steps to provide more undergraduate production opportunities through its Second Stages program (a student run series). This is an excellent development and by encouraging and growing this program, the Department will provide students the ability to take what is learned in the classroom into a practical and creative environment. There was a sense that this is a growing program with some unknowns for the students; well-defined policies and resources, along with positive support by both teaching staff and faculty are key success factors.

The visiting team attended the Department's production of *Smart People*. This seemed to be an excellent collaboration with a guest director and playwright on campus to work on

this very recent play. It also is a timely script, taking on issues of race and gender – vital conversations to foster. However, we were struck by the fact that the piece was only a cast of four and were informed that only two of these were students, with only one a theatre student. We do not know the casting for all the other productions in the Department's season, however, as we are discussing the undergraduate program in this report, performance opportunities for students is an important consideration in recruiting and increasing the number of student majors. Anecdotally, several times in our interviews students pointedly stated their opinion that guest artists and outside talent took away their opportunities to participate. Providing consistent opportunities for participation in productions is a key success factor in recruiting and building a strong undergraduate program.

Credit Hour Generation

We were told the Department currently has no courses that enroll over fifty, and that UW is moving toward an RCM/Allocation split model of apportioning funding. The visiting team views both as opportunities for the Department to consider designing and offering some large enrollment introductory courses that would fulfill campus general education requirements. This could help the SOE in credit hour generation, and hopefully allow the Dean's office to provide additional funding to the Department. If these courses are interesting and well taught, they might also attract new majors.

It is our understanding that this is not an easy fix and that there are several issues that make offering large courses challenging. It will take current faculty time and effort to envision courses and design their content and as faculty and staff are overworked with their current duties, there will need to be an instructor(s) hired to teach these courses. It appears that the current large enrollment courses stayed with the PhD faculty in the College of Letters and Sciences. If this is the case, new large enrollment courses would need to take on topics that lean more towards production – an introduction to design aesthetics for example.

Undergraduate/Graduate Program Balance

Although the visiting team is focused on the undergraduate program, the dynamic with the graduate program cannot be ignored. It seems to us that the Department and SOE must grapple with the amount of resources available to meet the needs of both curricula. With the MFA in acting is currently on hold, these discussions are timely.

Faculty

Due to retirements, division of departmental faculty, and cuts, the number of permanent teaching faculty has greatly diminished in the last five years. This is particularly true in

the acting and directing area – the area that almost always teaches the largest number of students in a theatre program. The loss of two acting/directing faculty members to administrative positions has compounded the difficulty of meeting the needs of students in this area, not to mention the amount of service work needed to keep a program of theatre operating. Currently there appears to be only two full-time faculty in acting, with one of these also serving as Head of Production, decreasing her teaching load. While the visiting team realizes there are budgetary considerations, the acting/directing area is understaffed and the Department is forced to hire a number of adjunct instructors to meet its teaching needs. As previously mentioned, this area garners the highest level of student interest and it will be difficult to build or maintain a program without additional full-time faculty in this area.

Some concern was expressed by faculty that UW was looking closely at the support for Departments with under eight full-time faculty – we are unclear as to what implications this would have for the theatre unit.

A number of students spoke very highly of the professional staff that teach and mentor them in some of the technical courses. This staff also seems very committed to students, their learning, and welfare. It may be helpful in making plans for the future to consult staff about students and development of the new curriculum.

There may be the opportunity for greater collaborations and interdisciplinary work with other faculty on the UW campus. The visiting team is aware of the inherent difficulties often associated with these initiatives – teaching loads, departmental and college divides, funding, etc. However as three important arts units are all part of the SOE, there may be ways to build more interesting and exciting collaborations. Theatre is also housed in the same building as communications – there has been at least one collaboration with this unit, with the possibility of future joint initiatives.

Curriculum – Proposed BS degree

It is apparent that much thought, time, and effort went into the planning of this BS degree, yet it was somewhat unclear to the visiting team as to how much time the entire faculty has spent as a group discussing the merits and challenges of this proposed curriculum. The degree requires a core of common courses, a practicum requirement, and then allows students to specialize in either acting/directing or design/ technology. The basic core and practicum courses add up to 42 hours, with the tracts in acting/directing or design/technology adding 15 hours making the total for the major 57 hours out of 120 hours. We are uncertain whether a student could receive the degree after only completing the 42 hours of core and practicum requirements or if they also were required to complete an area of specialty.

