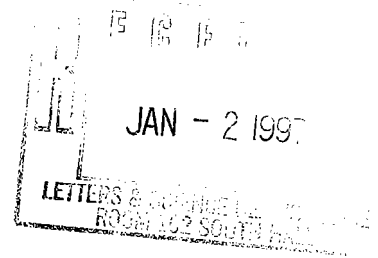


**UNIVERSITY OF
WISCONSIN
MADISON**

TO: Dean Phillip Certain
FROM: Edward Amor, Chair, Department of Theatre and Drama
DATE: 12/30/96
RE: Departmental Assessment Plan



Attached please find, as per your request, the departmental assessment plan for the Department of Theatre and Drama.

Theatre and Drama

DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE AND DRAMA
College of Letters and Science
University of Wisconsin-Madison

PLAN FOR ASSESSMENT

OF THE

UNDERGRADUATE MAJORS

December 1996

Introduction

In the fall of 1994, the College of Letters and Science informed all Departments and Programs of the necessity to develop an assessment plan in each undergraduate major and in graduate education by December 31, 1996. The College solicited pilot plans from selected departments during the 1995-96 academic year, which the Department of Theatre and Drama has examined closely in preparing the present document.

It is our understanding that formal assessment is a relatively new activity with potential for misunderstanding or misuse. The College must view our plan as an experiment; we expect to learn both from successes and failures. We wish to emphasize that, much like the undergraduate major programs under review, this plan may change in the future. It is not yet clear that this proposal will produce the benefits we expect, and we are not sure that we can accomplish all that we hope to do within our limited financial budget and our limited human resources.

We will also eventually submit a separate, though similar plan for assessment of the graduate programs in Theatre and Drama.

We understand that the process of developing a departmental assessment plan of the undergraduate majors involves the following four steps:

1. We need to articulate clearly and precisely a set of educational goals and objectives for our Theatre and Drama major tracks.
2. We need to identify and describe instruments or methods for assessing student achievement at important stages in the programs. These methods should measure the extent to which the we achieve the goals specified in step 1.
3. We need to develop a feedback mechanism so that the results of the instruments and methods described in step 2 are used for the improvement of our undergraduate major.
4. We need to establish a realistic timetable for achieving the previous three steps.

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

We wish to emphasize that the construction of this plan involved the participation of all members of the Department of Theatre and Drama. Initially, the Chair, Professor Edward Amor, appointed an Assessment Committee consisting of one faculty member from each of the three major sub-fields in the Department to develop a preliminary plan: Acting and Directing (Professor Phillip Zarrilli), Design and Technology (Professor Dennis Dorn), and Theatre Research (Professor Sally Banes). The Assessment Committee developed a preliminary plan, which was discussed at length at a special departmental meeting. Suggestions and comments were solicited from all faculty members. The Departmental Faculty Roster now lists 12 FTE and after lengthy discussion, the plan was adopted by the Department by a vote of 11 in favor, none opposed, and none abstaining (one was absent).

Educational Goals and Objectives

This new requirement for assessment must be put within the context of the Department's and the College's Strategic Plans, and other developments related to them. In our Strategic Plan, we articulated the mission of the Department. The aspects that have most relevance to the subject of assessment in the major is as follows:

Offer introductory and specialized instruction in the major fields of Theatre and Drama: Acting and Directing; Design and Technology; and Theatre Research;

Provide an integrated curriculum in our field providing undergraduate majors with a basic knowledge of Theatre and Drama and sound preparation for advanced study for those planning professional careers in the field.

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.

