



January 20, 2017

Subject: Department of Theatre and Drama response to the Visitor's Evaluation Report of the Undergraduate Program submitted by Committee Chair, Jonathan Michaelson.

In February 2016, a committee of four external evaluators (Jonathan Michaelson, Indiana University; Kathleen Conlin, University of Illinois; Priscilla Lindsey, University of Michigan; and Tom Littrell, Electronic Theatre Controls) visited the Department of Theatre and Drama; reviewed the Department's self-study and other relevant documents; toured our facilities; attended a production; and interviewed the Department's faculty, staff, and students. The Department appreciates the time this committee spent sifting through a massive amount of material and assessing our program in a thoughtful and informed way. We value the feedback they provided.

Since September, the Department of Theatre and Drama has been holding weekly planning meetings to address the challenges laid out in this document. In October, Jim Gray from the Office of Quality Improvement joined us to facilitate these meetings. The Department has been working diligently to analyze what we do well, what makes us unique, how to best serve our undergraduate majors as well as the University, and re-envisioning the future of our program. To date, we have overhauled our mission statement, revised our vision statement, and updated our core principals. In the following months, the Department is focused on restructuring our curriculum and major requirements.

We would like to address the following comments and recommendations from the review:

1. *"... 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."*

In our semester long series of meetings, we have strived to create a new identity for the Department. During these meetings, the following mission and vision statements were agreed upon:

Mission: Educate, mentor, and support the development of intellectual curiosity, life skills, and lifelong learning through the practice of theatre arts embodying critical analysis, creative problem solving, and collaborative laboratories.

Vision: We will be known both locally, nationally, and globally for mentored educational experiences that emphasize coursework, performance, and production by reflecting life through art and craft.

The Department of Theatre and Drama looked introspectively to define our role in the School of Education and the University at large. In the process, the Department embraced the idea that the uniqueness of theatre is the artistic application of academic disciplines from across campus. Education, engineering, communication arts and film, history, literature, business, art, physical sciences, social sciences, psychology, and many others are all directly applicable in the transdisciplinary nexus that is theatre. As such, the Department aims to better serve the university through the instruction of cross-disciplinary educational topics inherent to the art form. Some examples of these topics include collaborative problem-solving through design thinking, acting for effective communication, aesthetic design, and practical stagecraft training for theatre and life. Additionally, the Department is actively seeking co-curricular relationships across campus to better integrate ourselves into the campus community. For example: the development of Acting I: Effective Communication can be tailored for specific populations such as Scientists, Law Students, Business, ESL, etc.

The Department will communicate these changes to new and current students using existing and new methods. Both new and current students will obtain detailed information on the program from traditional departmental sources: website (to be revised) and the academic advisor. Current students will receive program information and regular updates through a new student colloquium series. The Department has plans to communicate with prospective students via: 1) developing a close relationship with admissions; 2) promoting the Department at theatre conferences and festivals. By combining these methods and existing School of Education marketing materials/methods, the new direction for the Department should be adequately communicated.

2. *“Providing consistent opportunities for participation in productions is a key success factor in recruiting and building a strong undergraduate program.”*

The Department is expanding the number of opportunities for undergraduate production participation numerous ways. First, priority will now be to place undergraduates into production roles and only fill these roles with outside personnel when necessary or pedagogically appropriate. An accompanying plan to outline a clear curricular path towards main stage work is being developed to better inform students on the process and expectations associated with main stage production assignments.

Second, the Department has changed focus in the selection and structure of the production season. To provide more acting opportunities for students, larger shows with bigger cast sizes have been selected for main stage production next season and will be considered in future seasons. Additionally, undergraduate roles and assignments will be specifically considered in the main stage production play selection process. As mentioned by the reviewers, the expansion of the open stage season was very popular with undergraduates. These ‘experimental/developmental’ productions will be enhanced with monetary support and mentorship in upcoming seasons. With better funding and faculty/staff input, we expect this ‘experimental/developmental’ series to thrive.

3. *“UW theatre spaces appear to be wanting on several levels...Improvements to both infrastructure and equipment is urgently required to adequately acquaint students with 21st century technical theatre.”*

ILM grants are currently being sought to help upgrade facility safety equipment for the technical and design needs of our theatres. We aim to continue our relationship with Electronic Theatre Controls in borrowing current lighting technology to help address production needs. In addition, improvements must be made to address issues of safety, cleanliness, maintenance, and the provision of appropriate environments for our classrooms, studios, theatres and public spaces (lobbies, restrooms, conference/meeting rooms, etc.). We are actively working with SOE and the Physical Plant to insure student safety and the quality of student learning environments.

