



May 4, 1998

To: Assoc. Dean Ozzello  
301 South Hall

From: Phillip Zarrilli *Phillip Zarrilli*

RE: PLAN FOR GRADUATE ASSESSMENT

Our draft plan for graduate assessment is enclosed. Sorry it is a few days late.

Theatre and Drama

**DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE AND DRAMA**  
**PLAN FOR ASSESSMENT**  
**OF**  
**GRADUATE DEGREE PROGRAMS**

Draft of May 1, 1998

Introduction

We offer the following graduate degrees:

M.A./Ph.D. --research oriented degrees integrating theory and  
practice of theatre/performance studies

M.F.A. --terminal professional degrees in the following areas:

Design (Costume, Lighting, or Scenic)

Theatre Technology

Acting

Directing (currently no students being admitted and  
therefore not included in this report)

Administratively our department is divided into three major subject areas, each of which oversees curricular and instructional concerns as follows:

Theatre Research (including Theatre Education): M.A./Ph.D. degrees

Acting/Directing: M.F.A. degrees in Acting and Directing

Design/Technology: M.F.A. degrees in various areas of design and

Theatre technology.

Assessment is already an important and essential part of all of our graduate degree programs. There are two forms of assessment: (1) period review conducted by the National Association of Schools of Theatre (N.A.S.T.), the recognized national accrediting organization in our field; (2) assessment conducted by each of our areas of graduate student work while enrolled in degree programs administered by each area.

### Instruments and Methods for Assessment

The Department of Theatre and Drama intends to use several instruments to measure graduate student achievement, including:

1. Student and Alumni Surveys
2. Exit Interviews
3. External Examiners (in conjunction with periodic NAST REVIEW)
4. Portfolio Evaluations
5. Performance Evaluations.

The first three methods of assessment will be used for all our graduate programs. Portfolio and Performance Evaluations are used when and where appropriate for each of our degree programs.

Below you will find the assessment plan that best suits each of our graduate degree programs.

### **ASSESSMENT -MFA Acting Students**

**Mission:** The three year M.F.A. Program in Acting offers students specialized preparation for careers in professional and educational theatre. A primary aim of the program is to interrelate the studies of theory and practice. Our purpose is to develop both an articulate artist and a skilled craftsman. In the acting area, the nature of our work demands ongoing assessments of the students.

**CLASSES:** Because classes are small and instruction demands interaction between teacher and individual student, the teacher provides VERBAL -- and often PHYSICAL -- FEEDBACK with each acting exercise, acting performance, vocal or physical exercise and performance. VIDEO AND AUDIO TAPES are often utilized to provide visual feedback. Grades are most often accompanied by WRITTEN EVALUATIONS of the individual student's work. JOURNALS are required in performance classes, and are periodically reviewed (with written response) by the faculty.

**SEMESTER REVIEWS:** At the completion of each semester, Acting/Directing faculty conduct a 20-30 minute review with each MFA Actor. During this time, faculty discuss how the individual has progressed in terms of performance, analytical and interpretive skill through class and performance work engaged in that semester. Teachers (and directors if available) who have worked with the individual are invited to participate in this review. As this is a two-way discussion, it is also an opportunity for the student to evaluate, question and clarify her/his career goals in terms of the training process and

opportunities made available.

**PERFORMANCES:** Because the theatre production program is our laboratory, as students audition and are cast in University Theatre productions, the directors and performance coaches (faculty) provide ONGOING ASSESSMENT (verbal and/or written) of their work as they progress through rehearsals and performances. After opening, other theatre and drama provided additional assessment through verbal and/or written feedback to the individuals. As additional assessment, we anticipate establishing department-wide reviews of all University Theatre productions in an effort to learn from the completed production process: where the production met its goals, what was less successful, what could be improved.

