THEATRE ARTS DEPARTMENT ASSESSMENT REPORT

Study of theatre arts is an integral part of culturally relevant liberal education. There is a high degree of correspondence between the curricular offerings of the Theatre Arts Department and the aims of the College, especially the following:

- Cultivation of intellectual and aesthetic curiosity and activity through the use of critical and creative abilities.
- Awareness of certain basic content, the principles, the methodologies, and the interrelatedness of the humanities, the social sciences, and the natural sciences.
- Participation in depth in a specific field of study, including acquisition of a body of knowledge and development of skills for discovery, recognition, and integration of knowledge in that field.
- Skills and taste in written and oral communications.
- Ability to use the resources of information and reason in analyzing and solving problems.
- Acquaintance with and sensitivity to beauty.
- Knowledge of and appreciation for cultures other than one's own.
- Recreational and social skills of lasting value.

The disciplinary study of the Theatre Arts includes a literature and a practice; includes performers and audience members; includes scholarship, creation, and recreation. Therefore, the curriculum of the Theatre Arts Department to a large extent naturally falls into four groups of courses:

1.) those related to performance:

2.) those related to the historical study of the drama and the theatre:

3.) those related to design and technical theatre; and

4.) those related to criticism as analysis, interpretation, and evaluation.

Each of these four categories is best assessed in manners organic to the nature of the particular study:

1.) performance by establishing criteria and evaluating laboratory performances (similar assessment for playwriting);

2.) the study of historical drama and the theatre by graded course examinations, papers, and research projects which examine skills in play reading, analysis, and the understanding of different styles of theatrical presentation;

3.) design and technical theatre by tests and evaluation of scenery, lighting, and costume design and evaluation of various sorts of "building" techniques; and

4.) criticism by tests and by evaluation of practical analyses of texts--the kinds of analyses required by critics, actors, designers, and
directors. Because critical approaches to text analysis and interpretation are so significant to theatre, the department is especially keen to assess the progress of students from TART 2120 (Script Into Performance) through TART 4200 (Integration of Style). One of the critical courses in the department, Introduction to the Theatre, is designed for the non-major student, essentially the audience member, and assesses the student's development not only by tests and papers but also by responses to theatrical performances in the major genres: comedy, tragedy, melodrama, farce, and tragicomedy.

The department also has established two methods of assessing the students' synthesis of disciplinary study, one in the living, communal enterprise of theatrical presentation (Theatre Practicum, TART 2200) and the other, the Senior Comprehensive Examination, for which the student must synthesize (both orally and in writing) scholarship, critical skills, and artistry.

Assessment of Specific Courses and/or Practices


Assessment: Voice Work

Most performance aspects of theatre center on vocal communication: the acting and interacting of characters, the directing of plays, and all the planning sessions on which the communal art of the theatre is based. Of prime usefulness for the production of an easy yet vibrantly communicative voice are the theory and method devised by F. M. Alexander (the Alexander Technique) and developed by Kristin Linklater (in Freeing the Natural Voice). The central notion of this approach invites students to pause before choosing a method of vocal production, and in pausing to evaluate old habits of thought and action before opting for the most familiar, habitual process. In voice work, the assessment of gradual improvement, i.e., the assessment of this process of pausing, evaluating, then choosing a method of ever-easier vocal production, is best achieved by observation. Observation is then linked to delicate psycho-physical feedback in such a way that assessment punctuates improvement in vocal production.

Specific assessment tools used in Voice Work are graded exams (on anatomy and physiology); graded responses to practice on the International Phonetic Alphabet, learned to improve both voice and diction; feedback from teacher and other students to enhance ear training, and feedback to class presentations and to tapes recorded by students each week; and finally written assessments by each student concerning his or her vocal changes during the term and also vocal changes made by other students.

(Master Teacher of the Alexander Technique, Dr. Meade Andrews, has been on Campus numerous times. She has worked directly with students and consulted with faculty members).

Assessment: Beginning Lighting Design

Lighting design is an art rather than a pure craft, often making it impossible to objectively assess design assignments, because it is difficult to separate the student's intentions or vision from the mechanical execution of the assignment. It is important in working with beginning design students to concentrate on teaching them how to see, so that they may then use this visual information to enhance their designs, rather than adhering to some formula for lighting design. Seeing means actually noticing the mechanics of an image or photo and determining how those mechanics visually affect the viewer or
audience. The average viewer of a scary movie, for instance, notices only that the villain looks evil and that the heroine looks young and beautiful, without realizing that the trick is achieved through the use of different lighting for each individual. In order to sensitize students to visual detail, they list together in class not only the controllable qualities of light, but also the functions that lighting design can fulfill through the use of those qualities. In order to assess understanding of these visual concepts, students are expected to put together a lighting morgue, that is, a collection of photographs from magazines that provide two examples of each controllable quality of light (intensity, direction, distribution, color, and movement) and of each function of lighting design (visibility, focus, composition, modeling, and supporting given circumstances). This collection not only enhances the student's ability to see, it also gives him or her a clear vocabulary to use for the first design assignment. By using this common vocabulary, the instructor is able to assess the design objectively, first assessing whether or not the tools the student has chosen will serve the function for which they are intended, then separately assessing whether or not that intended function is appropriate to the situation. This procedure helps to avoid the natural tendency to judge a design on the basis of how closely it fits one's own personal vision.

(Guest faculty member Cheri Prough and Master Teacher Henry Kurth, retired from Case-Western Reserve University, have consulted on approaches to stage lighting.)

Assessment: Text Analysis

All the choices in the process of the transformation of a dramatic text into a performance must arise from a controlling interpretation of a play. This interpretation is the product of applying a system of criticism to a text. A useful system of critical analysis is structuralism, an approach that acknowledges both complexity (multiple meanings) and ambiguity (contradictory meanings) in a wholistic "reading" of a text. The result is the discovery of an interpretation, or unifying principle, which then must be tested against the text.

