

Theatre Program Review

Faculty of Humanities, College of Arts

Dean's Summary

Submitted by:

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Program and Unit Review: History

Dean's Summary Report

Dr. Jacqueline Nolte

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In September 2012 the Program Review Committee conducted a site visit as part of a Program Review of the Theatre Department. Members of the Program Review Committee included members from other Canadian Universities and one internal member from another department.

Overview

The overall assessment was positive. The Review Committee described the curriculum as excellent, the production program as impressive and the physical resources as being of a very high quality. Graduates were described as well prepared to enter into certain forms of professional work and into specialized undergraduate and graduate programs. It was noted that students and alumni have high levels of satisfaction with the quality of the instruction and mentorship. The Committee noted that, despite limited resources, heavy workload and uncertainty regarding the future location of the theatre facilities, the department has maintained a high quality program that serves its students and the community well.

The Committee submitted that since the University requires the Department to physically move from its "current outstanding facilities to unknown new facilities in a different city within the next decade", the University "face[s] a serious challenge regarding this unit, despite its excellence and strong reputation." It commented that this was the most important variable for the Committee to consider. It commended the current UFV administration on its commitment to the future of the program, its vision of integrating it with other Arts departments in Abbotsford and its plan to fundraise for a new facility.

It concluded, "it is essential that the changes in University planning over the past decade do not result in a weakening of this Department, or result in a perception that the unit itself is weak," since the department has strengths of "widespread community engagement, excellent students, supportive alumni, very good facilities, and the talents, dedication, and energy of outstanding faculty and staff."

Key recommendations were that the Theatre Department develop and establish a BA Major in Theatre, and that the Yale Road theatre be maintained while a physical presence and eventual facility is developed in Abbotsford.

What follows is a detailed summary of recommendations and actions that are planned as a response to these recommendations.

A. Curriculum/Pedagogy/Program

The Committee noted that the department offers a solid curriculum for pre-professional and liberal arts theatre education and that, with a few adjustments, it could and should offer a major. Learning objectives, learning outcomes and pedagogical standards were regarded as appropriate. Unique strengths of the department were described as in-depth engagement with Canadian drama and Shakespeare, independently run student-led productions and vibrant engagement with communities, including Friends of the Theatre, local, regional and provincial theatre and educational bodies, and

community-based audiences. The production program was described as offering suitable depth, mentoring/teaching and hands-on and theoretical experience.

Recommendation 1: drop the Associate of Arts Degree (Theatre)

Action: there is no advantage (or saving) associated with dropping the Associate of Arts at this time; BCCAT is encouraging a review of the Associate of Arts province wide.

Recommendation 2: ensure components of each program are required by each pathway so as maximise course enrolment and efficient use of resources.

Action: the department will engage in a curriculum mapping exercise, evaluate courses, note areas of overlap, revise courses and reduce course offerings.

Recommendation 3: revise the structure of the diploma by grouping courses into categories such as acting, technical theatre and theatre studies.

Action: grouping courses into acting, technical theatre and theatre studies makes sense for the proposed major: in developing the major, the department will keep an eye on how these groupings may affect the diploma. The department plans to undertake a revision of the diploma once the major is in place with the aim of ensuring the diploma program complements and supports the major, while also offering a valuable two year program for students.

Recommendation 4: concentrate resources in the upper years, allowing students to complete general education requirements during first and second year; reduce lower-level BA minor requirements and assign fewer resources to first year acting.

Action: the department plans to work on reducing lower-level BA minor requirements and assigning fewer resources to first year acting in 2014/15.

Recommendation 5: provide a larger enrolment performance course for non-actors without audition, which will help enrolment and allow for smaller controlled-entry Acting classes for students specializing in Theatre.

Action: a larger enrolment performance course for non-actors will be introduced.

Recommendation 6: consider cross listing Theatre courses with courses in other departments for example, English courses in Drama/Theatre.

Action: the department will remove the option for students to fulfill upper-level minor requirements with courses from English and Visual Arts and will look at which courses to cross-list.

Recommendation 7: ensure all practica support program learning outcomes and that practica credit weights have a consistent logic.

Action: practica credit weights will have a consistent logic and as the department goes through the curriculum mapping and learning outcome alignment process, it will ensure practica credit weights are consistent with the outcomes.

Recommendation 8: offer more practica in the upper years of a major than in the lower years, so that students meet breadth requirements early in their academic careers.

Action: as the department works on the development of the major, the department will look at the distribution of practica through the entire four years of the program; currently upper level students who take on more demanding roles in the productions have the option to enroll in either an upper level practicum or one of the Theatre Practice practica 290 or 295; with the major, students may be required to take a 399 and a 499; these questions will be considered when working on the curriculum mapping, learning outcome alignment, and major development.

