

TO: Mike Mahon
President

DATE: January 20, 2012

FROM: Bob Boudreau
Chair, University Review Committee

RE: Department of Theatre and Dramatic Arts Academic Quality Assurance Review

In accordance with the U of L *Academic Quality Assurance Policy and Process*, the University Review Committee approved the review of the Department of Theatre and Dramatic Arts results at its November 4, 2011 meeting. This quality assurance review produced four documents:¹

1. *Department of Theatre & Dramatic Arts, Faculty of Fine Arts: Program Review Conducted 2010/2011, Self Study Report* (March 2011) – self-study report drafted by the Theatre and Dramatic Arts Program Review Committee.
2. *Department of Theatre & Dramatic Arts, Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Lethbridge: Program Review 2010-2011 – External Review Report* (April 29, 2011) – prepared by external reviewers Michael Greyeyes (York University) and Lee Livingstone (University of Alberta).
3. *Department of Theatre and Dramatic Arts: Response to External Review Report* (June 8, 2011) – the response of the Theatre and Dramatic Arts Program Review Committee to the external review.
4. *External review: Department of Theatre and Dramatic Arts – Decanal Response* (August 21, 2011) – response to the review, written by Desmond Rochfort, Dean of Health Sciences. Desmond Rochfort presented the results of the review to the University Review Committee on November 4, 2011.

¹ All documents are available upon request.

Self Study

The Self-Study Report noted that the Department successfully delivers “high quality, streamlined general drama education,” and its graduates are “well-rounded,” with a “wide perspective on the field.” This document contained a detailed set of strengths, challenges, and future directions for the Department:

Strengths:

- Students have access to superior learning opportunities, such as TheatreXtra, acting roles, crew assignments, and costume and prop shops.
- Theatre productions have high standards of artistry, technology, and design.
- Students have efficient access to spaces, equipment, and technical support.
- Faculty and staff are extremely knowledgeable and active in their fields, and are committed to mentoring students.
- Small class sizes.

Challenges:

- Finding a balance between specialization and liberal education.
- Fostering unity among the department’s diverse strengths.
- Balancing need for growth with demands of existing programs.
- Maintaining creativity and innovation in the face of heavy academic schedules, rigid productions schedules, and overly specific formulas and policies.
- Developing a curriculum that balances the needs of industry, the University, and the department faculty.
- Upgrading resources to meet program needs.
- Finding consensus on the future direction of the Performance stream.
- Facilitating collaboration with other departments within Fine Arts and across the U of L.
- Running the M.F.A without government funding.
- Managing the demands of theatre operation and the academic programs.
- Recruiting and retaining staff, in the face of impending retirements and administrative reassignments.
- Ensuring technologies are up to date.
- Lack of rehearsal spaces and equipment.
- Lack of professional theatre and dance in Lethbridge.
- Lack of diversity in student and staff.
- Better reflecting professors’ expertise in the curriculum.
- Ensuring Fine Arts needs are effectively represented to the Library.
- Ensuring deficiencies in facilities are addressed.

Future directions:

- Develop a long-term plan that prioritizes future areas for growth.
- Expand the Technical Theatre and Design Stream.
- Expand into applied theatre or community-based drama, areas that service other professional faculties.
- Place a stronger emphasis on design.
- Expand into media projection design.
- Develop a B.F.A. in Stage Management.
- Consider developing a Performance Creation stream.²
- Add advanced levels in play reading and analysis.
- Add dramatic criticism to help students consider plays critically.
- Regularize the term position in Lighting Design and acquire a new faculty position in theory and history.
- Improve planning and program definition for the M.F.A. program.
- Boost student involvement in the department.
- Develop new classrooms, labs, storage areas, and equipment. Upgrade existing studios and classrooms.

External Review

The external review praised the efforts of the Department, which it said operates in a challenging environment. Lethbridge lacks professional theatre companies and a road house to host touring theatrical performances. In spite of this, the Department has several strengths:

- To address the lack of a theatre culture, the Department takes students field trips and brings in guest artists from professional theatre.
- The faculty members have a fine record of scholarly research and publication.
- Faculty and staff are committed to improving the program and to aligning it with the mandate, philosophy, and vision of the U of L.

