Department of Performing & Visual Arts Theatre Program Assessment Summary

1. What evidence do you have that your students achieved your stated learning outcomes?

In theatre, we must always take our coursework and put it into practice, so our assessment in the theatre program is on-going in classrooms with individual and small group presentations and discussions of the various historical, theoretical and technical theatre methodologies and practices, weekly in-class performances, daily rehearsals and senior capstone experiences for our majors. However, the theatre program’s production season becomes the ultimate assessment tool for the program. We take written material—a play—and put it on the stage, combining all the elements of theatre. Productions help the students synthesize—bring together—all the skills they have developed and everything they have learned in their coursework. Productions are a series of public performances/evaluations of our work.

We know our program is moving in the right direction based upon our students’ ability to either find work or continue their training after graduation. In the last two years our students have found employment with the Peninsula Players, Glimmerglass Opera and the Santa Fe Opera among others. Other graduates have continued their training in MFA theatre programs at Western Illinois, Northern Illinois and the University of Florida.

Our productions and production values have improved, particularly over the last year. Attendance at our non-musicals has increased sharply, while our strong attendance at our musicals continues to hold steady. In fact, a long-time faculty member at UW-Madison recently remarked, after seeing two of our productions since last spring, that the program here at UWP is becoming “a powerhouse—a hidden gem—in southern Wisconsin.” He encouraged us to keep up the good work.

The theatre program has three overriding goals for all majors and minors in the program:

1. Graduates will demonstrate a conceptual understanding of theatre history, theory and dramatic literature, as these areas of theatre study form the foundation for all areas of theatre production.
2. Graduates will demonstrate competence in at least one area of theatre production/performance—acting, directing, choreography or scenic, lighting, costume or sound design—culminating in a senior capstone project.
3. Graduates will demonstrate competence in critical and analytical thinking skills by effectively communicating their knowledge of theatre in numbers 1 and 2 above both verbally and in writing.
Based upon the program’s overriding goals, there are three primary course components that make up the current theatre curriculum at UWP:

1. History/Lit/Crit (Theatre History I & II, Theatre Writing & Research, Play Analysis, Seminars on Minority Theatre and Theories of Acting & Directing)

2. Performance based courses (Beginning Acting, Advanced Scene Study, Classical Acting, Directing, Voice & Speech, Dance)

3. Technical Theatre (Stagecraft, Scenic Design, Lighting Design, Scene Painting)

In all of these courses, we strive to develop and improve the students’ critical and analytical thinking skills and their functional, working and/or performance skills in a particular area of theatre performance and production. Evaluation in all courses involves written, oral and performance-based assessment.

In the Hist/Lit/Crit area, we assess students’ knowledge, ability and development through the following means:

a. Short answer exams evaluates students’ fact-based knowledge, critical, analytical and conceptual understanding of the course material

b. Take-home essay exams evaluate the students’ ability to synthesize the conceptual and fact-based ideas presented in the course in writing.

c. 8-10 page essay evaluates the students ability to critically analyze a specific topic in theatre in writing. Students are expected to be able to write a cogent, persuasive argument with a clear thesis statement, a body presenting at least three major points to the argument using specific, detailed examples, ending with a concise conclusion that summarizes the main thesis statement and poses questions for further study and consideration.

d. In-class oral presentation and/or leading of class discussion evaluates students’ ability to clearly convey and share detailed information about a specific aspect of theatre history, literature or criticism verbally, incorporating modern media technology such as Powerpoint presentations, video and internet resources.
In the performance course area, we assess students’ knowledge, ability and development through the following means:

a. Performance of monologues, scenes, songs or dance routines evaluates students’ ability to put their development of voice, movement, staging, picturization, and acting skills into practice using text or music. Performance work includes student post-performance self-evaluation and critique and discussion of peer work.

b. Concept, character, textual analysis work evaluates students’ written ability to create a world for a play, or analyze and develop a specific character through dance, singing or textual scene and monologue work.

c. Response papers evaluates students’ ability to analyze and critique theatrical productions from a specific perspective in writing. Perspectives for response papers include concept/staging, acting, vocal production and dance/movement or choreography.

d. Final performance project evaluates students’ ability to synthesize all material and skills developed in a particular class through an acting showcase, one-act play festival or final dance performance/dance routines.
2. What have you learned from these evaluations?

