

Department of Theatre and Drama  
ANNUAL ASSESSMENT REPORT  
September 2008

- The annual summary of goals that the Department expects its students to achieve remains substantially the same. Minor changes in the language of the Assessment Plan and its attachments have been made to reflect current practice:
  - The description of the undergraduate curriculum has been updated to reflect the revised acting specialist curriculum See attachments.
  - The description of our participation in ACTF has been revised to reflect current practice (p. 7)
  - The description of our post-performance evaluation practices has been updated. (p. 7)
  - Our efforts in dramaturgy have been formalized. See attachments.
  
- We have made substantial progress in achieving our goals as set out by the Department and the University. We have addressed the Department's goals in the updated Assessment Plan, and cite the following ways in which we have been successful in achieving the goals set forth in the University's Strategic Plan:
  - Promote research: In publications, artistic design, directing, and performance our faculty and staff members have demonstrated excellence in their fields. Please see [www.theatre.wisc.edu](http://www.theatre.wisc.edu) faculty and staff bios for more complete information.
  - Advance learning: Our recent curriculum revisions have improved student access and sequence to undergraduate classes. Interdisciplinary courses and programs, professional development opportunities for faculty and staff, and fostering an atmosphere of collaboration, communication, and achievement for graduate students are other ways in which we have fulfilled this goal.
  - Accelerate Internationalization: Our faculty and students fully participate in Study Abroad opportunities. Prof. Manon van de Water developed a new winter intersession in Russian theatre, which will be offered in the 2008-09 academic year. Our departmental curriculum, programs, and guests reflect our commitment to diverse, global theatre.
  - Amplify the Wisconsin Idea: Theatre for Youth productions, the work of Theatre for Cultural and Social Awareness, and the Kaczmarek-Sklot Citizenship Prize assist our students to embody the Wisconsin Idea.
  - Nurture Human Resources: Professional Development grants, nominating students, faculty, and staff for University awards, transparency in administrative processes, positive work environment and appropriate grievance procedures are ways we strive to meet this goal.
  
- Theatre Research has addressed the problem of perceived redundancy of plays in basic courses expressed by students by improving communication. The area will discuss syllabi ahead of time to try to eliminate redundancy.
  
- The Curriculum Committee discussed revisiting the student evaluation forms to improve their usefulness. The perception is that too many questions ask the student for self-description (how often do you come to class, what grade do you expect, etc.), which then numerically becomes a part of the evaluation of the instructor. We will bring a proposed revision to the Department.

**DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE AND DRAMA**  
College of Letters and Science  
University of Wisconsin-Madison  
**REVISED ASSESSMENT PLAN**  
May 2008

## **INTRODUCTION**

In response to Dean Gary Sandefur's charge, the Department of Theatre and Drama has updated its 1996 undergraduate assessment plan and formalized an assessment plan for graduate programs. We understand that the process of developing an assessment plan involves the following four steps:

- I.** We need to articulate learning goals and issues for our programs.
- II.** We need to identify and describe instruments or strategies for assessing student achievement at important stages in the programs. These methods should measure the extent to which we achieve the goals specified in step 1.
- III.** We need to assign responsibility for initiating and conducting assessment activities in our programs, for interpreting the results, and for implementing change as indicated.
- IV.** We need to establish a realistic timetable for achieving the previous three steps and for maintaining ongoing assessment practices.

Each of the four sections below addresses one of these issues.

### **I. LEARNING GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

The most recent revision of the 2002 "Vision Statement" describes the Department of Theatre and Drama as a collaborative community of artists and scholars—faculty, staff, and students—aiming to achieve the highest level of excellence in their teaching and learning, research and creative endeavors, and outreach to the community and the state, nation, and the world.

Our strong faculty and staff across the Department's three areas of Acting/Directing, Design/Technology, and Theatre Research make the Department of Theatre and Drama uniquely positioned among its Big Ten peers to teach and study theatre and drama as a liberal art at an undergraduate level and to offer advanced pre-professional training at the MA, MFA, and PhD levels.

We aim to prepare our undergraduate students for a lifetime of successful engagement with the theatre. We provide an intellectual, practical, and experiential knowledge of the performing arts, a working knowledge of the craft, discipline, and thinking (both historical and critical) it requires, and a deep appreciation for the collaborative art of the theatre.