Recommendation 9: ensure class hours and credits are consistent across the Theatre curriculum.

Action: the department will review the class hours allocated to upper level studio courses to study the viability of reducing these; challenges here might be more pedagogical than administrative; since studio courses at most universities are based on 6 hours a week, but with a significant component of independent experiential learning, it may well be that the department needs to look at how to facilitate more student directed activities in studio based courses; the main issue here, for faculty, is workload

Recommendation 10: if developing a 200 level course in *Theatre Production and Stage Management*, offer this every second year.

Action: this is a resource issue; currently, the department can only afford to do this by using an existing section for this purpose.

Recommendation 11: rather than build in an emphasis on design, concentrate instead on capturing technical learning of students into tuition generating courses and redressing the staff-faculty balance; facilitate experience with design by exploring partnerships for internships or apprenticeships with outside groups.

Action: the Dean is working with the Head to explore the suggestion of tuition-generating courses linked to redressing the staff-faculty balance in the department; the department will explore the idea of partnerships for design internships or apprenticeships.

Recommendation 12: create upper level shell courses such as “Studies in Theatre History” and “Studies in Performance.”

Action: the department will create these upper level shell courses within their existing section allocation.

Recommendation 13: develop an upper level writing course rather than a lower level writing course.

Action: this decision will relate to revision of breadth requirements in BA and revision of writing requirement.

Recommendation 14: do not develop online versions of THEA 101, 201, and 202 until resources permit.

Action: the department is in agreement; the Dean will encourage online development once major curriculum changes have taken place.

Recommendation 15: do not develop upper--level course in Aboriginal Theatre and Performance until resources allow; instead, attend to performances that can address indigenization.

Action: the department will not develop upper-level course in Aboriginal Theatre and Performance until resources allow; instead it will attend to performances that can address indigenization such as this year's production of *Ernestine Shuswap Gets Her Trout*.

Recommendation 16: goal of internationalization is best addressed through performance of world theatre.

Action: the goal of internationalization is best addressed through performance of world theatre; this past fall, the department organized a workshop and demonstration performance of Indian dance; the department plans more initiatives of this kind, especially in the year that the upper level World Theatre course is offered.

Recommendation 17: develop summer programming only if there is convincing evidence that summer programming will recoup costs or if FT faculty assigned to summer courses can serve the new major program better than through winter courses; it is important for the department to prioritize allocation of resources.

Action: there are other ways of attracting Aboriginal and international students to the program outside of Summer offerings; the programme needs to maximise fill rates of current sections and possibly approach International Education for funds to employ part-time faculty to offer courses to international students.

Recommendation 18: extend existing play analysis, theatre history and theory courses over 4 years, enhancing their levels as appropriate.

Action: the department is considering extending play analysis, theatre history and theory

Recommendation 19: The Review Committee noted that a major could be launched with the current faculty and infrastructure and it commented on the range of students, alumni, community groups, and even IR staff who reiterated that a major would fulfill a need within the university and broader communities and draw students to Theatre courses. The Committee argued that establishing a BA Theatre Major would be an important evolutionary step toward implementing the goals of the University, College, and Department.

Action: The Dean has given approval for the curriculum working group to proceed with a proposal.

B. Student Experience

The Review Committee noted the high level of satisfaction of current students and argued that the establishment of a Major will enhance the top end students' experience.

Recommendation 1: the Committee agreed in principle with the department request for an additional release for advising but, given resource challenges, it suggested more clearly articulated program options be supported by transparent written materials to enable students' self-selection of options and courses.

Action: advising material will be developed; when resources permit, the position of the BFA Advisor will be expanded to include advising for Theatre; Arts Advisors visit Chilliwack once a week and can accommodate queries related to the Theatre minor in the BA.

Recommendation 2: the Committee commended existing practices to promote diversity and suggested gender and colour-blind casting, production of contemporary plays with more roles for women and roles for other under-represented groups in classic European theatre.

Action: the department will continue to attend to promoting diversity in the classroom and in productions.

C. Enrolment/Recruitment/Completion Rates

The committee noted that enrolment is not as strong as usual but felt that this was due to the sudden isolation of the department's physical facilities. It also argued that enrolment, particularly at senior levels, is affected by the lack of a major in the discipline. The Committee encouraged the department to pursue partnerships with departments and programmes, for example the Creative Arts disciplines and in the form of the proposed Media Arts Degree.

Recommendation 1: the University and the College should provide the department with resources for developing and implementing a communications strategy aimed at regional and international recruitment; UFV administration should provide short term support for recruitment given the situation the program is in as it tries to rebuild confidence in the program at new locations.