The primary theatre faculty—Ann, Brad and I—inherited a broken down program, a program that wasn’t functioning well. We decided that we would take the first two to three years to build and begin to strengthen the program by increasing the number of majors and minors, improving the quality of the productions, and evaluating all courses in the program, determining what works, what doesn’t and how we could improve the weaknesses in the students’ education and training.

What we determined after three years is that we’re moving in the right direction. The students are experiencing success in many areas of our program. The number of majors and minors has more than doubled, and our production values have improved. We need to continue on the current course relative to increasing the number of students in our program and the level of production values. Our assessment practices within individual courses are solid, but the program curriculum needs a major overhaul, an in-depth reworking of the courses offered and the program course sequence. In our opinion, this will not only strengthen and expand the program but also more importantly give our students the appropriate foundation and skill set, which will enable them to be successful and competitive in the theatre field.
3. What changes have resulted from your assessment efforts?

In February the theatre faculty applied for a CIF grant citing the need for a complete overhaul of the program, and a revising and expanding of the theatre curriculum. A summary outline of the CIF Grant Proposal follows.

**Major Goals of the Curriculum Revision and Expansion**

a. Change the descriptions, titles, and aims of the program’s core courses to reflect current theater curriculum standards in higher education.
   1. Rename some of the courses, such as our Technical Theater I(1230), II(2230), III(3250). Those courses should just be listed as Stagecraft, Lighting Design, and Scenic Design. Drop the I, II, and III from the acting courses, instead referring to them as Beginning Acting, Advanced Scene Study, and Classical Acting. Play Direction (3330) will be changed to Directing. History of Theater and Drama (4630,4730) will be changed to History of Theater I and History of Theater II.
   2. Revise courses already on the books. Play Production (2220) would become Practicum I and allow for students to earn 1-3 credits depending on their level of involvement. Studio Production (4930) will become a senior practicum in which our majors much act, direct, or design as part of our production season.

b. Establish clear and consistent prerequisites for all program courses, establishing a reasonable sequence and progression of the students’ knowledge and skill development in the field.
   1. Require Intro to Theatre as a basic core course prior to taking any other theatre courses.
   2. There is currently no prerequisite for Scenic Design (3250)—an advanced class that requires more than a basic knowledge of the theatrical production process. Require Stagecraft as a prerequisite to enrolling in any other technical theatre class.
   3. Require students to take the acting class sequence in order. Advanced Scene Study or Classical Acting cannot be taken before Beginning Acting.

c. Develop and offer additional core courses that are mainstays of other national theater departments and programs, which are missing from the theatre program’s current curriculum. These new courses are essential to bringing this program in line with current trends in theater education. The literature courses, in particular, allow the students more opportunities to fulfill the literature requirement from within the program.
   2. Because we have a musical theater minor on the books and several students have minors in musical theater, we would add another musical theater related course, such as The Singing Actor.
3. There is a critical need for costume design and costume production courses in the curriculum.

In order to make room for these new courses, some of the above-mentioned courses will be replacements for current courses. Oral Interpretation of Literature (1430) is better taught in the speech program, although we have discussed with speech faculty the possibility of replacing the requirement with Acting I. The course Recent and Contemporary Drama (4220) will be eliminated and replaced by the two-part dramatic literature sequence.

d. Make it mandatory that our students take the necessary four semesters of foreign language in order to receive a BA in Theatre, thus eliminating the possibility of a BS degree, which places our students at a disadvantage for professional and graduate school opportunities.

e. Offering additional courses like Minority Representations in Contemporary American Drama that allow for more general education opportunities, highlighting the diverse nature of the theatre discipline.