Theatre & Drama Assessment Plan/3

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

1. the ability to acknowledge and explain the relationship between theory and practice of theatre in order to integrate them;
2. the ability to understand and appreciate world canons of dramatic literature, and a basic familiarity with those canons;
3. the ability to understand and view theatre in its global historical development;
4. the ability to acquire a basic level of skill in, understanding of, and knowledge about theatre practice, including acting, design, and technology;
5. the ability to write competently about theatre and performance;
6. the ability to perform basic research tasks in theatre and drama;
7. 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 which allow them to synthesize what they have learned in a variety of courses and field 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:

1. the ability to read critically and independently about theatre and drama;
2. the ability to assess live performance critically;
3. the ability to communicate ideas about theatre clearly, through written documents, oral presentations, and creative work;
4. the ability to formulate hypotheses for research, based on reading, observing, and thinking;
5. 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.

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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. 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 encompass the major subfields of Theatre and Drama for both the theatre generalist and the acting specialist. They are: 150: Fundamentals of Acting and 170: Fundamentals of Stagecraft (or the approved equivalents of these two courses for either the generalist or the acting specialist); 161: Backstage Lab I; 361: Backstage Lab II; 200: Writing about Theatre and Performance; 221: World Drama; and 231: History of Theatre; and then through taking one of the two programs leading to the Theatre and Drama degree as described in our requirements for the major. (We attach a copy of these requirements as an appendix to this report).

Concerning the Nature of Assessment

1. The Department has many ongoing assessment activities. These include records of grade point averages in various 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 program has not been explored.

It should be noted that Our assessment activities also include periodic review by the National Association of Schools of Theatre (NAST), the recognized national accrediting organization in our field.

2. 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.

3. 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.

4. 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.

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5. The assessment process should build on and not replace ongoing curricular review. In particular, all departments in the College are undergoing a review of their curricula in the light of the four characteristics of a liberal arts education, as outlined in the L&S Strategic Plan. The Department is presently at work on this assignment. We intend to center the assessment process, and in particular the feedback mechanism of assessment, around this critical departmental task.
6. The Department will stress periodic internal assessment activities, rather than annual assessment activities. We do not expect much new information to be gained by frequent assessment, and insofar as possible we will attempt to build assessment into other reviews of the department's program. At the same time, we agree that a ten-year cycle is too long, so we will strive for a three- to five-year cycle.
7. The whole assessment process should itself be subject to periodic assessment to insure that time and effort 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 intends to use several instruments to measure student achievement. These include:

a. Portfolio Evaluations

For those students majoring in Theatre and Drama as generalists, the Department will maintain anonymous portfolios consisting of final examinations, term papers, and final class design and drafting projects (these may include color xeroxes and other reproductions of design projects) created during the Junior and Senior year. A special committee will periodically review these portfolios to evaluate whether our goals are being met.

b. Performance Evaluations

For those students majoring in Theatre and Drama as Acting Specialists, the Department will evaluate class performances during the Junior and Senior year. Written reports that protect the anonymity of the student will be kept on file. A special committee will periodically review these portfolios to evaluate whether our goals are being met.

c. Other Measures

In the future, the Department may also use Student and Alumni Surveys, Exit Interviews, and External Examiners as additional assessment methods. Were we to undertake these methods, we would need a budget of \$500 for student help.

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Also, since the Department is involved actively in outreach work and community cultural education, through University Theatre, we will develop a plan to assess the work done by our undergraduates in the theatre outside of the classroom, including evaluations of performances and published reviews. However, protecting anonymity in these cases will present a challenge.

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 benefitted from those assessments. The last NAST report was in 1992, and we are scheduled for another NAST review in 1997-98.

The Feedback Mechanism

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

1. An annual summary of the knowledge goals which the Department expects its majors 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 revision of the undergraduate curriculum.
2. A list of ways in which the Theatre and Drama major is successful in achieving the educational goals set out by the Department, paying attention to the different objectives of our majors.
3. Suggestions for changes in curriculum or pedagogy if the assessment measures indicate that problems exist or changes are needed.
4. 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.

Timetable for Implementation

During the second semester of the 1996-97 academic year, the Curriculum Committee will initiate the assessment measures listed above. The Committee will expect to carry out its first assessment during the 1997-98 year.