As of the beginning of this year, the Theatre and Drama Department has made a considerable amount of effort and progress in the areas of our spaces and the technologies that we use. The chair of our Space and Technology committee, GW Rodriguez, along with the Department Chair, Ann Archbold, have composed a list of upgrades, enhancements, and repairs to our facilities. The list (please refer to the Appendix I) is organized based on the Instructional Lab Modernization prioritization defined by SOE. This has been done in collaboration with Jesse Winters, the facility manager for SOE.

Mr. Winters and Mr. Rodriguez have made additional steps toward some of the items on the wish list. They have met with a group of experts to assess the safeness of the Front of House Egg Crate lighting position in the Mitchell Theatre, as well as started the process of planning to replace the existing structure. They have also met several times to discuss and plan out upgrading the electrical systems, and lighting systems throughout the building in hopes of acquiring funding for LED lighting upgrades. Mr. Rodriguez, with the advisement of Mr. Winters, will be putting together a formal proposal for the ILM grant over the next few weeks.

4. *“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.”*

Now that we have completed the first phase of revamping the mission and vision statements for the Department, we are presently focusing on our curriculum.

There is much documentation to demonstrate that the skills learned by Theatre Majors give them a "leg up" in competing for jobs in almost any area – not only careers in theatre – and that the life skills they learn help them become more balanced and productive human beings and citizens. The following links discuss this further:

<https://shar.es/1DCwfX>

<http://www.chronicle.com/article/The-New-Performing-Arts/238020>

In the new Theatre and Drama curriculum, the following changes are being proposed:

- Lower the number of required credits for the major
- Incorporate either a study abroad, internship, or capstone course
- Require Theatre for Cultural and Social Awareness coursework
- Satisfy general education requirements and practical breadth requirements in required curriculum
- Provide general breadth education through core courses
- Provide ample opportunities for more in-depth study and experience in elective areas
- Enhance professional preparation with an emphasis on communicating transferable skills

The following are corresponding Student Learning Outcomes adopted by the Department to ensure that theatre majors are prepared for entering the work force or advanced study (both within the theatre profession and outside of the theatre profession).

- Demonstrate the ability to evaluate the art and craft of theatre both critically and conceptually.
- Demonstrate the ability to analyze a script for the basic elements of plot, character, theme, language, rhythm, mood and elements of production.
- Demonstrate knowledge of theatrical history and literature from ancient Greek to present.
- Demonstrate competence in one or more areas of theatre specialization.
- Demonstrate the knowledge and skills necessary for success in their field(s) of endeavor.
- Demonstrate the ability to problem-solve creatively and generously collaborate as theatre artists.

5. *"The visiting team views... opportunities for the Department to consider designing and offering some large enrollment introductory courses that would fulfill campus general education requirements."*

We agree that the Department needs to develop and offer large enrollment courses. While many of our courses are highly experiential and cannot be taught effectively in a large lecture class format (acting classes, for instance, which require a great deal of individual focus and mentorship to develop each student's skill and understanding of the craft), we have explored other options for large enrollment introductory courses that could fulfill campus general education requirements. While we continue to explore other possibilities, potential course work is being considered in the following areas to address this issue:

- Entertainment Arts and Technology: Enrollment up to 60; could fulfill Humanities Breadth Requirement
- Design Aesthetics: Enrollment up to 60; could fulfill Humanities Breadth Requirement
- Design Thinking for Innovation: Enrollment up to 60
- Theatre Appreciation: Enrollment can be as large as possible; could fulfill Humanities Breadth Requirement (possible Comm B requirement)

- History of Stage Performance: Enrollment can be as large as possible; could fulfill Humanities Breadth Requirement (possible Comm B requirement)
6. *“There may be the opportunity for greater collaborations and interdisciplinary work with other faculty on the UW campus.”*

The Department is committed to and is actively seeking collaborators for future projects. These collaborations are extremely valuable and are an important step towards integration into the campus community. The additional time requirements associated with these collaborations will necessitate that we approach these projects carefully to make sure that we and our collaborators do not take on more than we can handle. We are also looking at the possibility of including at least one interdisciplinary co-production annually beginning with the 2017-18 season. In addition, the Department is working on clarifying our relationship with Interdisciplinary Theatre Studies.

