

**Weber State University Five-Year Program Review
WSU Department of Performing Arts—
Theatre Program Review Evaluation Team Narrative Report, April 2015**

The following narrative report reflects the observations, questions, findings, and recommendations of the Evaluation Team based on the team's March 6, 2015, site visit.

The team was comprised of the following members:

External Members:

John Hill, Review Committee Chair, Front Range Community College, Fort Collins, CO
Bob Nelson, University of Utah

Internal Members:

Sue Harley, Department of Botany, WSU College of Science
Kathleen "K" Stevenson, Department of Visual Arts & Design, WSU College of Arts and Humanities

Besides touring the Browning Center, the Evaluation Team met with the following faculty, staff, and administrators:

Bryce Allen	Staff, Technical Director
Tracy Callahan	Faculty, Acting/Directing
James C. Christian	Faculty, Musical Theatre Director, Theatre Studies
Jean-Louise England	Staff, Costume Shop Manager
Jessica Greenberg	Faculty, Lighting and Sound Design
Jennifer Kokai	Faculty, Theatre Ed/History/Playwriting
Van Tinkham	Faculty, Scenic Design
Catherine Zublin	Faculty, Costume Design, Assoc. Dean, and current acting chair of English
Madonne Miner	Dean, College of Arts and Humanities
Thom Priest	Chair, Department of Performing Arts (Dance, Music, Theatre)
Nicole Beatty	Arts and Humanities Librarian
Debbi Murphy	Arts and Humanities Academic Advisor
Frank Bradshaw	Browning Center Facilities manager

The team did not have the opportunity to meet with the following individual:

Tamara Goldbogen Endowed Chair of the Beverly Taylor Sorenson Arts Learning Program

The team was afforded the opportunity to meet with several students, including:

JJ Freeman, Mandie Harris, Kaitlyn Hipwell, Amelia Moore, Cubby Morris, Kacee Neff, Tanner Rampton, Janessa Richardson, Katie Rogel, Geoff Rosenberg, Alex Thedell

All team members agreed that the Theatre Arts program mission statement accurately reflects the reality that we experienced during our visit:

The Theatre Arts area of the Department of Performing Arts provides scholarly, creative, collaborative and practical theatre experience for students. The objectives of the program are to:

1. Encourage participation in and appreciation of theatre and drama;

2. Foster creativity and develop technical skills in acting, directing, theatrical design, script writing, theatre education, dramaturgy, and stage and theatre management;
3. Use and develop higher level thinking skills including analysis, synthesis, and creation in understanding and organizing knowledge;
4. Prepare students for careers or professional schooling in those fields that require strong presentational skills, creative problem solving, effective collaboration, and an understanding of human experience.

**WHAT FOLLOWS ARE THE EVALUATION TEAM’S COLLECTED OBSERVATIONS, ETC.,
RELATED TO THE STANDARDS OF THE REVIEW GUIDELINES PROVIDED BY THE UNIVERSITY.**

Strengths in meeting standards related to:

Staff and Faculty

Curricula

Student Learning Outcomes and Assessments

Facilities: Safety, storage, “stage and set” work areas, scheduling of practice areas

- Overall, the Theatre Arts area (within the Department of Performing Arts) shows genuine strength and vitality.
- The results are most evident in the students themselves—they are confident, thoughtful, and enthusiastic. The faculty members bring professional acumen, commitment, and attention to their teaching and programming, with the results evident in the students’ work and learning; numerous, adventuresome public performances; and overall enthusiasm for their program and colleagues.
- There is strong faculty commitment to high quality instruction, student mentoring, and creative scholarship.
- There appears to be good collegiality within the program—with the sole exception of the integration of the Beverly Taylor Sorenson Endowed Chair Professor position, discussed in the sections on challenges and weaknesses, below.
- The rapport between the Theatre program faculty and the College Dean appears to be mutually respectful and supportive.
- Overall, the staff personnel are exceptional. Their capabilities, dedication, and work ethic are a tremendous contribution to the program’s many successes. The coordination among their support services is a good model for the entire Department.
- The Costume Shop and facilities are expertly managed and appear to serve all three areas simultaneously —Dance, Music, Theatre and The manager, Jean-Louise England, is to be commended, particularly in her coordinated service and her remarkable mentoring of students.
- Positive visibility for the University flows from the quality of the stage productions presented by the Theatre program.
- The implementation of a jury system to monitor progress of majors in the Theatre program has created a higher level of rigor and academic excellence.