We aim to prepare our graduate students for successful 21<sup>st</sup>-century careers in the theatre and academia as actors, directors, designers, technicians, scholars, and teachers.

Through production and scholarship we aim to excite, entertain, pose questions, challenge assumptions, critically examine values and beliefs, and expand global perspectives. Our production programs and theatre spaces serve as instructional laboratories for our classrooms and studios as well as provide an

interface with the communities that make up our audiences.

Through outreach to the campus and regional community we aim to amplify the Wisconsin Idea, particularly by using theatrical performance to address societal issues through multidisciplinary and multicultural approaches, and to increase lifelong learning opportunities for Wisconsin citizens of all ages.

Through our curriculum and production season, research, and creative activity, as well as through international programs for students and artists, we actively seek a diverse and global perspective in our classrooms, studios, and theatres.

### **A. Undergraduate Assessment**

Our assessment of the undergraduate curriculum must take into account the goals of the students who pursue it. Our majors fall into three categories: those who plan to go on to graduate school in Theatre and Drama; those who plan to stop at the bachelor's level and seek employment in theatres and other situations where they can use their knowledge; and those who plan to seek employment or advanced study outside of the field of Theatre and Drama.

The Department subdivided the objectives of the undergraduate major into two types: basic skills and knowledge goals (because theatre combines both theory and practice, these are indivisible) and critical thinking goals.

The basic skills and knowledge goals we expect of all of our students are:

- An understanding of theatre and drama as complex and interrelated forms of art, which involves knowledge of performance, production, design, literary, historical, and theoretical practices globally
- The ability to understand and appreciate world canons of dramatic literature, and a basic familiarity with those canons
- The ability to understand and view theatre in its global historical development;
- The ability to acquire a basic level of skill in, understanding of, and knowledge about theatre practice, including acting, directing, design, and technology
- The ability to write competently about theatre and performance
- The ability to perform basic research tasks in theatre and dramatic literature
- Knowledge of, through participation in, theatrical production practices

In addition to acquiring specific skills and knowledge, we expect undergraduates majoring in Theatre and Drama to develop certain important higher skills that allow them to synthesize what they have learned in a variety of courses and creative work. The goal here is to assist in creating an active participant in the field and even possibly a creator of new knowledge. The critical thinking goals are:

- The ability to read critically and independently about theatre and drama
- The ability to assess live performance critically
- The ability to communicate ideas about theatre clearly, through written documents, oral presentations, and creative work
- The ability to formulate hypotheses for research, based on reading, observing, and thinking
- The ability to work creatively and collaboratively, as part of a production "team," based on training in theatre practice, whether in acting, directing, design, or technology

The specific knowledge we believe is essential for an undergraduate degree in Theatre and Drama is obtained primarily through courses and seminars offered in our Department and the related departments of literature, communication arts, dance, art, and art history, among others. However, the skills we expect undergraduates to acquire are often learned in a much broader context, through general education courses in communication and quantitative reasoning and through writing intensive courses offered throughout the College. Teaching the ability to think critically is part of the task of every course in the Department.

We expect that undergraduates will acquire the specific knowledge necessary for a major in Theatre and Drama through taking the required courses. These courses constitute a basic "core" of courses that pertain to both options in the major: the Individual Emphasis Option and the Acting Specialist Option.

#### ALL STUDENTS TAKE ONE ACTING COURSE (3 cr)

##### PRODUCTION CORE (6 cr)

- 160, Introduction to Stage Production
- 161, Backstage Lab I
- 162, Production Lab

##### THEATRE RESEARCH CORE (12)

- 120, Introduction to Theatre and Dramatic Literature
- 224, History of Theatrical Production
- 324, Traditions in Dramatic Literature
- 424, Contemporary World Theatre and Dramatic Literature

Students complete the major by taking courses prescribed for one of the two options in the major as described in our requirements for the major. (We attach copies of these requirements to this report).

## **B. Graduate Assessment**

Our assessment of our graduate programs varies according to the goals of each graduate degree program.