After much discussion, the visiting team offers the following observations:

Based on conversations with faculty and students, and our understanding of current trends at UW it appears to us that the size of the proposed BS is too large. Nationally many students wish to double major or seek several minors or certificates, and creating a degree that allows students to have this option might attract more students to the program. Several students we talked with expressed a desire for greater flexibility in fulfilling the degree and being able to study other topics.

This is not to suggest that a motivated student could not enroll in as many theatre courses as she or he wished, however it would not be a requirement to fulfill 57 hours. Currently the proposed curriculum appears to be a hybrid between a liberal arts degree and a BFA degree (in theatre typically the BA would be in the 30 to 35 hour range and a BFA would be 80 to 90 hours). From our observations and reading of the self-study, we would recommend moving to the former and creating a smaller degree.

It appears to the visiting team that the proposed BS is a collection of courses that are fairly conventional in their approach. While it is vital to cover basic scholarship and theatre skills, in light of the Department's ability to create a new degree, more thought might be given to what students will face in the future as they seek employment and become productive citizens.

With the Theatre program's current size and need to attract students, some courses that focus on a shared experience for all students in the major might be considered. Perhaps a freshmen experience and/or capstone course would help to build community in the Department and provide an over-arching framework for the undergraduate experience. These types of courses could also serve to create an identity for the degree and provide students with an introduction to the Department and a place to set career goals prior to graduation. While we certainly did not talk to all students, those we did talk to expressed a desire to have greater contact with full-time faculty.

The visiting team did not meet the faculty member (who is now in administration) who was in charge of the Theatre for Cultural and Social Awareness program which appears to be on hold. This is a very important initiative for diversity efforts, recruiting students, and community outreach. It could become a bigger part of the overall curriculum and provide students with many options for using theatre to affect change.

Likewise the Department has had a long standing commitment to Theatre for Young Audiences and produces one production a year dedicated to providing young audiences with a first-class art experience. There does not appear to be any courses in the proposed curriculum that could provide students the opportunity to study this important area of theatre. It perhaps could also tie into the SOE mission.

The proposed curriculum has one course in Musical Theatre. While this is an important genre to study, it does require additional resources. Students need training in singing, music theory, dance styles specific to musical theatre, and the history of musicals. Given the number of needs within the Department, it may be difficult to justify allocating these resources to musical theatre.

There is little in the self-study about globalization and the importance of a study abroad opportunity for students. Programs or courses that address this are not easy to implement, need resources, and students who can either afford to travel or are able to receive scholarship funding. However, this may be another way to give the proposed curriculum a greater sense of identity.

Theatre Unit's Relationship to the UW-Madison Arts Institute

UW has established an Arts Institute whose mission “is to educate, advocate, and inspire through all forms of creative expression”. Several of the strategic initiatives for the next three years stood out to us as being important to the theatre program. Specifically: “We will expand, reinvent, and revolutionize education across campus”, “We will explore new ways to teach and learn”, “We will advocate and collaborate with campus to develop a broader and more balanced admissions policy that values multiple intelligences and proficiencies in the arts”, and “We will develop and secure resources for the arts.”

In interviewing faculty and administrators it was unclear as to the true relationship between the theatre unit and the Arts Institute, however with the above stated mission and goals it seems that the Institute could and should have a major role in helping theatre on the UW campus. Certainly seeking additional resources is extremely important, and it appears there is a desire for the Institute to help with curricular development – something that should be done with and not independent of the theatre unit.

A number of faculty talked about the need to develop admission metrics that take into account a student's creative potential in the arts – which appears to be one of the Institute's stated goals.

We do not presume to know all the intricacies of the relationship between Theatre and Drama and the Arts Institute, however it is clear that this connection should be well defined, and if the Institute follows through with its stated goals there will be positive implications for theatre at UW.

Career Planning – Field Study and Internships

The SOE has a robust program that provides students with field study opportunities and works to create internships for students. It appears that the Department has not fully explored this outstanding service to create programs centered on the needs of theatre

students. If conversations with the Dean's office can take place soon, this could have a profound effect on students and positively influence any proposed curriculum – helping with recruitment of undergraduate majors.

Facilities

Like the sciences, theatre programs need laboratory spaces in the form of studios and theatres to put concepts learned in the classroom into practice. UW theatre spaces appear to be wanting on several levels. The need for a proscenium theatre is important to the growth of the program as well as additional well equipped studio spaces. We realize this is expensive and would take a new building to really solve, but this should be a long term goal for which planning should begin.