- A recent curriculum overhaul to address articulation issues and institute a new emphasis with a Theatre Arts Generalist track has also contributed to strengthening the program. These recent and substantial curricular changes offer students more robust and beneficial programming. These efforts are noted and are to be commended.
- Recent hires in the Browning Center have brought much needed facilities re-evaluation, coordination and vigor to the Theatre Arts program and to the overall use of the building. The recently hired Technical Director, Bryce Allen, has made appropriate assessments and is working diligently toward more, continued and manageable coordination, especially as it applies to performance spaces, equipment and safety. Most significant seems the recent hire of the new Facilities Manager for the Browning Center, Frank Bradshaw. In the short time of his tenure, he has made significant contributions in both the development of a strategic plan and increased partnership among the areas. This has been a real boon to each area independently and to the Theatre Arts area in particular. The Marketing staff person has also assisted in the redistribution of workload relative to marketing concerns, which has, by extension, also assisted in Theatre Arts program recruitment.

Challenges in meeting standards related to:

Faculty and Staff loads

Funding and Budgets

Outreach

Community Relationship

Arts Integration Sorenson Program

Facilities: Safety, storage, “stage and set” work areas, scheduling of practice areas

- For a program of its size, there seem to be too few faculty, described as “one deep” in the program self-study. This is being partly addressed with two new faculty lines—the recent hire of a technical faculty member for sound/lighting and an in-progress search for a second faculty member with expertise in Musical Theatre. Students expressed a desire for progression in course work so that they are challenged when they take an additional course in a subject area, rather than having the second course be at the same level as the first, because of having to accommodate students taking the subject for the first time. Additional faculty would enable the program to schedule more course offerings and sequence them more effectively, and to challenge their students with higher levels of learning.
- Many administrative tasks specific to Theatre (such as preparation of the program self-study) are done on an ad hoc basis by a limited number of the Theatre faculty, without re-assigned time or other official notice of their work. This appears to be a consequence of the current administrative setup for the Department of Performing Arts as a whole. The Department Chair, who is from the Music Program, noted that Theatre Arts works well as a team and manage themselves very well.
- Junior Faculty members carry a significant role in administration and service. An additional line—especially to broaden the scope Theatre’s curricular focus—could also assist with this seemingly uneven distribution of work. The possibility of dividing the Department, as a part of this possible solution, is addressed in the section “Program Weaknesses.”
- Overall, there seems to be a “creep” factor as it applies to Faculty Promotion, Tenure and Advancement. The faculty, for the most part, have continued to take on several additional

administrative duties as the ubiquitous computer and laptop have become the “default” office, secretarial, and managerial support system for all. Unfortunately its operation requires extra work from its isolated operators. The teaching load—12 credit hours per semester—is already significantly high, although it should be noted that there does seem to be equitable reassigned time for production work, but less so or none for administrative duties. To add to the already growing list of expectations and duties—more service to students, a higher degree of research and the added burden of increasing administrative duties—a committee of higher administrators should consider undertaking a comprehensive and long-term review, in cooperation with faculty, addressing issues of Rank, Tenure and Advancement, especially as it applies to load and compensation.