**THESIS DEFENSE and COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATIONS:** In the fall of the third year, the MFA student writes two comprehensive examination questions that are designed to synthesis learning in selected areas of specialization, and to gear the student towards writing her/his thesis. The written thesis is an opportunity for the student to synthesize and articulate an individual process of acting. It serves as a culminating experience and can be shaped according to interest and future goals. The thesis is read by a committee of four-five faculty. It is defended near the completion of the final spring term. It becomes a final step in the assessment process.

**PLAN FOR GRADUATE ASSESSMENT****DESIGN/TECHNOLOGY AREA**

**Department of Theatre & Drama, University of Wisconsin-Madison**

**MISSION AND GOALS** of the MFA Programs in Design and Technology:

The MFA programs in design and technology balance the practical experiences of working in the theatre as designers and technologists with an academic course of study designed to synthesize craft training with the development of the intellectual processes needed to be effective theatre practitioners. All candidates are required to complete at least 60 credits of coursework during their three years residency, participate substantially in the University Theatre production program, and complete a research, production, or creative thesis.

**ASSESSMENTS OF GRADUATES:**

The progress of graduate degree candidates is formally assessed each January via an established review process administered by faculty members in scenic design, lighting design, costume design, and theatre technology, in association with scene and costume shop academic staff. Graduate students are required to present comprehensive portfolios reflecting all areas of work in their respective specialties. These annual reviews are categorized according to the student's year in the program. First year students, after their first semester of studies, present the **Candidacy**

**Portfolio**, to determine full acceptance as MFA degree candidates. Second year students present the **Progress Portfolio**, to show that they are making satisfactory progress toward the MFA degree. Third year students present the **Achievement Portfolio**, to display the level of proficiency they have attained as they enter into their final semester of work culminating in the thesis.

The portfolio reviews are conducted in the following manner. Students are given time to set up their portfolio display, which is to include copies of their current resume. Area faculty and staff then perform a careful examination of each portfolio display using a form developed to rate each student's work according to completeness, proficiency of craft and process, creativity, and effectiveness of the display itself. Also evaluated is the quality of the resume in terms of clarity, layout, and graphic style. The evaluation activity is performed without the students present. The following day, according to an arranged schedule, each student is interviewed individually by the Area faculty. During this interview the student is informed of the results of the faculty's evaluation. Specific critique is offered by faculty, and the student is given an opportunity to ask questions and make a verbal response. In the case of **Candidacy Portfolio**, the student is informed whether or not they have been accepted as a full MFA candidate. If the review is not in the affirmative, the student is given another semester, at the end of which the portfolio is reviewed once again by the faculty for a final determination of candidacy.

Work in the MFA program culminates in a research thesis which pertains to the candidate's specific focus of study. The thesis subject is selected in consultation with the student's graduate

**GRADUATE ASSESSMENT PLAN: Design and Technology Area (Continued)**

advisor and may be based on a practical production, a creative-hypothetical production, or on research related to theatre technology. The thesis takes the form of a substantial paper in which research and processes are discussed, accompanied by relevant visual material, renderings, models, draftings, diagrams, and photos.

The presentation of thesis and materials is conducted via a formal Thesis Defense before a committee of three faculty members. The Defense Committee is composed of the student's chief advisor plus three other faculty members, including at least one from outside the Area. The written thesis paper is distributed for perusal by Committee members prior to the defense date. The defense formally begins with a presentation of the candidate's final portfolio. This is followed by a period of questions and commentary regarding the thesis paper, lead by the candidate's chief advisor, with responses from the candidate. The Committee then consults in private to determine granting of the degree, and any special terms to be stipulated for final completion of the thesis. The candidate is then informed of the Committee's decision, along with any particular terms. The warrant for the degree is signed by Committee members, though



signature of the chief advisor may be withheld until the candidate has completed the terms stipulated.

### **ASSESSMENTS BY GRADUATES:**

Graduate students, like undergraduates, are given the opportunity to assess individual courses at the end of each semester. This is accomplished via a form that lists specific criteria measuring degrees of course effectiveness. Included is space for specific individual comments. Student fill out these forms anonymously, which are then delivered to the department office by a student elected to perform that task.