Especially useful in this approach are terms for considering all the playwright's choices (for example, the incidents that are offstage vs. the incidents that are onstage) and for considering the arrangement of parts of a play, and especially for considering the temporal aspects of a play.

The work of Richard Hornby provides a useful guide in this process and enables students to understand that a script is embedded in a performance via an interpretation. In the course which focuses on this process, Script Into Performance, assessment instruments include informal text analysis, graded course examinations, written text analyses (some of which have been presented at NCUR), and because the theatre is a communal art, two oral presentations of text analyses: one done by a group and one done singly. Each analysis must justify a procedure and result in the declaration of a unifying principle that would guide all the choices and decisions involved in the transformation of a text into itself in performance. The ultimate assessment of the effectiveness of this course is the use students can make of this process as they prepare to direct a play during their senior year.

Assessment: Speech Communication

The Department also offers TART 1100, Speech Communication. This course is a hybrid oral communication course. The purpose of this basic course is for students to understand and apply the process of communication in four areas: intrapersonal communication, interpersonal communication, group communication, and improvements in assessment.
For purposes of assessment, an outline provides information concerning what students are asked to accomplish, how students’ accomplishments are evaluated, the expected outcomes for students, and improvements in assessment.

Students are first taught the elements of the communication process. They are asked to apply this process throughout the course in the above stated areas through lectures, planned exercises, evaluation of speeches, and an exam.

Lectures, discussions, and exercises for intrapersonal and interpersonal communication include the following:

- Self-concept and Self-esteem activities
- Relating Perception and Self-concept
- Psychological Safety and Risks
- Gender and Self-concept
- Learning how to set reasonable goals
- Listening Skills
- Verbal Communication skills
- Nonverbal Communication skills
- Interpersonal Relationships
- Conflict Resolution.

Lectures, discussions, and exercises for small group communication include the following:

- Characteristics of Small Groups
- Small Group Effectiveness
- Discussion in Groups
- Leadership in Groups.

Lectures, discussions, and exercises for public communication include the following:

- How to Organize a Speech
- Finding Material for a Speech
- Defining the Audience
- Delivering the Speech
- Writing Informative and Persuasive Speeches.

Students are also asked to read the assigned text and to take an exam about half way through the term over the text and lectures.

To complete the course students are expected to attend class, participate in class, read the text, complete all graded assignments, and take the exam. Students are evaluated on the basis of those expectations. The majority of the grade is based on the students’ performances on the graded presentations. These presentations include an interpersonal seminar, a major group presentation, three major speeches, and three impromptu speeches. Students have the opportunity to evaluate themselves by viewing their own video-taped presentations. Each type of presentation is graded according to criteria pertinent to that assignment. To properly assess students’ communications skills, the number of students in the course should be quite small. Twenty to twenty-two is the ideal class size for this course.

The expected outcome is that students will understand the process of communication by understanding the elements of the process, and by applying that process in their own intra-, inter-, group, and public communication. In doing so, the students will begin to understand how to improve their communication skills and minimize speech apprehension. Through the exam, the
instructor determines whether students understand this essential component of the course. Through non-graded and graded presentations, the instructor determines whether the students can apply the process of communication. Video equipment provided by the Murphy Foundation for an oral communication lab aids in assessing students' oral communication skills.

Finally, two proposals for improvement have already been made in assessing student communication. The first proposal is to provide lap-top computers for the classroom. Immediate and complete feedback on graded presentations is necessary for students to understand their communication strengths and weaknesses. A lap-top computer with printer in the classroom would aid in evaluating students with a more complete evaluation sheet. Another improvement in the assessment process would be to have students, upon entering and leaving the course, take James McCroskey's speech apprehension test. Test scores will aid in determining the level of speech apprehension at the beginning and at the end of the course, allowing the instructor to measure improvement in students' communication skills.

Speech Communication is not a required course for graduation. However, it is required for specific majors such as Education and in Business, for the CPA bound, and for some Natural Science majors who might attend certain pharmacy schools. Although pre-med majors on this campus are not required to take the course, pre-med students are required to take three English courses, one of which can be Speech. Also, students may elect to take this course to fulfill the Theatre Arts Distribution requirement of the Humanities Area.

In assessing the course, consideration is made to clarify what the students are asked to accomplish, how students are evaluated, their expected outcomes, and improvements in assessing student evaluation.

**Resources Necessary to Sustain the Program over the Next Five Years**

The department is currently staffed by three full-time faculty members (and an adjunct faculty member who teaches speech) and is housed in the Cabe Theatre Arts Center. Enhanced scholarship possibilities for prospective students are likely part of a trend toward ever larger numbers of students interested in Theatre Arts. Faculty, the building, larger numbers of students: these three interrelated matters create resource considerations. The needs of the faculty are for more time to devote to departmental duties, for more accessible clerical assistance, and for improved office space. Indeed, the next five years must see improvements to the aging building—in the office space, in storage spaces, and replacement of the carpeting and seating in the theatre itself.

A primary issue related to assessment of the Theatre Arts Department is pursuit of departmental accreditation by the National Association of Schools of Theatre. This process should enrich the department's teaching and artistry. The accreditation should enable student endeavors in all those enterprises related to the work of the theatre.
The following addendum indicates the Theatre Arts Department enrollment for the years 1989 through 1997.
# Enrollment for Theatre Arts Courses

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**KEY:**  
- f = fall  
- w = winter  
- s = spring  
- B = Binnie  
- G = Grace  
- H = Henenberg  
*For 1996-97 this course was renamed Shakespearean Dramaturgy.*

Henenberg's teaching outside the Department:

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