Action: resources for recruitment and marketing will depend on contingency funds allocated to Arts.

Recommendation 2: engage with other Acting programs to recruit students interested in a production-focused BA.

Action: the department will recruit students interested in a production-focused BA.

Recommendation 3: partner with other institutions' graduate theatre programs.

Action: the department will explore partnering with other institutions' graduate theatre programs.

Recommendation 4: partner with colleges which offer foundational theatre courses to attract transfer students.

Action: the department will explore partnerships with colleges which offer foundational theatre courses in order to attract those transfer students into the theatre major at UFV.

Recommendation 5: develop a marketing plan aimed at the “2nd tier” of very talented students not admitted to highly sought after programs.

Action: These initiatives will all be attended to by the new Marketing and Development Manager who will be asked to develop a coherent and rigorous recruitment plan, hopefully with the support of MarCom and Student Services.

Recommendation 6: create enticing topic courses aimed at non-majors.

Action: topic courses will be developed to attract non-Majors within allocated sections.

D. Faculty and Staff

The Committee noted that there is sufficient breadth and depth of expertise to deliver the programme as it is advertised. It noted that faculty and staff demonstrate willingness, accessibility, and dedication that extend beyond the expectations of the job. Faculty members are engaged with their art form and related research.

Recommendation 1: productions directed, produced and designed as part of the UFV season should be seen as scholarly activity and UFV should revise the term “research” to “research and creative activity”.

Action: the Dean has communicated these recommendations to the Research office and JPDC.

Recommendation 2: positions of specialist staff, who currently supervise and support students informally, should be shifted to partial teaching/technical demonstrator positions so that valuable teaching functions of specialist/mentoring staff will be captured in the FTE student count; in the long term the department may need to shift a position from staff to faculty.

Action: the Dean, the Manager, Academic & Administrative Services and the Department Head are planning accordingly

Recommendation 3: recognize directing productions separately, as Acting practicum courses, with appropriate course load assignments for instructors.

Action: see #5 below

Recommendation 4: continue to invite professional theatre personnel into classes and to assist on productions.

Action: professional theatre personnel will continue to be included in the program.

Recommendation 5: the hours students spend in rehearsal, production, and performance should be captured in calculating student enrolment and faculty teaching time and aggregate hours of learning time should be reflected in the credits allocated to the practicum courses.

Action: the department recognizes that the workload involved in the production season is excessively burdensome, yet has felt compelled to continue with the season as presently constituted for various reasons: first, to support the two staff positions funded through box office revenues; second, to provide the kind of range of performance opportunities needed by our students; third, from a community engagement and audience development perspective, a three show season plus a festival provides the range and diversity of offerings needed to be a culturally animating force in the region; fourth, the current structure allows for sufficient scope to offer programming in more specialized areas, such as indigenization, world theatre etc. However, the department will look more carefully at how these goals might be achieved while operating on a scale more within the resources available.

Recommendation 6: do not hire additional faculty immediately as this would only make the FTE student to FTE faculty ratio shrink; administration should commit to long term faculty growth as enrolments rise.

Action: future faculty hires are contingent on budget and growth funding.

Recommendation 7: the idea that the faculty position currently shared with English be converted to a full time Theatre appointment by converting four sections presently taught by sessional faculty is a matter of negotiation with Heads and the Dean

Action: the English department has indicated that it does not want to lose a much-valued cross-appointed department member.

Recommendation 8: do not add or extend staff positions; instead the department should work with the College to set discipline-specific, clear, reasonable, and achievable targets for enrolment growth and a strategy for achieving these.

Action: job descriptions are currently being reviewed with the Department Head; the Dean will work with the Head to set targets for enrolment growth.

Recommendation 9: consider the creation of more formal faculty coordinator positions.

Action: the Department will create a program and a curriculum committee as well as point-persons for areas of concern such as practica and applied skills, study abroad and International; the Dean will request updates on program committee formation and tasks.

E. Resources

The Review Committee noted that current physical facilities are excellent and that equally impressive future facilities can be created with long-term planning and stable leadership. It noted that while much of the Department's equipment infrastructure is not up-to-date, it remains functional, with some exceptions.

Recommendation 1: Develop a coherent 5 year plan for the transition from Chilliwack to Abbotsford; that the university support the department in establishing a presence in Abbotsford prior to the move

and look for creative temporary approaches to developing a classroom / limited performance venue in Abbotsford so as to establish an academic and cultural “footprint”.

Action: the Dean will work through Campus Planning toward finding a venue for Theatre to begin establishing a presence in Abbotsford.