- Budgets are always tricky—especially in times that come immediately following a national downturn and from a State Legislature that has relegated the rapidly growing WSU institution to teaching, not research. Several significant expenditures—some through strategic fund-raising, others through thoughtful administration—have been very beneficial to the Department overall. However, continued fairness in monies and resource distribution to all three Department areas, or at least the perception of fairness, is important, in particular if the Department remains a group of three individual areas. As the staff members’ assigned tasks are continually growing, there should be an effort made to keep compensation in line with their duties. The compensation to adjuncts—especially as they play such a significant role within the Department—should also undergo constant review, advocacy and adjustment. The administration should continue to assess the use of student fees as the only source for some budget monies. Are there other possibilities, internally or externally, that would result in a more “hard,” reliable budget for ongoing expenditures?
- All departmental productions rely on soft money allocated by the University Student Fee Recommendation Committee. While the SFRC appears to be a fairly reliable source as far as soft money is concerned, it is a source that will always be limited based ultimately on enrollments and the number of groups requesting a share of the available funds.
- The lack of cooperation between Theatre and the other programs in the Department of Performing Arts needs to be addressed. The technical support that Theatre Arts used to provide to Dance was stopped due to limited resources of both personnel and funds. Other interaction with Dance, such as curricular, is minimal, apparently due to Dance’s primary emphasis on modern dance. There is, however, a general feeling that Theatre and Dance could get along and even collaborate productively if separated in some fashion from Music. Fortunately, many of the scheduling conflicts between programs are being resolved due to work of the new facilities manager of the Browning Center.
- Junior faculty across all areas of DPA, seem to be more amenable to interdisciplinary activities than are senior faculty. There was even mention from junior faculty that their undergraduate experiences in the performing arts were more integrated than those of their current students. Increased interdisciplinary activity could come about simply as the faculty in Performing Arts turn over in the next few years. This would match a pattern observable in other academic areas on campus.
- The Theatre Arts program continues to support the community with numerous performances of a high caliber and ongoing outreach programming, especially at the Children’s Tree House Museum. The outreach educational programming, while good, could (and should) continue to

grow, especially in the light of the ethnic diversity of the local population and the need for further community and children-centered performances. Continued outreach to area elementary and secondary schools would be highly appreciated by community members, assist in the perception and growth of the connection between “town and hill,” be an excellent teaching experience or practicum for Theatre Education Teaching candidates, and assist with arts integration throughout the College and University campus. This calls into question the role and function of Tamara Goldbogen, Endowed Chair of the Beverly Taylor Sorenson Arts Learning Program.

- The integration of the Sorenson Arts Learning Program into the Theatre area has proved less than successful. There are various views. Some believe Professor Goldbogen does not want to be involved directly with the Theatre program; others suggest she has not been made to feel welcome by Theatre Arts colleagues. As part of her duties to the Arts Learning program, she teaches in the Education program and does arts outreach. The level of internal conflict suggests an administration-level examination for possible alternatives. Can this position be changed to an administrative position? Could the Sorenson Endowment be re-located to the College of Education? Does Theatre Arts actually wish to give up a half of an outside-funded tenure-line position, rather than figure out how to integrate it effectively into their program? Are there other possibilities that need further exploration? This matter is addressed further under recommendations.
- Advising appears solid. A dedicated advisor in the College in the area of “Gen Ed” requirements, Debbi Murphy, is of significant assistance. However, the students recognize the need for specialized advising, particularly in the case of the student admitted as a major relatively late in the degree process. Juniors and seniors may need more specialized attention. Summer advising is also an ongoing concern. (If the three Department areas were to split, a full-time Theatre Arts Chair or Department “Co-Chair” might help to alleviate the summer “advisory vacuum,” if a Chair or Co-Chair position is funded for the full year.) The addition of on-line advising through “Cat-Tracks” has been helpful; however the program’s reliability is not yet 100 percent.
- The Theatre Arts area has an excellent resource in their assigned librarian, Nicole Beatty. Current needs are regularly requested and met. However, the overall funding available is still relatively low.
- Venue issues—The Theatre Arts program is housed in the shared Browning Performing Arts Center, managed by Frank Bradshaw, a facilities manager not directly affiliated with the Theatre Arts program. There are many outside users (25 regular outside users and 6-8 fine arts series events, often other special events, such as requests from other academic departments, the President’s Office, the Development Office, etc.) who compete with Dance, Music, Theatre for use of the Browning Center. Sometimes classes are bumped from classrooms in order to accommodate outside users. Frank Bradshaw noted that he does not have control over classrooms.

All Performing Arts events are ticketed by a central agency whose major responsibility is to support the University’s athletic program. The ticketing services staff do not always provide sufficiently high quality customer service for Theatre Arts or other DPA events.

Bryce Allen, the Theatre Arts program Technical Director, feels that he works well with the Browning Center staff, but expresses concerns about facilities upkeep, maintenance, and

safety. Bryce Allen and Frank Bradshaw are working to maintain the facility effectively and to keep things safe. Jessica Greenberg, the new lighting, sound, and projection faculty, also feels that she gets along very well with Frank Bradshaw and his staff, but is challenged because the Browning Center tends to serve the non-departmental clients first with equipment, etc. For the most part, lighting and sound equipment is controlled by the Browning Center, not the individual programs, so from time to time there are inventory use issues. It is clear there is a need to update equipment in the venues (performance, practice, teaching) throughout the Browning Center, including control systems, fixtures, etc.