In addition to the established modes of graduate assessment described above, the Area faculty plans to institute an exit interview for students completing the MFA program in Design and Technology. Such interview will provide students with the opportunity to make a verbal and written critique of their experience in the program of study in all of its aspects. The exit interview will serve as a means of gauging student response in terms of program effectiveness from the student's point of view. The information and opinions thus gained will help to assess strengths and weaknesses of the program, casting light on ways to improve the ever evolving process of education in this professional degree program.

**THEATRE RESEARCH AREA**  
**M.A./PH.D GRADUATE PROGRAMS**  
**ASSESSMENT PLAN**

**Mission and Goals:**

The Theatre Research area oversees pursuit of M.A./Ph.D. degrees in Theatre and Drama which are intended to prepare its students to assume professional positions as scholars, educators, and researchers in the areas of theatre, dance, and performance studies. The area seeks a careful balance between theoretical and practical investigations with practical application of knowledge and craft skills, and fosters interdisciplinary approaches to the study of theatre and performance.

**Assessment of Graduate Students in the M.A./Ph.D. degree Programs:**

The progress of graduate degree candidates is formally assessed each semester via an established review process administered by faculty members in the Theatre Research area. The area faculty review each student's permanent portfolio and file.

**Portfolio Development and Review:** The portfolio consists of copies of research papers written for each course taken as part of the student's degree program at the 6xx level or above. In addition, the student's file includes copies of teaching evaluations (if a T.A.), grade reports, etc. The M.A. defense is a public, oral, one hour examination at which each student's M.A. thesis is discussed. Admission to our Ph.D. program is never granted without passing the M.A., which is a significant written piece of original

scholarship, and shows promise for successful completion of Ph.D. level work.

Each Ph.D. student must show comprehensive knowledge by taking at least two courses at the 600-level or above in each of the following areas of theatre research: dramatic literature; theatre history; and theatre and performance theory. Copies of all papers submitted for coursework must be submitted in duplicate and on disk, and one copy of each paper will be placed in the student's permanent departmental file as part of the student's portfolio of written work.

### **Oral Defenses and Qualifying Examinations**

Upon completion of coursework students petition for admission to dissertator status. Three papers from the permanent portfolio are selected for review at the qualifying examination. The three papers selected must include one paper in each area of literature, history, and theory, read by the entire Theatre Research faculty, and defended by the student as his/her one hour oral qualifying examination. At this session students have the opportunity to discuss how they would rewrite these papers in light of their intellectual development and academic experience toward publication.

Upon successful completion of this qualifying examination student write the dissertation proposal, which is circulated to the entire Theatre Research faculty, and then defended before the student's dissertation committee. The final step in obtaining a Ph.D. is the two hour oral defense of the dissertation.

Each stage of this process ensure ongoing assessment of each student's work and progress in their degree programs.

### **Assessment by Graduates**

Graduate students, like undergraduates, are given the opportunity to assess individual courses at the end of each semester. This is accomplished via a form that lists specific criteria measuring degrees of course effectiveness. Included is space for specific individual comments. Student fill out these forms anonymously, which are then delivered to the department office by a student elected to perform that task.

In addition to the established modes of graduate assessment described above, the Area faculty plans to institute an exit interview for students completing the MA and Ph.D. degrees. Such interviews will provide students with the opportunity to make a verbal and written critique of their experience in the program of study in all of its aspects. The exit interview will serve as a means of gauging student response in terms of program effectiveness from the student's point of view. The information and opinions thus gained will help to assess strengths and weaknesses of the program, casting light on ways to improve the ever evolving process of education.

### **PLAN FOR IMPLEMENTATION**

During the 1998-99 academic year we will be conducting our next NAST review. We expect to implement this assessment plan while we are undergoing NAST review, and plan to submit our first assessment report along with our response to the NAST report by late spring, 1999.