

School of Drama
University of Washington

Response to Grad review

The School of Drama is very grateful for the careful and thoughtful work done by the review committee. It was clear to us as we met with members of the Committee that they had read our documents thoroughly and reflectively. We are deeply appreciative of the attention they brought to their task as well as for their observations and recommendations.

Our response will follow the shape of the review and go Program by Program.

UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAM

Since the early 1990s the School of Drama has been experiencing growth in the Undergraduate population. This growth has brought us many new opportunities such as new Access-funded positions and an energized Undergraduate Theatrical Society. It also has put new strains on resources. The review identifies three principal challenges: numbers of students, tension between graduate students and the undergraduates, and curricular "holes."

Numbers: Since we believe in the value of a BA program for undergraduates, the faculty is reluctant to restrict admission to the major in any way. In our field, admission requirements for entry into the major are the hallmarks of a BFA degree and we are reluctant to do anything which might hint at a BFA rather than a BA degree.

We continue to assist students in their time to degree by offering gateway courses in the summer and as of September 2002 we have eliminated the Drama Minor which required all of the gateway classes. This will further facilitate premajors getting the courses they need.

Tension: Tension between the Professional Graduate Programs (MFAs) and the BA Program has existed since the professional programs were founded in the 1960s. That is, we have been wrestling with it for a long time. The recommendation that we should put an "exclamation point on the difference between our programs" is an excellent one and one we can accomplish with no expense and little additional effort! Therefore we have already embarked on a concerted education/reminder program for all our students that we offer the BA by choice and that we are deeply committed to the principle of a liberal arts undergraduate experience. Statements to this effect (from our Mission Statement and Strategic Plan) are now included on our web site, the list of requirements and pre-major enrollment forms used by the Undergraduate Advising Office, on syllabi, and on the screen savers on all STF supplied computers in our lounge, etc. It is wonderful to find such a relatively simple response to a long time challenge and one we believe will be effective!

We also have taken to heart the observation that our BA students want to have more formalized contact with the faculty. Here again we have an opportunity to better inform our students of the extracurricular opportunities we regularly have for our Majors. Some annual activities include Valerie Curtis-Newton teaching an African dance workshop over several weeks, Steve Pearson offering an Audition Workshop geared toward applying to graduate schools and several faculty participate in weekly "drop in" audition/monologue coaching sessions.

We regularly hold Town Meetings with our students and the Review Committee's Report provides several interesting ideas for discussion. By the time we meet in December we will be able to let you know how our students have responded to the suggestions made, such as having a graduate student assigned to the Undergraduate Theatrical Society (UTS).

There are a few statements that we would like to clarify.

Stage Management is taught every quarter (Drama 466) by our General Manager for Production (professional staff), Anne Stewart. Those students interested in advanced work may enroll in an independent study course.

Shakespeare is taught every year in Drama 352 (an advanced acting class, open by audition to 18 students) and we accept the courses in Shakespeare offered in English, and encourage our students to take them!

The School funds one full production for its BA students each year. It is part of our subscription season. UTS funds four to six productions in the Cabaret annually. Their budgets range from \$300 to \$500. UTS is an extracurricular club and as such may wish to maintain its independence from the School.

The School has a half-time staff person available to instruct students in the use of the Cabaret's equipment, and UTS also has a Cabaret manager who is paid hourly to assist fellow students in the safe and correct operation of the equipment.

We offer one course in ethnic drama, Drama 365, every year and one on Asian Theatre, Drama 494, biennially.

CURRICULA

We concur with the Committee's summary that we have several curricular holes which merit filling, most notably playwriting. Professor Frisch feels that the absence of Playwriting is the most

glaring need. He is quoted as saying (playwriting) is “the single creative act in theatre.” While we feel playwriting is indeed a central creative act, as a faculty we have previously affirmed our commitment to “the fundamental collaboration between the live actor and the live perceiver . . . is the core of much of our research.” That interaction, which occurs in performance, in shared time and space, is, in the opinion of our faculty, the vital creative act.

GRADUATE PROGRAMS

Professional Actor Training Program (PATP)

We’d like to clarify that we do have a speech teacher, Teresa Thuman, who is part-time at a rate of approximately 20% per quarter. She will work with the first and second year students in 2002/03. And we agree completely that a full time speech specialist would be more advantageous.

Yes, funding for student support is a major problem. Over the previous few years several new quarters of TAs were made available to PATP students from both Arts and Sciences and the Office of Undergraduate Education. These quarters eased enrollment demand for Drama 251,2,3, the introductory acting sequence, and provided instruction for UWOnCue. Sadly, these gains have been lost due to budget cuts.