### MFA programs in Design and Technology

#### Learning Goals and Objectives

- The ability to work collaboratively and in a professional manner with directors and other designers as well as production staff and artisans
- The ability to communicate design and technical ideas with verbal and visual sophistication
- The continuing development of a presentation portfolio of design/tech work that meets current professional standards
- Development of a deep knowledge of the skills and technology particular to each discipline (e.g. draping, scenic art, automation)
- Development of processes of visual research and creative synthesis of such research as it applies to both project and practical design/tech work
- Familiarity with the diverse canons and genres of dramatic literature and theatre, both national and international
- The ability to think critically and analytically about theatre and its visual expression

- The ability to articulate ideas in a written format, along with appropriate techniques of research

We expect that graduates, in consultation with their lead advisors, will take courses that cover the above objectives for skills, experience, and artistry. We offer the opportunity to test and apply skills and creative vision in a collaborative context in the laboratory of University Theatre productions.

All MFA's in Design and Technology take Theatre 670/970, Collaborative Design/Tech Studio every fall semester. They also take intermediate and advanced courses in their respective career disciplines. In addition, during the fall semester of their second year, they take Theatre 700 as an introduction to advanced writing and research; the class is intended to provide training in design research, critical thinking, and the collaborative process, as well as to prepare students for the MFA thesis paper required for graduation from the program. In the course of their three-year program they also take classes in humanities, literature and theatre history. They are further given the opportunity to take related courses both in and outside the Department to round out their familiarity with stage skills and research.

### MA and PhD programs in Theatre Research

#### Learning Goals and Objectives

- Thorough familiarity with the theory, history, and practice of drama and theatre as collaborative cultural forms
- Historical understanding of the diverse global locations of theatre and the intercultural contact between theatre traditions, especially in the modern and contemporary periods
- Understanding of the connection of drama and theatre to other forms of literature, art, and performance
- Intensive training in the methods and materials of theatre research and writing, leading to original scholarly projects that range in complexity from term papers to theses and dissertations
- Understanding of theatre-as-practice through participation in the production process
- Broad-based preparation for future careers as theatre scholars, teachers, and practitioners
- Professionalization in the discipline of theatre through participation in conferences and submission of work to scholarly journals

The MA and PhD programs in Theatre Research provide advanced training in the theory, history, and practice of drama and theatre as literary and performance genres. In their first semester of study, students in both tracks take 700, Introduction to Research in Theatre, to familiarize themselves with the methods and materials of theatre research and writing. The course also brings them together with MFA students in Acting/Directing and Design/Technology, thus providing a concrete forum for the study of theatre as a collaborative art that involves both text and performance. Thereafter, MA students in Theatre Research construct an individualized program of study culminating in a thesis. PhD students take a range of lecture/discussion and seminar-style courses in dramatic literature, history, and theory within the Department of Theatre and Drama; construct a Minor on the basis of courses taken in other related disciplines; and fulfill foreign-language requirements. They are admitted to doctoral candidacy after an oral exam based on a portfolio of research papers (Prelim A), followed by a dissertation proposal defense

(Prelim B), and the final dissertation defense. MA and PhD students also participate in the production process by serving as actors, dramaturgs, and/or design/technology assistants for University Theatre, the production wing of the Department.

The graduate program in Theatre Research meets these goals primarily through coursework requirements, diversity of course content, multifaceted training in research and teaching, and careful advising and mentorship.

### MFA programs in Acting and Directing

**The MFA program in acting** aims to produce skilled and competent actors who are ready to pursue professional careers on the stage and also, if they so choose, to practice their craft in a studio or classroom environment. By obtaining a strong base in classical text-based and Stanislavski acting techniques, balanced with emerging theories of acting, Asian stage disciplines, the study of other non-Western theatres, and studies in theatre for cultural and social awareness, graduates of the program should be articulate and capable theatre professionals who are able to connect theatre practice with larger issues of cultural and international representation.

**The MFA program in directing** aims to produce skilled and competent directors who are ready to follow a professional career path or to direct in a teaching situation. Students are required to demonstrate extensive knowledge in the following areas:

- Directing Techniques--Students are required to demonstrate the ability to analyze scripts, develop conceptualization, and integrate their interpretation into the overall production, while providing an artistically inclusive environment for production collaborators. Therefore, students are expected to demonstrate an understanding and knowledge of vocabulary in the areas of acting and design.
- Play Analysis--Students are expected to possess an advanced knowledge of text analysis based on a comprehensive knowledge of dramatic literature, its structure and aesthetics, thus creating a basis for artistic interpretation helpful in directing new works, adaptations and both conventional and non-conventional presentations.
- Dramatic Literature, Theatre History, and Theory--Students should have a comprehensive knowledge of dramatic literature, representative works of various periods, an overall view of theatre history and its significance to world events, and prominent theories of theatre.