Recommendation 2: that because the Production Program is a key factor that makes the program distinctive and attractive to students, that the Yale Road building is currently the best facility for the production program and that the department focus on its physical presence at Yale Road and in Abbotsford, with overflow courses located at Chilliwack Education Park (CEP) as needed.

Action: the department plans to continue to offer theatre courses on both the Yale rd. and Chilliwack Education Park campuses despite a strong desire by some to focus on the Yale Road facility; the department recognizes that the CEP studio provides a valuable space for teaching acting and for mounting small performances that maintain a presence at CEP and that increase the visibility of the department; the department will identify a better balance of classes between CEP and Yale Rd. and will explore holding more classes in Abbotsford, including the use of the gym.

Recommendation 3: continue to develop arrangements with other organizations for joint use and development of facilities and infrastructure in Abbotsford.

Action: the only plan the department has at present is to explore space on the Abbotsford campus where first year acting classes may be offered; fundraising for a U-Hub requires initiative from the university administration as a whole, led by the Advancement Office.

Recommendation 4: develop a renewal plan to help make the ongoing task of maintenance and upgrading more manageable.

Action: fundraising will help fulfil these needs; the Dean and Department Head have met with Advancement to outline the department needs; the department will explore putting certain percentage from all ticket sales towards a technology fund that can be used to upgrade equipment as needed.

Recommendation 5: move pieces of equipment from one location to another.

Action: the department already moves pieces of equipment from one location to another depending on the needs of different spaces and productions; one challenge is the compatibility of equipment between the different and unique spaces.

Recommendation 6: invest in a functioning ticketing system.

Action: the best system seems to be Ticket Manager, which is fairly expensive, especially the online function; once the new Marketing and Development Manager is in place, options will be investigated

Recommendation 7: explore synergies with other departments and community partners for work on digitizing the archive, making it accessible through the web page, and sharing this information.

Action: given the many other priorities and challenges facing the department at present, this initiative is a relatively low priority; however, it is possible staff changes and the creation of a special work study position could provide at least some means of moving this forward.

Recommendation 8: that the University and the Department explore all options for keeping the Yale Road theatre building permanently open even after the Department moves, including working with the City of Chilliwack and community performing arts groups regarding a purchase or lease; the report reads, “notwithstanding that Chilliwack has recently built a larger theatre venue, the Department's present theatre is an essential piece of community infrastructure and a significant cultural asset for the region. The theatre is less than 20 years old, is very well designed and highly serviceable, and should not be abandoned.”

Action: the Dean will work with the VP External and Director of Campus Planning toward this end and will make this case at Campus Planning.

F. Alignment with University and Community Needs/Plans

The Theatre Department exemplifies the social and cultural values in the UFV Strategic Plan in its outreach to the community. The department was commended for attending to Community Engagement, Indigenization and Internationalization and was described as well-positioned to continue to fulfill the university's strategic goals into the future.

Recommendation 1: work with the Development Office on establishing a new group of production sponsors

Action: the conversation with Advancement has begun; the new Marketing and Development Manager will play a key role in moving this initiative forward.

Recommendation 2: devote resources to assisting the Department build a strong group of supporters in Abbotsford.

Action: Items F3 related to E3 above: we need through the U-Hub committee, to engage the Abbotsford arts community (and indeed the entire Fraser Valley arts community) and we need to develop a strategy that includes/involves all the players; this is an initiative that has to be organized and supported by administration as it is beyond the resources of the theatre department alone.

Recommendation 3: create MOUs with community partners to formalize the long standing relationships.

Action: The department and administration will review the viability of developing MOU's as one vehicle for moving forward with recommendation F2 above.

G. Program/Department Administration

The Committee commented, “[w]e were impressed by the passion and commitment of the students, the high level of community interest and engagement, the dedication and excellence of the faculty and staff, and the strong and positive administrative leadership. Support for the program was unanimous and resounding.”

The Committee noted that the Department has an appropriate structure and reasonable number of support staff. Teaching and learning assessment methods were regarded as sound and enrolment challenges were regarded as having less to do with the quality of the education than the location of the program and the absence of a major. Library resources were recognized as adequate to support the program’s growth. Technical support and infrastructure were noted as creating expensive student FTEs but the Committee noted that Theatre FTEs were always costly and balanced by the value-added results in community profile, institutional reputation and cultural benefits.

The Department has already started to implement a number of recommendations. The Dean will work with the Head to address the remaining issues and will request a report on progress both six months and one year from the date of this submission.

It is worth noting that the Committee was impressed by the organizational and administrative preparations for the review and the excellent staff support.