However, we are very excited about the increased support generated for our PATP through the efforts of our donor-funded Director of Development. The Adopt an Actor program has been very successful over the past two years. It is a pleasure to be able to report that we now support our students on their Showcase Tour better than any of our peers! The students do participate in several ways with the fund-raising, currently having responsibility for approximately one-fourth of the funding needed. We are very proud of the amount of support we now have for the Showcase career entry experience. Eight years ago the School was able to provide \$2,000 and the students needed to raise the remaining \$34,000 (\$3,000 x 12 students for a total of \$36,000) with little additional assistance from the School. Now we have a true program that is repeatable from year to year and we hope will weather the economic downturn. For several years we sought and were granted travel support from the Graduate School and the College of Arts & Sciences for our actors. Since we have had considerable success with recent fund-raising, we have not applied for these funds. The fundraising goal for the 2003 Showcase is \$4,000 x 12 or \$48,000.

The School of Drama has long been fortunate in its excellent relationships with all of the professional theatres in our community. From “borrowers” privileges for costumes and props, to frequent placement of student interns, and employment of the faculty in professional capacities, it

is fair to say that the Seattle Theatre Community considers the School one of its own. The latest projects are good examples of what is possible. In January 2003 Seattle Children's Theatre and the School of Drama will co-produce THE OUTSIDERS at the Charlotte Martin Theatre at Seattle Center. The cast consists of both PATP and BA students. Scenery and Costumes will be designed by MFA students. Alumna and Artistic Director of SCT Linda Hartzell will direct. We believe that THE OUTSIDERS will provide a new model for cooperative ventures between the School and the profession.

The second new enterprise is supported in part by a gift to ACT Theatre which stipulates a benefit to the School. The gift has formalized coordination of visits to the School by both staff and visiting artists. For instance, this fall noted comic artist David Shiner will be doing three workshops for the PATP while he is performing at ACT, and several members of the staff are speaking to the Major's Seminar.

It has been announced that Bob Egan will be the new Artistic Director at ACT. Bob taught at the School 20 years ago when he was an associate at Seattle Rep. We look forward to exploring a new ongoing relationship with him which would include work on new plays. Mr. Egan has said he hopes to make ACT the center of new play development in the United States. We believe that with a relatively small amount of money (\$7,500 - \$10,000 per year) we could partner with ACT in a rich experience which would include commissioning a new play, have the playwright teach a quarter long course, and have our graduate students participate in the development process of the new play which typically involves a series of staged readings and workshop productions.

The casting directors for the three major Equity theatres (Seattle Rep, ACT and Intiman) regularly attend our productions, as well as audition each PATP class in January. We will try to communicate these facts more effectively to our students and continue to invite area Artistic Directors to our productions.

Design Program

The Design Faculty concurs with the report when it points out the gross inadequacy of the Scene Shop, Design Studio and performance facilities; the critical inadequacy of production budgets; the absence--when compared with peer programs--of investment in institutional identity, marketing, and promotion; the detrimental absence of any program in Sound Design and graduate-level concentration in Playwriting and Stage Management. These latter deficiencies -- Sound Design, Playwriting, and Stage Management -- impact the Directing Program at least as much as the Design program.

However, we are acutely aware that all problems rarely get solved at once. Priorities need to be established and steps forward, rather than comprehensive "solutions," are the more likely reality. With those thoughts in mind we unanimously rank increased production budgets, which can be done incrementally, as our number one priority. The design faculty firmly believes that a minimum increase of \$30,000/year is needed. Double that is needed to bring us in line with our peers.

The primary use of the new funds would be to increase the materials budget for the physical aspects of productions (scenery, costumes, lights, properties, etc.). With an increase to \$60,000 we would then be able to bring in significant artists as guest directors, choreographers, composers as well as improve our promotional materials and increase our marketing budget. It is also reasonable to expect an increase in our earned income (Box Office receipts) as a result of these improvements.

As you may be aware, the College of Arts and Sciences and the Library are at work on a proposal for a Fine Arts Library Center which would include the badly needed proscenium theatre. A new theatre would benefit all of the performing arts and enhance our ability to collaborate. It is essential to the well being of the School of Drama and our sisters in Dance and Music that a new, reasonably sized scene shop be included in that building. When Meany Hall was built, no provision for constructing scenery for its large stage was made and we bear the burden of that shortsightedness to this day. It is fair to say that it would be unwise for the UW to build a new theatre without addressing the support facilities required.

We were shocked to read of the apparently unaddressed safety concerns for students working in the Design Studio and Scene Shop. None of the faculty or staff has ever been approached about any incidents. All students are supplied with keys so that doors may be kept locked. We stress to all of our students the necessity of traveling in pairs after dark around all of our buildings. At a meeting on September 24, 2002 with all of the graduate students in Design not one of them could identify a security concern.

Professional Director Training Program (PDTP)

The faculty in this program agree with the committee report and there is no need to repeat those findings here. We are pleased that we have been able to make steady progress toward the goal of more opportunities for the PDTP students to work with their peers in the PATP. Starting this fall more PATP will be participating in Director's Projects (in Studio 218) and Workshops (in the subscription season) than has previously been our practice. The annual Ten Minute Play Festival which features both student and faculty directors was inaugurated last year. Here again it was satisfying for us to identify an improvement which did not have dollar signs attached to it.

