

**Annual Assessment Report**

**Theatre Arts Department**

**Executive Summary**

**September 15, 2016**

**Introduction**

During the 2015-2016 academic year, the Theatre Arts Department undertook the following primary assessment projects: assessed its Program Learning Outcome in written disciplinary effectiveness (Letter IIA); developed changes in the department’s Design and Technology program relative to Key Questions from 2014-2015 (Letter IIB); followed up with changes in rubrics from the department’s major assessment activities from 2014-2015 (Letter III); and developed Key Questions relative to curriculum design and development (Letter IV). Please find the following brief discussions that expand and develop findings and interpretations itemized on the Annual Assessment Report document.

**Discussion**

IIA. The Theatre Arts Department’s third Program Learning Outcome is posted on the Theatre Arts website and reads: “Students apply discipline-specific research methodologies in crafting effective writing about theatrical practice.” Students are introduced to methods and competencies relative to writing about theatre and drama in TA 001 Great Literature of the Stage, and develop and master them in TA 120 and 121 Theatre History I and II, where students are assessed. As part of the department’s PLO, the department uses two Student Learning Outcomes

* Student Learning Outcome 1: Students develop a precise thesis and fully developed arguments in their writing.
* Student Learning Outcome 2: Students produce accurate discipline-specific research in their writing.

The above outcomes were assessed in TA 121, Theatre History II, during Spring 2016. This is the second time the department has focused on writing for its assessment activities, with the last assessment coming in the 2012-2013 school year, using a rubric and a “key to the rubric” created during the 2010-2011 academic year. Please find the attached rubric listed as Appendix A, and its key as Appendix B.

The following data set consists of two different sets of students, in two different courses, over two different years. The first set comes from the 2015-2016 academic year, and includes students from TA 121 Theatre History II: The Rise of the Professional Theatre to Modernism. The prompt for the assessment tool is attached, and listed as Appendix C. The second set comes from the 2014-2015 academic year, and includes students from TA 120 Theatre History I: The Greeks to Shakespeare. The prompt for the assessment tool is attached, and listed as Appendix D.

Course Number 1

The data set consists of six students, all of whom are Theatre Arts majors. The assignment develops effective writing about 18th and 19th century acting conventions, and research methodologies appropriate to the field. Though there were several writing assignments in the course, the assignment used to assess this outcome was a research paper in which students research and write about the methods, styles, and features of a significant 18th or 19th century actor. Though the rubric includes such writing categories as Structure & Organization, Argument & Analysis, Use of Evidence, Bibliographic Format & Sources, and Style & Mechanics, for the purposes of this outcome special attention is paid to Structure & Organization, especially in regards to the development of an effective thesis; the development of that thesis through the essay’s use of Argument & Analysis; and proper Bibliographic Format & Use of Sources.

Theatre History II is a Writing Intensive course, and as such there is a substantial amount of revision and rewriting required for writing assignments. John Blondell, using a rubric created during the 2010-2011 school year, assessed student essays. In addition, Professor Blondell provided a significant amount of written feedback to the student regarding the strengths, weaknesses, and areas of improvement for the essay. Students received their essays with margin comments, a highlighted rubric indicating Professor Blondell’s assessment of student writing relative to their first draft, as well as written comments. In addition, on several occasions, Professor Blondell provided oral feedback to students’ writing. Students then took the feedback from these sources (marginalia, rubric, and written and/or responses) and crafted a revision of the essay. All students are required to revise their essays at least once. Please see Appendix E for sample responses to initial and subsequent drafts for the assignment.

The following data was collected from use of the rubric:

* 6 of 6 first drafts received a “C” or lower in “Structure & Organization,” the category of the rubric that most clearly addresses the development of a thesis, and the argument(s) that intend to develop that thesis. (Please see the appendix for features that characterize grading in each representative category.)
* Students showed substantial improvements in subsequent drafts. 5 of 6 second drafts received a “B” or higher in this category.
* 5 of 6 first drafts received a “C” or lower in “Bibliographic Format and Sources.
* Students showed substantial improvements in subsequent drafts. 6 of 6 second drafts received a “B” or higher in this category.

Course Number 2

Outcomes were assessed in TA 120, Theatre History II, during Spring 2015.

The assignment develops effective writing about Shakespearean theory and practice, and research methodologies appropriate to the field. Though there were several writing assignments in the course, the assignment used to assess this outcome was a research paper in which students research and write about the pervasive theoretical orientation of a significant Shakespearean critic.

Please see above for information about the rubric, revision practice, and student feedback used for this assignment.