The Mitchell Theatre was designed as a television facility and has always been a very compromised theatre space. Out-dated motorized lighting battens are failing and are out of commission for safety reasons. The 'egg crate' lighting position over the downstage is arbitrarily restrictive and requires tedious effort to work in safely. The lighting and sound equipment inventory has not been significantly updated or changed in years. Design and technical theatre students have little or no exposure to current hardware and methods. Improvements to both infrastructure and equipment is urgently required to adequately acquaint students with 21st century technical theatre.

A short-term and easier fix would be to improve the condition of the current facilities. Simple improvements like painting, clearing and organizing spaces might go a long way in increasing student recruitment and ownership in the Department and help faculty morale.

Audience Development and Fundraising

In talking with staff, there are some changes that could take place in publicizing the Department and productions if careful thought and some flexibility was considered in allocating the budget. There also appears to be some potential to fundraise on a larger scale with the Friends of UT support group.

A question was posed in the self-study regarding reaching out to alumni – this is a vital component of any department and can provide feedback on the program, fundraising opportunities, as well as a gauge of student success. The visiting team has no magic method for reaching alumni, however a tracking system put in place as students graduate, an alumni newsletter, a strong social media presence, and a way faculty can report news of former students that they continue to have contact with might be useful.

Conclusion

The Department of Theatre and Drama is in a unique position, being able to thoughtfully plan and design a new curriculum that will challenge and educate future students. It is

unusual that a Department is able to engage in this process and can be seen as a real opportunity. With this in mind it might be constructive to plan a faculty retreat with an external facilitator to help faculty work through this process. We know retreats can have mixed results, however with a facilitator who knows the Department, but is not personally invested in the outcome, might help the Department to define goals and make meaningful plans for the future. In any case, it appears to us that some dedicated time is needed where faculty can grapple with the creation of a new undergraduate degree.

REVIEWER'S BIOS

PRISCILLA LINDSAY has served as chair of the Department of Theatre and Drama in the School of Music, Theatre and Dance at the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor since 2010.

She attended the University of Michigan as a professional theatre program fellow receiving a B.A. and M.A. Following her formal training, she performed professionally at the Alley Theatre in Houston, Texas. Subsequently, she was appointed associate professor at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, as well as a member of the Missouri Repertory Theatre company. Professor Lindsay was the associate artistic director at the Indiana Repertory Theatre (IRT) for twelve years. In addition to the duties of artistic planning with this engagement, she headed up the IRT's Summer Conservatory for Youth program and was director of the Young Playwrights in Process playwriting competition.

Lindsay is a gifted and experienced actor, having performed in over 30 seasons (over 50 roles) at the Indiana Repertory Theatre (IRT). Additionally, she is an accomplished director, having directed over 25 plays professionally, and a number of plays at the University (*Henry IV, Part 1, Tartuffe, You Never Can Tell, The Beaux' Stratagem, Three Sisters*). In addition to her theatrical talents, Professor Lindsay is a recognized voice-over commercial artist. She has held professional engagements with such clients as Sub-Zero, Maytag, Cool Whip, Gerber, Oscar Meyer, Sears, Hyundai, Kraft, Kellogg, McDonalds, Kroger, American Dairy Association, Meijer and Proctor & Gamble, among many others. In 2014 she returned to the IRT to star in Ken Ludwig's *The Game's Afoot*, and followed that with a summer's run of *The Last Romance* at the Purple Rose Theatre in Chelsea, Michigan.

TOM LITTRELL has been at Electronic Theatre Controls (ETC) in Middleton, Wisconsin, since 2003 and is now an outreach and training specialist, concentrating on tradeshow and other events. From 2004 to 2013, he was ETC's fixtures product manager responsible for maintaining the Source Four product line and was a part of ETC's team developing its LED strategy and products.

In 1976, Tom started his career as a lighting technician at Showco, Inc., in Dallas, Texas, then one of the largest concert touring sound and lighting companies in the world. He was present when Showco engineers designed the first practical automated stage-lighting system, soon to be called Vari-Lite. He programmed and operated the system's first use on a Genesis world tour in 1981. After Vari-Lite, Inc., evolved as a separate company, Tom was a moving light programmer and lighting designer, working with several corporate clients, such as IBM and the Ford Motor Company, and touring with many concert artists, such as Led Zeppelin, The Who, Paul McCartney and Wings, David Bowie and Genesis.

Tom has a degree in technical theatre from Stephen F. Austin State University and is active in community and professional theater in the Madison, Wisconsin, area as a lighting designer. Tom and his wife Stacy are happy residents of Madison and thoroughly enjoy the upper Midwest lifestyle, despite the winters.