The PDTP students are supported to the best of our ability on their thesis (third year) production. A typical materials budget for sets, lights, costumes, props, and sound is in the \$4,000 - \$6,000 range. These productions are supported with 3-4 weeks of labor from our scene and costume shops. The second year workshop production is budgeted at \$200 in part because that is what we can afford and in part to keep the physical production to a scale and scope which our labor force can support. Recently Professor Collum has undertaken to provide additional expertise and labor for these productions with his advanced scenic construction classes. We are very pleased to be able to support these productions in this way.

PhD Program

Here again the area faculty concur with almost every aspect of the report and wish to make a few comments. Two years ago the program was redesigned to allow second year students to serve as Dramaturgs on School productions for credit. We believe in supporting this important student interaction which can include students from all four graduate programs. The PhD faculty affirms that just as their focus is scholarship, their primary concern is to prepare their students for a career of scholarship and teaching in theatre studies. This may mean that students do not have the time within their program for additional interaction with peers in the MFA Programs. However, we do not want to fundamentally alter what has been to date a very successful program with both faculty and alumni having healthy publication and presentation records and job placement.

Sarah Bryant-Bertail and Odai Johnson are leading an effort to mentor students and guide them in preparing and submitting papers for both publication and presentation. We believe we are well on the way to our goal of every student being published before they leave, a goal we achieved regularly before the late 1990s.

We would like to note that we do teach some of the material commonly covered in Performance Studies Programs, and would merely add to the report (p12, second paragraph, first sentence) the word "fully" in front of represent. It would then read, "The faculty of the PhD program made a

carefully considered decision in the 1990s to continue their focus on theatre history and criticism without attempting to fully represent the somewhat under-defined field of performance studies.”

The arrival of Herb Blau and the participation of Laurie Sears have increased the exceptional offerings available for our students. All of our faculty have enjoyed the energy of these colleagues in the English and History Department. We might also note that many of our BA students relish the seminars with Herb Blau which are cross listed between English and Drama.

FACILITIES

We commend the understanding of our needs displayed in this section of the report and again find little need to repeat points made. However, we want to share some good news here! Significant upgrades in lighting and sound equipment have happened via Student Technology Fee grants over the past two years. The Studios and Cabaret in Hutchinson, the Light Lab in the Scene Shop, and the Light Lab in the Design Studio are all very well equipped now. The Design Computer Lab is also in good shape. This past summer we were able to take advantage of bargain dimmers coming out of the old Opera House and achieved the goal of a dimmer per circuit in the Penthouse. In spring 2000 and 2001, thanks to the A&S Dean's Office and the Vice Provost for Research, we were able to purchase a total of 46 critically needed lighting instruments (an investment of \$38,000). We are not able to use STF funded equipment in our theatres where we restrict student use.

One final note about the curtains in the Hutchinson studios. Not only are they dilapidated they also pose a safety hazard as their flame proofing has passed its life span. All stage drapes are flame proofed with a heavily saline solution which has an effective life span of 10 years. It also causes break down of the fibers and can only be repeated 2-3 times. Our drapes were last done 15 years ago when we moved into Hutchinson, and are too fragile to treat again!

CONCLUSION

We think it is apparent that the School and the Review Committee are in agreement on most substantive issues and we would merely offer these additional comments.

In 1999 we were fortunate to have a donor fund a full time Director of Development position. This allowed us to have an active and effective development program. The funding runs out in June 2003. After that time we know the development staff in the College will be very helpful, however we have no way to maintain the current level of activity and productivity.

There is considerable interest in helping to support increased instruction in Technical Theatre and/or the reinstatement of the MFA in Technical Direction from both the for-profit businesses who do technical and design work, and the not-for-profit performing arts companies (Pacific Northwest Ballet, Seattle Opera, as well as area theatres). The economic downturn brought our development efforts in this area to a halt. There are partnership opportunities here for the future.

There is a strong demand for our service courses to satisfy distribution requirements. We certainly could utilize additional TAs to provide additional opportunities for BAs and simultaneously increase support for our graduate students.

The School of Drama has a long history of creative problem solving and stretching dollars. We are experienced collaborators and team players who are focused on our students. We are deeply appreciative of this review process which has provided the opportunity to look at what we do with new eyes. Although the present economic picture is not good we have no doubts that we will continue to vigorously pursue excellence because that is what we do. The process has helped us to identify increased funding for our Production Budget as our number one priority. The production budget provides for materials for scenery and costumes, pays royalties, and provides trucks to move scenery into theatres. This budget has flexibility that would allow us to commission a new play and have the playwright in residence, teaching, while we produce the new play if we wish. This budget would allow us to reinstate our practice of bringing in guest artists to direct and teach. Our number two priority would be an increase in our part time faculty funding. We would use these funds to address curricular and programmatic needs throughout the School, such as guest scholars for the PhD Program, more speech classes for the PATP, playwriting and sound design for the Undergraduates, etc..

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Review Committee Report. We have found the entire Program Review process time-consuming to be sure, yet in our case it has been an energizing experience. To have the affirmation of ones peers is a great boost to morale in these difficult times and we look forward to continuing the tradition of excellence for which the School of Drama is known.