## **II. CONCERNING THE NATURE AND METHODS OF ASSESSMENT**

Our description of methods of assessment is based on the following assumptions and observations:

- A. The Department of Theatre and Drama has many ongoing assessment activities. These include records of grade-point averages in our courses and student evaluation data of the faculty. While there are tight feedback loops for assessing individual students and faculty, the usefulness of this data in assessing our programs has not been explored.
- B. The data that are produced by the assessment measures are intended to provide the Department with information about strengths and weaknesses and about needs for change. They are not intended to evaluate individual students or faculty.
- C. It is easy to misinterpret an individual numerical datum, and so our assessment instruments will

include both quantitative and qualitative measures. The data must be viewed as a whole, and individual parts must not be viewed out of context.

- D. The assessment program must not inhibit innovation or risk-taking in teaching techniques and learning. Rather, the assessment process should be used to encourage trying new pedagogical techniques.
- E. The assessment process should build on and not replace ongoing curricular review. The Curriculum Committee of the Department has recently revised the undergraduate curriculum to more fully realize the goals set forth in the University's Strategic Plan. We will continue to consider graduate and undergraduate curricula in relation to the strategic priorities of the Department and the university.
- F. The whole assessment process should itself be subject to periodic assessment to insure that time and efforts spent are worth the results, perhaps in connection with the ten-year review of the Department.

### ***Instruments and Methods for Assessment***

The Department of Theatre and Drama uses several instruments to measure student achievement. These include:

#### ***A. Portfolio Evaluations***

From **undergraduate students** majoring in Theatre and Drama and wishing to graduate with distinction in the major, the Department solicits portfolios of representative work in the Department. These portfolios include research papers, script analyses, technical drawings, design renderings, photographs, audio and video tapes, DVDs, CD-ROMs, or web pages representing the breadth and depth of each student's work and significant accomplishments. The portfolios are reviewed by the Scholarship Committee and maintained as a permanent record representing excellent undergraduate work in all areas of the Department.

In addition, certain classes (for example Theatre 120, Comm B) maintain a portfolio of representative student work to evaluate the degree to which goals are being met. These are evaluated by the instructors of each course.

**Both graduate and advanced undergraduate students in Design/Technology** have the opportunity to submit work to the annual Portfolio Review, which displays the students' work for the public as well as for assessment by the Design/Technology faculty and staff. MFA students in Design/Technology participate in an annual mandatory review, part of which is their showing in the annual Portfolio Exhibition. The review evaluates their academic progress, the performance of their TA duties, and their University Theatre assignments. Above all, it is an annual assessment of the student's progress towards a professional degree.

#### ***B. Performance and Production Evaluations***

**Both undergraduate and graduate students in acting** are evaluated at each audition for University Theatre productions by the directors of the productions. Undergraduate students audition for the Acting/Directing faculty each semester for placement in performance classes, and graduating seniors seeking advanced training may audition for Departmental sponsorship to the annual University and Regional Theatre Auditions (URTAs).

The work and progress of **graduate student actors** in studios and on stage is evaluated each semester in a review conducted by the entire Acting/Directing faculty.

The work and progress of **graduate student directors** is evaluated in a series of studio projects and stage productions each semester throughout 3 years of training.

University Theatre has participated in the American College Theatre Festival program in the past and regularly sent productions to regional competitions. As a part of this process, each University Theatre production was evaluated by an external evaluator. The director of the production and the Director of Theatre responded to these evaluations. The evaluator's report, together with a video tape of the production, became part of University Theatre's archival record. Two productions, *The Bluest Eye* and *Streetcar Named Desire*, were reviewed externally during the 07-08 season.

University Theatre conducts "Lessons Learned" meetings for each UT production at the end of every semester. Artistic staff, production staff, and cast members (including faculty, academic staff, and students) discuss the successes and problems in the production, rehearsals, and performances of each show. As mentioned in the most recent NAST self-study, we intend to explore more formalized post-performance evaluations—practical and theoretical—for students and faculty in all areas of the department. In the 2007-08 season, as a part of our enhanced efforts in dramaturgy we scheduled and structured our post-show discussions, called "UT Talks," to more fully engage audiences and all areas of the department. They are now advertised in our season brochure. We have discussed additional post-performance evaluations, but we have not determined a workable format.