- The Browning Center, which recently celebrated its 50th year, supports or presents a challenging line-up of shows, performances and cultural events. However, the Theatre Arts program, as a principle user, is clearly running out of space—for offices for new faculty, teaching, set and equipment storage, and program growth. There appear to be a couple of ongoing issues of safety—in particular, ventilation in the shops and adequate storage that will assist with design and movement safety.
- The Development Office and Administration are to be commended for finding necessary financial resources for the most urgent facility needs. However, especially with this aged facility and related program dependence on up-to-date technologies and servicing such large public audiences, the funding needs will only continue to grow for systems, technologies, and building refurbishment. To manage budgeting for production work with only soft funding may not be sustainable.

Weaknesses in meeting standards related to:

Internal Governance and Program/Facilities Collaboration resulting in Departmental Morale Concerns

Limited Space and Aging within Facilities

Workloads: Faculty and staff

Funding and Budgets

- A continuing weakness, noted in the previous program review, is the ongoing reliance on soft money in order to mount plays. This funding's being linked to student fees, and the distribution of those fees being governed by a review board, makes long-range planning and program development difficult, and seems to have led to budgeting shortfalls and other challenges for the Theatre Arts program specifically and the entire Department overall.
- As noted in the prior program review, there clearly continues to be only limited interaction between Theatre Arts and the other areas of the Department.
- Discord exists in the areas of collaboration and cooperation among the three distinct parts of the Department of Performing Arts. This discord suggests a need for an internal, possibly external, study and consideration of revisions in Department structure. Given the varied natures and resources needed by these distinctly different disciplines housed within a single Department, this discord is neither surprising nor unusual. However, given its impact on the morale of personnel and students, as evidenced in interviews and reviews, it rates high as a concern. We recommend charging a taskforce with a more thorough exploration of viable alternatives to the current Department structure. In the meantime, equitable distribution of resources—monies, faculty, support staff, and facilities—will require increased administrative oversight, in order to ensure a perception of equity and strong stewardship at

all levels within the administration. The Music area, with distinct personnel needs—such as the often one-to-one ratio of student to teacher—has resulted in numerical and therefore political advantage for this area during departmental voting. And though we find no purposeful misuse of this perceived advantage (in agendas, strategies, policies, etc.), the effect on personnel, budget and resource distribution is continually called into question by many individuals.

Recommendations to meet standards related to:

Efforts in departmental collaborations

Faculty and Staff workloads

Outreach

Possible departmental reorganization

- There needs to be overt support for efforts of junior faculty to collaborate across the three areas of the Department, through financial, scheduling, load and staffing incentives.
- The Costume Shop is used as instructional space as well as a production space. Currently it lacks technology infrastructure to deliver specific aspects of instruction. It needs to be outfitted with appropriate IT infrastructure.
- The Costume Shop manager, Jean-Louise England, has for this semester only a paid shop assistant due to the fact that her colleague, Catherine Zublin, faculty costume designer, and Associate Dean of the College, is also the current Acting Chair of English. We recommend that this Costume Shop Assistant position be continued, even after Professor Zublin has completed her assignment with the English Department. The Costume Shop is one area where Dance is still supported—on a pay-for-services basis. Also, the costume inventory is regularly accessed by different programs within the Department, and that inventory must be managed and maintained. Ms. England teaches as well as managing the shop, and an assistant is critical in ensuring the various production and teaching demands on the shop are being met, as well as safety procedures.
- The Technical Director should also have a full-time assistant, for a similar list of reasons.
- Based on interviews and the self-study documents, we believe that there needs to be improved outreach to local high schools—as a recruitment tool, and to more effectively provide notification to interested high school seniors about the tuition waiver program and the need to apply and audition for DPA scholarships in late winter or early spring prior to their freshman year.
- If there is genuine commitment on the part of the current Theatre Arts faculty, there needs to be improved K-8 outreach. This may be best achieved through effective interaction with the Sorenson professor (see below).
- Professor Tamara Goldbogen, Beverley T. Sorenson Endowed Chair for Arts Integration, was not on the schedule for meetings with the Program Review Team. The Review team was told of her desire to continue as a tenure-track colleague in the Theatre Arts program. However, the collaboration between the Sorenson Chair and the Theatre Arts Faculty has been strained, with valid concerns from both entities. We recommend that a meeting that includes the Dean of the College of Arts and Humanities, the Chair of DPA, the Theatre Arts faculty, and Professor Goldbogen be held to examine her role in Theatre Arts, and also to

reconcile Professor Goldbogen’s activities in Learning Arts with the requirements for tenure in the College of Arts and Humanities.