Curricular collaborations are also being actively pursued. Conversations with design studies, engineering, and communication arts regarding cross-listed and co-curricular courses are already underway. We have previously also had successful curricular collaborations with the Law School, the Business School, Neuroscience and the School of Music. We plan to revisit these connections as soon as we are able. Now that we are in SOE we particularly look forward to future conversations with the Dance and Art Departments regarding potential course collaborations. While we are very excited by the possibilities of these and other interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary collaborations, we are aware that we must proceed carefully and realistically as well as positively and enthusiastically. We are aware that expanding the foundation upon which the Department is built is crucial to our long-term success and that these curricular collaborations are an important step toward this goal.

## APPENDIX I

### The Department of Theatre and Drama Space and Technology Wish List

Priority	Description	Type	Estimate
1	egg crate	safety	??
1	Soft goods (Mitchell and Hemsley)	safety	\$27000.00
1	general safety in Mitchell	safety	??
1	Keywatcher	upgrade	
1	Mitchell curtain	safety	
2	Dimmers (total for both spaces)	replacement	\$66240.00
2	CueSystem	enhancement	\$7000.00
2	New dimmer system in 4010	upgrade	
2	Mitchell Power upgrade	upgrade	
2	LED lights	enhancement	
2	Profile moving lights	enhancement	
3	Materials storage	upgrade	\$3500.00
3	Prop storage	upgrade	\$2000.00
3	3phase power in shop	upgrade	
4	General lighting upgrades	upgrade	\$10000.00
4	Followspots (2x)	enhancement	\$10000.00
4	Inferred video	enhancement	\$3000.00
4	New shop power tools	replacement	
4	New seating for Hemsley	replacement	\$10000.00
4	Floor replacements in both spaces	replacement	\$40000.00
5	Garment Racks	replacement	\$1760.00
5	Costume shop supplies	replacement	\$2835.00
5	Sewing Machines	replacement	\$1256.00

## **MFA Theatre and Drama Graduate Review Program Response**

January 20, 2017

Subject: The Department of Theatre and Drama to the Visitor's Evaluation Report of the MFA-Theatre and Drama Program submitted by Committee Chair, Mark Shanda.

In April 2016, a committee of three external evaluators (Mark Shanda, The Ohio State University; Cameron Jackson, Florida State University; Shelley Delaney, Ohio University; and one representative of the University of Wisconsin-Madison GFEC, Tracy Schroeffer, visited the Department of Theatre and Drama; reviewed the Department's self-study and other relevant documents; toured our facilities; attended a production; and interviewed the Department's faculty, staff, and students. The Department appreciates the time this committee spent sifting through a massive amount of material and assessing our program in a thoughtful and informed way. We value the feedback they provided.

We would like to address the following comments and recommendations from the review:

***1. Department and MFA program climate needs to improve for the benefit of both staff and students.***

Since September, the Department of Theatre and Drama has been holding weekly planning meetings to address the challenges laid out in reviewer's report. In October, Jim Gray from the Office of Quality Improvement joined us to facilitate these meetings. The Department has been working diligently to address issues ranging from identification of unique program offerings to climate. The Department has created guidelines that have better defined communication and culture within the Department by specifying rules for meetings, emails, and other intradepartmental communications. The faculty voted in fall to return voting rights to academic staff who play a vital role in collaborating on program development and offering Department courses. This balance and respect is representative of the collaborative culture held in professional theatre among disciplines and is important to maintain in educational theatre settings. Early reports indicate an improved culture with better and more open communication lines. Meetings will continue through spring semester with the goal of designing an updated undergraduate curriculum. The graduate curriculum will be updated following this to better coordinate and create opportunities to support both curricula.

The Department will start colloquia in Fall 2017 for all faculty, staff, and students that meet regularly throughout the semester. These meetings offer opportunity for faculty, staff, and students to meet and discuss aspects of the program or listen to guest speakers in a more casual setting encouraging better dialogue outside of the classroom. The program assumes the purpose and expectations of these colloquia will continue to evolve over time and meet the needs and interests of student cohorts.

The structure of production meetings has also changed to focus on the primary voices of the team constructing the vision of a production (director and designers). The reduction in the size of these meetings has created better opportunity for students to practice their design communication skills while still receiving guidance from their mentors outside the meetings. The improvements to production meetings are further discussed below.

***2. The program needs a clearer common vision for the future. A better common understanding regarding what the MFA is and embodies needs to be developed and embraced by all faculty.***

Weekly planning meetings facilitated by the Office of Quality Improvement have resulted in a new mission and vision statement for the Department.