The weaknesses that the external reviewers saw in Theatre and Dramatic Arts were:

- Faculty members have to assume a number of fields of study, forcing them to become generalists in a discipline that requires specialists.
- The programs in the Department lack the depth in specialized areas that is required for the professional theatre industry.
- Many courses integrate too many students from different degree programs, with varied needs and pursuing different ends.

² “Performance creation” involves learning ways to create original work, as opposed to analyzing and performing existing work.

- Classes are generally not small enough to give students adequate one-on-one instruction.
- Course scheduling does not allow progressive learning. Often, the following course in a sequence is not offered in the next semester.
- There are several resource issues, including: the movement studio has a floor that is not sprung or non-slip, and the studio is shared with other Fine Arts departments; the design studio is too small and poorly equipped; there is no shop space for Techniques courses; the costume shop lacks a fume hood; the scenery shop needs an industrial dust extractor; the prop shop is too far from the scene shop and is too small; storage space is inaccessible; and lighting instruments are outdated.
- The student-run performance series TheatreXtra is inadequately funded.
- The number of contact hours, specialization courses, and actual practice are not consistent with industry needs.

The external reviewers offered commentary related to the U of L's choice to not follow a conservatory model of fine arts education. The conservatory approach requires an audition or portfolio for admission and segregates by stream the students admitted through this process. In this model, instruction can be at a higher level than for classes that have a mix of students, some of whom may not have been admitted through portfolio or audition. In the opinion of the reviewers, the university conservatory model offers several key advantages: integrative learning; enhanced collaboration between instructors; and the ability to offer courses on alternate years and in modules. The reviewers recommended the Department re-examine the structure of its programs in consideration of the conservatory model.

One set of issues related to safety, which is discussed at length in the external review, bears further explanation. The reviewers pointed out several safety concerns that they considered to be serious. These concerns included: insufficient enforcement for students to take a Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System test; lack of visible Materials Safety Data Sheets; poor ventilation and dust extractions systems in the shop spaces; students not wearing respirators, safety glasses, or particle masks when needed; a demonstration being done on a table saw with no safety guard on; inconclusive certification of the theatrical rigging; and lack of fume hoods in the costume shop. The reviewers strongly recommended that the safety issues be addressed and that the "Safe Stages" workshop, run by Theatre Alberta, be arranged for faculty, staff, and students.

To strengthen the Department and improve its quality, the external reviewers had several recommendations, depending on how they want to move forward with degree offerings. If the Department wants to continue offering B.F.A. degrees, then the external reviewers have the following recommendations:

- Increase the faculty complement to include positions in: performance; lighting design; technical theatre; movement/dance; voice/dialect; and stage and production management.
- Either reclassify staff to Faculty Service Officers or include in their job descriptions a designation as Technical Demonstrator. This will allow them to teach students.
- Reorganize theatre staff so they report to the same administrative unit. Currently one group reports to University Theatre Services and the other to the Department of Theatre and Dramatic Arts.

- Commit additional instructional space: a movement studio; an acting studio; change rooms; a teaching shop space; a prop shop; and storage space.
- Address several safety concerns.
- Consider replacing the program in Design and Technical Theatre with two distinct degree routes – a B.F.A. in Design and a B.F.A. in Technical Theatre.
- Establish core courses in performance and design for the third and fourth years of study.
- Reinstate mandatory instruction in production techniques for all Design and Technical Theatre students.
- Implement compulsory crew duty for all students.
- Establish vetting procedures for show selection.

Overall, the external reviewers noted that the Department of Theatre and Dramatic Arts, if it wishes to continue to offer B.F.A. degree programs, needs a “paradigmatic shift” from its current generalist approach to one that emphasizes specialized training.