KATHLEEN F. CONLIN has enjoyed a multi-faceted career as professional stage director, casting director, associate artistic director, university administrator and award-winning professor. She served for twenty-two seasons as Associate Artistic Director and Casting Director for the Tony Award-winning Utah Shakespeare Festival where she also directed Shakespearean and other classic plays, contemporary plays, and a musical. Keenly interested in design and performance, her production of *THE TEMPEST* with its emphasis on Leonardo da Vinci's pencil drawings as visual metaphor was featured as a major exhibit at Southern Utah's Braithwaite Gallery. Her production of *RICHARD III* explored medieval iconography and Mannerist painting techniques. Both productions relied on evocative original musical scores.

Most recently she served as the Roe Green Guest Director for Kent State University with a production of *YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU*. She was guest director for Illinois Opera in productions at the Krannert Center of Verdi's *FALSTAFF*, Mozart's *MAGIC FLUTE*, and Mozart's *COSI FAN TUTTI*. For the Department of Theatre, she staged a critically acclaimed production of *MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING* which featured professional faculty, guest designers, and advanced students. She re-staged a production of McCraney's *THE BROTHERS SIZE* featuring Illinois alums in a project which launched their Definition Theatre, a multi-ethnic professional theatre in Chicago.

In her wide-ranging career, she has written a critically acclaimed video, *PERFORMING SHAKESPEARE*; served as President of both the National Association of Schools of Theatre and the National Theatre Conference; and won faculty awards at the University of Texas at Austin (teaching) and Cal State-Long Beach (meritorious service including teaching). She served as Board Member of the University/Resident Theatre Association and the Council of Fine Art Deans. At the University of Illinois, she served as both Dean of the College of Fine and Applied Arts and the Barnard Hewitt Professor of Theatre/Director in Residence. A member of the Society of Stage Directors and Choreographers, she has been installed as a Fellow of the American Theatre in ceremonies at the Kennedy Center.

Combining work both in the professional theatre and in the academy, she has directed at Shakespeare festivals, Colony Theatre in LA, Peterborough Players, Michigan Repertory, Clarence Brown Theatre, Theatre South Carolina, and others. She has completed consultancies at the Iceland Academy of the Arts, the University of Alabama/Alabama Shakespeare Festival, Florida State University/Asolo Theatre among others including service as co-chair with Paula Wagner (of Wagner/Cruise Productions) of the President's Advisory Committee for the Department of Drama at Carnegie Mellon University. A native of Ohio, Conlin has also served as Director of Theatre at Ohio University and Chair of Theatre at Ohio State University.

JONATHAN R. MICHAELSEN is Chair of the Department of Theatre, Drama, and Dance at Indiana University. He is also Producing Artistic Director of both the *Indiana Festival Theatre* and *Premiere Musicals: Developing New Works at Indiana University*. Professor Michaelson has directed and acted in numerous professional and collegiate productions, including *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Merchant of Venice*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Angels in America* and *Uncle Vanya*. At Indiana University Michaelson has directed *A Clean House*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *Arcadia*, *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, and the world premiere of *Reel*, which was selected for regional honors by the American College Theatre Festival. He has had four productions selected for presentation at regional American College Theatre Festivals, with the world premiere production of *Southern Girls* receiving national honors.

For the Indiana Festival Theatre Michaelson has directed *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Comedy of Errors* and *Taming of the Shrew*. He directed *Present Laughter*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *Arms and the Man* and *25th Putnam County Spelling Bee* at the Brown County Playhouse. He has also directed the opera *L'Orfeo* for the Bloomington Early Music Festival and the IU Jacobs School of Music.

Before coming to Indiana University Michaelson was Associate Dean for Humanities and Fine Arts at the University of Alabama. He also served as head of the graduate and undergraduate Acting programs in the Department of Theatre and Dance for ten years. He created a professional theatre company for the University of Alabama, *SummerTide*, and directed its inaugural production.

Michaelsen was instrumental in re-establishing the MFA program in playwriting at IU and spearheaded the creation of the Musical Theatre BFA and the Costume Technology MFA degrees. He also created *Premiere Musicals: Developing New Works of Musical Theatre at Indiana University* which is now in its seventh season. Active in the Southeastern Theatre Conference since 1991, he served for a number of years on the executive committee and as president from 2003-2004. Michaelsen was awarded a teaching grant for the development of theatre curriculum for secondary school educators and received a Druid Arts Educator of the Year Award. Michaelsen also received a State of Alabama arts award for his contributions to theatre.

Professor Michaelsen currently serves on the Board of the National Association of Schools of Theatre.