Mission: Educate, mentor, and support the development of intellectual curiosity, life skills, and lifelong learning through the practice of theatre arts embodying critical analysis, creative problem solving, and collaborative laboratories.

Vision: We will be known locally, nationally, and globally for mentored educational experiences that emphasize coursework, performance, and production by reflecting life through art and craft.

The Department's next steps are to define the unique aspects of the graduate program. These aspects will be honed and emphasized in the creation of updated curriculum. It is expected that this will mirror the undergraduate program but also be more specific to relate to the professional training expectations of the MFA as a terminal professional degree. These unique identifiers are expected to drive the direction of the curriculum and be tied to the opportunities best afforded in this region of the country.

***3. As the program attempts to revise the MFA curriculum, they struggle with what is a "relevant" theatre curriculum today.***

While the undergraduate curriculum is rooted in the liberal arts and the graduate curriculum in professional training, the Department recognizes the intertwined nature of the undergraduate and graduate experiences and is working to create complementary experiences that work off current faculty expertise, regional industry ties, and curriculum scaffolding. The graduate program plans to explore and define the unique and niche offering that can be experienced with this program and will use this as a foundation for creating new graduate curriculum. The undergraduate program is taking the lead and will be rebuilt first as this curriculum and students needs drive the need for teaching assistants from the graduate program. Defining unique structures and curricula will drive graduate offerings and recruitment of graduate students. The Department has defined the importance of the program and the uniqueness of theatre as a transdisciplinary nexus that spans many topics and disciplines.

The theatre physical infrastructure will continue to play a role in the revision of the graduate curriculum as exposing students to the most current technology is essential in preparing them for employment upon graduation. Given the constant advances in the entertainment industry in lighting, automation, and projection technology along with the need for the integration of technology and performance, it is essential that the updated curriculum create opportunities for exposure for these young professionals. Likewise, students must have exposure to multiple theatre venue architectures to be employable upon graduation. The Department houses both a black box theatre and a modified thrust theatre, but does not have open access to a proscenium theatre, the most common form of theatre space. Currently, the Department rents the proscenium theatre at the Memorial Union for occasional productions at great cost. Maintaining this opportunity once every three years is essential for maintaining NAST accreditation; however, both the accrediting body and the Department believes that students should experience working in a proscenium theatre at least once a year.

The Department recognizes the current Doctoral Minor offering in Theatre and Drama. This minor has stronger ties to the Interdisciplinary Theatre Studies program and we are ready to discontinue this minor when L&S and Interdisciplinary Theatre Studies are ready with their new program proposal. We

will continue to work with ITS during this transition to support any currently enrolled students but hope to discontinue this minor soon.

**4. Department restructuring is suggested to reduce the committee requirements of faculty to create additional time and responsiveness to students and research.**

The reviewers' report offered suggested ways of restructuring Department responsibilities and committee to increase time with students and research. This work has begun and will continue as many of these structures are tied to curriculum. The Department has begun to make adjustments to "right-size" time and expectations regarding committee work for faculty and staff. These changes need to be made as the Department was attempting to operate with committee structures of a much larger Department leftover from before the Interdisciplinary Theatre Studies split. Committees with similar missions are being combined to reduce faculty and staff service load whenever possible.

Additional changes are expected as the curriculum is updated. Specifically, the review team suggested the elimination of the Director of Theatre position as a way to integrate production more fully with curriculum. This suggestion will continue to be evaluated as the new undergraduate and graduate curricula are developed. This position is already combined with the Department Chair role during summer term to create cost savings but the DoTP position is regarded as a valuable asset during the academic year because of the other duties the Department Chair assumes already and the DoTP serves as Associate Chair.

**5. The established production process is clear, but the production structure and timelines are not consistently respected making production meetings a tense and unsupportive learning environment for student designers.**

The production process has been reevaluated and changes have been made including streamlining the faculty/staff expectations of participation in meetings. Specifically, design and production meetings were large affairs including the director, stage managers, dramaturgs, publicity, student designers, and all faculty who mentored students having a direct role in the production. This sometimes led to the over-involvement of faculty in meetings and had the potential to limit the student designer voices. Design and production meetings have been revised to include the mentoring faculty only when scheduled or requested. This allows students to better work on their interpersonal design communication skills and creates a safer environment to take creative risks. Faculty mentors are still actively involved by having individual meetings with their student designers and mentoring them through the process. This allows the students to direct their own development as they focus on the most pressing challenges they are facing in a particular design. Respecting and valuing the student designer voice has already improved climate within design and production meetings.