The external reviewers noted their opinion that the B.F.A. (Theatre and Dramatic Arts) resembles a B.A. (Honours) program at other Canadian institutions. If the Department wants to offer B.A. Honours degrees instead of B.F.A. degrees, then the external reviewers have these recommendations:

- Increase the faculty complement to include positions in: performance; lighting design; technical theatre; and stage and production management.
- Either reclassify staff to Faculty Service Officers or include in their job descriptions a designation as Technical Demonstrator.
- Reorganize theatre staff so they report to the same administrative unit.
- Commit additional instructional space: a movement studio; change rooms; a design studio; a teaching shop space; a prop shop; and storage space.
- Address the safety concerns.
- Reinstate mandatory instruction in production techniques for all Design and Technical Theatre students.
- Implement compulsory crew duty for all students.
- Establish vetting procedures for show selection.

Additional recommendations from the external review were:

- Examine the program structures in the Department, considering the contact hours and course offerings at other B.F.A. programs.
- Guarantee Performance students a part in a set number of productions during their program.
- Guarantee that Design and Technical Theatre students will have the opportunity to design for at least one theatrical production during their program.
- Limit the number of courses in a B.F.A. that don’t relate to a specialization to 20.
- Strengthen the mechanisms for student assessment of teaching.
- Consider a class devoted to preparation for a professional career.

- Develop a release policy to allow faculty to fulfill their creative research obligations. At a minimum the policy should allow for a six week residency with a professional theatre company.

Program Response

In their Program Response, the Program Review Committee summarized the issues from the Self Study Report and the External Review Report and provided details on how the Department plans to address those concerns, or is currently addressing them:

Issue:	Response:
<i>Expand programs to bridge the gap between Lethbridge and the professional theatre community.</i>	The Dept. has expanded the Visiting Artists program and will explore other actions, such as guest instructors and touring shows.
<i>Increase depth and rigour in B.F.A. programs.</i>	While the Dept.'s programs do not duplicate conservatory models, they do prepare graduates for entry into the profession. Canadian professional theatre offers many different types of opportunities and Dept. graduates have been successful as actors, designers, playwrights, dramaturges, and technicians, and in creating their own work.
<i>Conduct a thorough curriculum review of all B.F.A. programs.</i>	Curriculum reviews have begun, with a goal of completing changes for the 2012-13 Calendar.
<i>Change the name of the Theatre Studies Major.</i>	The Theatre Studies Major was designed to address the fact that smaller theatre companies are becoming more important in the industry. The Dept., however, will begin discussions about a possible name change.
<i>Reinstate courses in Production Techniques.</i>	The Dept. will address this and other curriculum issues relating to the Technical/Design Major.
<i>Split the Technical/Design Major.</i>	The Dept. will consider this, but splitting the Technical/Design Major would require more resources to provide acceptable breadth and depth. Other smaller universities in Canada combine these two areas, and many entry level jobs require basic knowledge in several areas.
<i>Reduce the number of courses taken outside the Dept. and the area of specialization.</i>	The liberal education requirement is University-wide, so cannot be reduced. The curriculum review will include the possibility of increasing the number of required Drama courses in the Departmental Majors.
<i>Require compulsory crew duty for all Theatre and Dramatic Arts students.</i>	All Departmental Majors require at least one Drama Portfolio course, which offers experience in working on or running a show.
<i>Offer courses in modules.</i>	The Department will investigate this as a possibility for some third and fourth year classes.