- Explore a formal separation of Music from Theatre and Dance, such as Co-Chairs within a single department or complete separation of DPA into two departments. Overwhelmingly, the Theatre faculty lean toward two departments. There is acknowledgment that problems exist because of the way DPA currently functions. Questions of space and budget efficiencies should not drive a critical decision about Department organization that will affect the Music, Dance, and Theatre programs and students over the long term.
- A mechanism such as an Executive Committee could be formed to handle issues among and across the three areas of DPA, whether they stay as a single unit or split into two.
- The workloads being carried by junior members in Theatre Arts seem heavy, beyond their regular teaching duties, especially as we have observed it during this particular review period. The senior faculty—due to several reasonable factors, including their high commitment to their professional research, outreach and performances—seem less likely to pick up these additional housekeeping duties. And of course, junior faculty, for promotion and tenure reasons, are naturally appointed to these duties. However, the assignments during this review year appear inequitable. We recommend effective administrative guidance to avoid the possibility of junior faculty “early burn-out.” This concern might also be addressed if the Department were to sub-divide into two distinct areas, each with independent Co-Chairs, appropriate administrative support, fair allocation of resources, and equitably prescribed service and load needs.
- Finally, the review team congratulates Jenny Kokai on managing the multiple aspects of this complex and demanding review, especially as a non-tenured, junior faculty member who seems to be serving as an uncompensated, de-facto program director. There needs to be formal recognition of the persons who do the administrative functions for Theatre Arts, such as job descriptions and re-assigned time or other compensation for the required tasks.

EVALUATION TEAM’S FINDINGS

STANDARD A–MISSION STATEMENT

- a. Strong. The Mission Statement clearly delineates the technical expertise and academic aspects of the Theatre Program.
- b. Weak. Although a strong assessment program is presented in other standards, no mention of it, such as the student jury, occurs in the Mission Statement.
- c. Adequate
- d. Adequate

STANDARD B–CURRICULUM

- a. Strong. Large curriculum revision last year to address articulation issues within USHE and institute a new major within Theatre.
- b. Strong.

- c. Adequate
- d. Adequate. Some students brought up scheduling difficulties with alternate year courses.

STANDARD C–STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES AND ASSESSMENT

Evaluate the extent to which the program has clearly defined outcomes

- a. Strong. The jury system implemented by the program provides formative assessment of the majors throughout their time in the Theatre program.
- b. Adequate
- c. Adequate

Evaluate the effectiveness of the assessment process

- a. Strong
- b. Strong
- c. Strong

STANDARD D–ACADEMIC ADVISING

- a. Adequate
- b. Adequate
- c. Strong. Mentoring of students occurs both formally and informally due to the high amount of student-faculty interaction in the program. Students expressed appreciation for the way faculty work with a variety of theatre groups in Utah in order to open channels for student internships, etc.

STANDARD E–FACULTY

- a. Strong. The faculty are making good decisions about discipline areas in hiring for two new faculty lines and retirement turnover.
- b. Strong.
- c. Adequate
- d. Adequate
- e. Adequate
- f. Adequate. The service workload needs to be more equitably distributed especially with regard to the junior faculty.
- g. Strong
- h. Strong. College-wide annual review of faculty and post-tenure review policy in addition to a tenure review policy.

STANDARD F–PROGRAM SUPPORT

- a. Adequate. Each of the support staff could use an assistant, particularly if Theatre is to

provide technical support to Dance.

- b. Adequate.
- c. Adequate. Space is at a premium in the Browning Center. Equipment in the Eccles Theatre and the Allred Theatre need updating.

STANDARD G–RELATIONSHIPS WITH EXTERNAL COMMUNITIES

- a. Not applicable
- b. Not applicable
- c. Not applicable

STANDARD H–PROGRAM SUMMARY

Strong. Addressed all concerns raised in the prior review. Provided a timeline for addressing each concern.