* 5 of 6 first drafts received a “C” or lower in “Structure & Organization,” the category of the rubric that most clearly addresses the development of a thesis, and the argument(s) that intend to develop that thesis.
* Students showed substantial improvements in subsequent drafts. 5 of 6 second drafts received a “B” or higher in this category.
* 4 of 6 first drafts received a “C” or lower in “Bibliographic Format and Sources.
* Students showed substantial improvements in subsequent drafts. 6 of 6 second drafts received a “B” or higher in this category.

Close the Loop – Observations and Strategies

The use of assignments, the writing rubric, and its key continue to demonstrate the improvement and effectiveness of student writing relative to research methodologies in theatre and drama. The following brief observations are demonstrated by the data collected for the assignment

* The assignment, the rubric, and its key create clear expectations for students, and are useful for professor and student alike.
* The rubric’s categories are appropriate: they cover a range of criteria, including Structure, Argument, Evidence, Sources, and Style.
* The revision and rewriting process participates significantly in the development of student writing. All students improve from first drafts, some of them dramatically. This process is integral to the way that the department teaches writing, and helps develop a great deal of student success in terms of disciplinary writing. It will continue to be an active and important component of the department’s emphasis on effective e disciplinary writing.
* Students do continue to struggle with Structure and Organization, especially in relation to the creation of effective thesis statements and the support of those theses in the initial draft. Though different strategies have been used, including the use of effective writing models, and instructor oversight and encouragement, this is obviously an area that continues to need attention. The Chair will consult with the Dean of Educational Effectiveness and the English Chair to develop further strategies to enhance student writing in the early phases of researching and writing.
* The instructor of record (Dr. Blondell) has yet to use LiveText to assess this project, though is considering doing this in future assessment cycles.

**IIB: Key Question: Language, projects, and changes in Design and Technology courses**

In 2014-2015 the department instituted changes to elevate student learning in the building and installation of theatrical scenery, as related to the department’s first Program Learning Outcome in the creation, development, and presentation of theatrical performances. The department re-designed Stagecraft courses (TA 015, 016, 017) to project-oriented, problem-solving courses, and assigned students major design and technical responsibilities in the departmental season. The department noted and discussed several substantive changes in student learning:

* Students show elevated design aesthetics, evidenced in main stage, senior project, and Fringe Festival productions.
* Students display strong technical understanding of basic building principles, and the use appropriate terminology in design, building, and construction.
* Significant increase in the number of students engaging in significant design and technical responsibilities in the departmental season, including 6 completed Lighting Designs by Student 1; 5 completed Lighting Designs by Student 2; 1 completed Sound Design by Student 3; and 3 completed Costume Designs by Student 4; and 2 completed Scenic Designs by Student 5. This represents a sizable increase in student engagement and success in the Design and Technology component of the program.

**III. Follow-up of 2014-2015 Assessment Project related to Program Learning Outcome 1.**

In 2014-2015 the department adopted several improvements designed to elevate students’ thinking and artistry as they relate to the department’s first PLO – the creation, development, and presentation of theatrical performances. The department clarified evaluation criteria; developed language appropriate to Design and Technology; and adopted six new evaluation categories for its senior projects. These categories include Depth and Breadth of Artistry, Initiative and Discipline, Critical Thinking and Problem Solving, Collaboration and Community Engagement, Disciplinary and Professional Development, and Contextual and Historical Research.

This year’s evaluations reveal significant success in terms of senior projects for 2015-2016. This year’s projects were ambitious and challenging: all were original, created from scratch during the process. Though theatre always requires work in the six evaluation categories listed above, the projects this year were especially demanding for the artists as they chose to create and present new work for the stage. All five seniors demonstrated outstanding initiative and discipline in their original work, and displayed an exceedingly high level of artistry.  In addition, due to multiple projects being politically and socially conscious, the students were highly involved in collaboration and engagement with faculty, administration, and potential audiences as they developed how to best present work that was challenging for the community.

IV. Other Questions or Projects: Curricular Design

In the spring of 2016, the department undertook a discussion related to curricular design and implementation. The discussion centered on two separate though related issues: the challenge for students to double-major in Theatre Arts due to its high unit count; and ways to develop more Design and Technology courses into its present curriculum. Following lengthy discussions, the department decided to take a two-fold approach to this problem. It created a lower unit count “Liberal Arts” track, intended for students who want to double major. It created three separate tracks in Performance, Design and Technology, and History and Writing. All four tracks are as of yet at the draft stage, and include at least two new courses in Design and Technology that need to be approved. The plan is to design those courses, have them approved, then submit the four new tracks for the major for the necessary approvals. Please find Appendix F to display the beginnings for a draft proposal for a new “Liberal Arts” track in Theatre Arts.