### ***C. Other Measures***

**MA and PhD graduate students in Theatre Research** are assessed informally by Theatre Research faculty at the end of every semester, and must choose an advisor by the end of their third semester. MA and PhD students whose progress in the program appears to be unsatisfactory receive a written assessment at the end of the year in question. All PhD students also receive a review letter at the end of their second year of study. Graduate students receive careful and detailed evaluations of their writing during the period of coursework, and throughout the process of writing theses or dissertations. At the time of the Prelim A exam, PhD students must satisfy rigorous criteria for research in the areas of dramatic theory, history, and literature for advancement to doctoral candidacy. Students are also encouraged to participate in professional meetings of various kinds at the regional and national level, and to submit their work to scholarly journals for publication. The regional conference organized by the Theatre Graduate Student Organization during the spring semester every year is one important sign of such professional training.

The Theatre for Youth program engages annually in outreach work with schools statewide, and employs classroom follow-up visits and written assessments to measure the effectiveness of the program. The Director of Theatre for Youth and the Director of Theatre receive and respond to these assessments.

A new program, Theatre for Cultural and Social Awareness, works in community schools and businesses using theatre as a way of encouraging discussion of sensitive issues within the school or workplace. Follow-up evaluations are a part of the process, and they are evaluated by the Director of the Program and the students (both graduate and undergraduate) involved.

In our field, the recognized accreditation body is the National Association of Schools of Theatre (NAST). We have been assessed in the past by NAST, and we have benefited from those assessments. The most recent NAST review occurred in 1998-99, and we used that review to shape curricular and staffing



changes, particularly in the areas of Acting/Directing and University Theatre. The Theatre Research area completed an assessment of the PhD program by the National Research Council in 2007-08. The next NAST review will be conducted in 2008-09.

At present, the course evaluation forms administered at the end of each semester are the main instruments of student assessment of all courses in all programs.

The work of our students and graduates is recognized by campus-wide awards, national awards by professional organizations, and professional awards. We keep track of these informally (usually within each area of the Department) and via our occasional alumni newsletter *SubText*, but we have not developed a centralized method of tabulating these awards as a means of assessment. We are still working on developing this. [Lists from 2007-08 are appended to this report.]

The Department has conducted student surveys and exit interviews, but the student response has been low. We intend to improve survey distribution methods and to utilize online survey methods to improve this aspect of assessment. [We have improved our data collection, and the results from the 2007-08 surveys are appended to this report.]

We try to track the placement of our graduates in several ways. Through word of mouth, through the UT alumni page on the UT production web site ([utproduction.com](http://utproduction.com)), and through our annual alumni newsletter *SubText*. As in the case of the student surveys and exit interviews, alumni response is low and not necessarily representative. We intend to enhance our efforts to track our graduates with online surveys and an expanded and updated Department website.

### **III. THE FEEDBACK MECHANISM**

All of the assessment measures discussed above will be reviewed annually by the appropriate Departmental committee (currently the Curriculum Committee). On the basis of this review, the committee will provide the Department and the College with an annual report. This report will include:

- An annual summary of the goals which the Department expects its students to achieve. We expect that this summary will be sharpened during the initial years of assessment and then will be relatively unchanged from year to year unless major developments in the field of Theatre and Drama indicate the need for curricular revision.
- A summary of the ways in which the Department of Theatre and Drama is successful in achieving the goals set out by the Department and the University, paying attention to the different objectives of our various programs.
- Suggestions for changes in curriculum or pedagogy if the assessment measures indicate that problems exist or changes are needed.
- Suggestions for changes in the measures or methods of assessment if the Department feels that current practice does not adequately capture the needed information.

The Curriculum Committee will present this report to the full Department each year. The Department will also submit these reports during the periodic ten-year reviews of the Department conducted by the College.

### **IV. TIMETABLE FOR IMPLEMENTATION**

Having completed this revised assessment plan for undergraduate and graduate programs in Theatre and Drama in May, 2006, the Curriculum Committee will report annually to the Department about assessment beginning in the spring semester, 2007. This is the updated report for 2008.