Issue:	Response:
<i>Create a course in preparing for the profession.</i>	The Department will consider regularizing and expanding access to Drama 3850: Preparing for the Profession. This was offered as a topics course in Fall 2010.
<i>Have faculty teach only in their area of specialization.</i>	The Department will look into ways to implement this recommendation.
<i>Create a method for teaching evaluation.</i>	The Department will research how other units and institutions do course evaluations.
<i>Increase the number of faculty members.</i>	The Department agrees and has added a new tenure track position in Acting, has requested one in Lighting Design, and will investigate one in Dramatic Theory and Criticism.
<i>Create a rotation of course relief for faculty members to allow them to work in professional theatre.</i>	Addressing this is complex. The Department will establish addressing this issue as a long-term goal.
<i>Designate staff as Academic Assistants or APO appointments.</i>	Currently, the Department cannot implement this suggestion.
<i>Keep a full-time position in props.</i>	The Department will investigate how to retain this position.
<i>Additional space requirements for teaching, rehearsal, and workspace.</i>	The Department will investigate space needs.
<i>Increase the TheatreXtra budget.</i>	This budget has been increased.
<i>Review the theatrical season selection process.</i>	The Department will implement a review of the season selection process.
<i>Review safety procedures and implement safety training.</i>	The Department agrees that safety is top priority and has begun to review safety procedures and training.
<i>Staff should report to one unit.</i>	The existing reporting lines actually do promote cohesion. All staff members are scheduled and supervised by the Technical Director and Production Managers.
<i>Revise the wording in the program planning guides</i>	The Department will contact the Fine Arts advising office to discuss wording changes.
<i>Hiring of U of L graduates.</i>	The Department has grown in profile outside our region, and this will likely increase the diversity of candidates for advertised positions.

The Program Review Committee commented that some of the external reviewers' suggestions did not match the nature of the B.F.A. (Theatre and Dramatic Arts) programs at the U of L. However, the Committee acknowledged that the external review was thorough and has stimulated discussions on improvements to the unit and its programs.

Dean's Response

In the Dean's Response, Dean of Fine Arts Desmond Rochfort noted that the external review, though valuable, contained many suggestions that do not entirely fit with the U of L's Department of Theatre and Dramatic Arts. The external reviewers came from conservatory programs, which aim to train students to enter directly into professional practice. These types of theatre and drama programs are quite different from those at the U of L. Conservatory programs are highly specialized into specific streams. The Theatre and Dramatic Arts programs at the U of L are in the tradition of a liberal arts program, providing a broader program that parallels those at UCalgary, URegina, and UBC. Nevertheless, Dean Rochfort commented that the Department faces a crossroads.

The Department of Theatre and Dramatic Arts has to decide on its future direction. It can move towards a conservatory model of specialized, practical preparation for a theatrical career. Or it can strengthen its broader, liberal arts focus. Desmond Rochfort therefore recommended that the Department develop a five-year academic plan.

The academic plan should be comprehensive. It should include an articulation of the overall aims and objectives. It must align departmental programming, facilities, and staffing with these aims and objectives. Finally, the academic plan must include a prioritized schedule of implementation for recommended changes. The Dean's Response recommended that the academic plan be completed for presentation to the Dean by the end of April 2012.

Response to Safety Concerns

After the Dean's Response and the Dean's presentation, at the urging of the University Review Committee some further actions were taken by the Department related to the safety concerns. The Committee emphasized the safety concerns following Desmond Rochfort's presentation on the results of the review.

To follow-up, there was a meeting on November 7, 2011 with Bob Boudreau, Paul Sparrow-Clarke, Desmond Rochfort, Leslie Robison-Greene, and Doug MacArthur (Chair of Theatre and Dramatic Arts). The meeting reviewed the status of the main safety issues:

- Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS) – 1000 and 2000 level students do not deal with hazardous materials. All students in a shop will now be asked to get the WHMIS card and carry it with them. This card is printed out after the student takes the test.
- Materials Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) – The Department will ensure that the MSDS sheets are posted in a visible location in the shops.
- Masks, glasses, ear protection – The Department will buy additional respirator masks to ensure all students have them and will ensure there are adequate supplies of safety glasses and ear protection. Students who do not wear safety equipment after being asked a second time will be told to leave the shop.
- Table saw guards – The Department will require the use of table saw guards during demonstrations to students.
- Rigging – The rigging has been certified to 2013.
- Fume hoods – The scene shop lacks a fume hood; scenery spraying is done in the loading dock area. The costume shop has one fume hood, but it needs to be stronger. Fume hoods

