

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS OF THEATRE

VISITORS' REPORT

OF

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN, WHITEWATER DEPARTMENT OF
THEATRE AND DANCE

THEATRE EXECUTIVE
LINDA M. HURSTAD

DATES OF VISITATION
DECEMBER 3-6, 2003

VISITING EVALUATORS

D. TERRY WILLIAMS, WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY, team chair
FERGUS CURRIE, ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY, retired

RENEWAL OF FINAL APPROVAL FOR LISTING
BACHELOR OF ARTS IN THEATRE - 4 YEARS

BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN THEATRE EDUCATION- 4.5 to 5 YEARS
BACHELOR OF FINE ARTS- 4 YEARS: PERFORMANCE;
DESIGN/TECHNICAL; MANAGEMENT/PROMOTION; STAGE
MANAGEMENT

The following report and any statements therein regarding compliance with NAST accreditation standards represent only the considered opinion of the visitors at the time of the visit. Definitive evaluation of compliance and the accreditation decision will be made by the Commission following a complete review of the application, including the Self-Study, the Visitors' Report, and any Optional Response to the Visitors' Report submitted by the institution.

A. Mission, Goals, and Objectives

The Department of Theatre at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater appears to be meeting the goals and objectives of its stated mission. The department has experienced positive growth in enrollment and has attempted to meet this growth by "fracturing" several teaching positions thus allowing the department to hire more specialized, but not full-time faculty members. The department has minimized the issue of faculty overloads by being relieved by the administration of the responsibility for teaching general education courses and by not offering non-major elective courses. The department also adheres to a very strict course rotation schedule that generally assures a student of the ability to take required courses in a logical and timely manner. With the exception of transfer students and those students who must work in order to attend the university, most students, except those in the theatre education program (four and one-half to five year program), can graduate within a four year, eight-semester program. There appears to be a balance between course work and the practical application of said course work in the production program.

B. Size and Scope

The growth of the department is a testament to the hard work of the faculty and the support of the administration in developing a sound outreach and recruiting program. Within the past five years the program has grown from approximately fifty undergraduate majors to well over eighty and a number of these students have been attracted to the program from areas outside of the state of Wisconsin. In addition, retention is high and this is helped by a high morale among students who believe the program is not only student centered but also student friendly.

The accessibility of the faculty leads to a mentoring system that makes each student feel that he/she is important. This attitude is further enhanced by the willingness of the faculty to tailor programs to the specific interest of students.

Notwithstanding the above statements, it is clear that the program is understaffed in the performance area. Compared to the student/teacher ratio in the design area (which is four faculty/staff members for six BFA students and six BA's, i.e., a four to one ratio), the performance area is understaffed with only 1.5 faculty members serving twenty BFA and ten BA students. The students enrolled in the stage management program, two BFA, two BA; and the Theatre Management, two BFA, are taught by a combination of individuals within the Department of Theatre, the College of Arts and Communication including members of the Dean's staff and staff members of the Young Center for the Performing Arts and faculty from the College of Business. The eleven undergraduate students enrolled in the Theatre Education program are supervised by a Department of Theatre faculty member. There is one course in the College of Education, SECNDED434, Methods of Teaching Theatre. However, since the visitors were given

conflicting information, they are confused as to whether the department of theatre teaches this course. There are also a number of students who have graduated from other institutions who are returning for certification purposes, whose student teaching must be supervised by an already overloaded faculty member.

It is clear not only to the visitors but also to the department and college administration that the department has probably reached its maximum enrollment in the BA and BFA areas unless additional faculty members are hired. The visitors suggest that any such hires be full time because of the load and service expectations placed upon these faculty members.

There appears to be a sufficient number of departmental productions for the size and scope of the program. There also appears to be opportunities for student directed productions on a regular basis. There are also ample opportunities for student to design main stage productions.

The dance offerings of the department are strong and thoroughly integrated into both the academic offerings and production program of the department. The two faculty members in this area believe they are treated as equals and their production is supported in the same level as those in theatre.

C. Finances

From a reading of the self-study it might appear that the department faces few if any financial challenges. However, it should be noted that operations budgets have not been increased in nearly two decades and, with the current state budget crisis, faculty members will receive no raises this year and there appears to be little money to hire new faculty members for those programs experiencing enrollment growth. It should be pointed out that the administration has found funds to upgrade the facilities and equipment of the department. The visitors were greatly impressed with the external appearance of campus buildings.

In regard to funding from external sources, the visitors were unclear as to whether this is a responsibility of the department or whether it is being addressed by the new College Development Officer.

D. Governance/Administration

Initially the visitors were concerned that there appeared to be no codified university document regarding promotion and tenure. The concern was heightened by the fact that although a number of the faculty members had been at the university for nearly two decades, none had achieved promotion to Full Professor. However, in a conversation with the Provost it was made clear that a document does exist, although it has yet to be ratified by the Board of Regents, an action that is anticipated in the spring of 2004. As soon as that document is ratified copies will be made available to the faculty. The faculty has already had individual department guidelines approved by their respective colleges. In the meantime "a gentleman's agreement" is in effect and the result is that several members of the department are now in various stages of preparing documents for promotion.

The department has evolved from a form of shared governance that allows all faculty members, both full- and part-time, as well a staff members and students, to participate in the decision making process of the department. There is excellent

communication between the department and the Dean, and the visitors were also impressed with the Provost's knowledge of the activities and reputation of the department. It is clear that within the financial limitations being experienced by universities within the Wisconsin system, that the department receives financial support above and beyond that normally given a department of its size.

The current chair enjoys the support of her colleagues within the department. Her area of expertise is choral music education. She sees her role as a facilitator and in that role has been successful in achieving a sense of unity and collegiality within the department. This success has been made easier because she has been active in the musicals presented by the department and because she appears to thoroughly enjoy working with her theatre colleagues. It appears that she may wish to return to the music faculty on a full-time basis in the near future. If and when this occurs, the institution may wish to consider her replacement come from within the present theatre faculty.

E. Faculty and Staff

The faculty and staff are well qualified to support the mission and objectives of the department. The faculty recognizes the need for an additional instructor within the performance area and indicated to the visitors that this position was the number one priority if and when funding becomes available. The visitors would recommend that individuals with specialization in voice and stage movement receive priority consideration for this new hire. Further, the department hopes that the half-time position of the Costume Shop Supervisor can become full time within the near future.

Although the morale of the department is exceedingly high, the fact that no salary increases will be given this year further widens the gap between salaries paid at Whitewater and comparable institutions in other states. Unless this issue is addressed in the near future it will gradually become more and more difficult to hire faculty to replace those who will retire within the next ten years. The visitors are also concerned about the "fracturing" of academic lines that results in a high percentage of part time faculty members who, due to the nature of the discipline, have many more contact hours than colleagues in purely academic departments, thus resulting in particularly large teaching loads. Such heavy loads may sometime compromise part-time faculty member's ability to participate in other department functions such as committee participation and advising.

The use of guest artists to augment the instruction of the department should be applauded and continued. This use of guest artists had resulted in closer ties between the department and the professional theatre communities in Milwaukee, Madison and Chicago, thus providing students with networking possibilities upon graduation.

Although the faculty appears to be interested in taking advantage of faculty development opportunities provided by the university, at the present time it is virtually impossible because of the heavy load the faculty must carry simply to meet the academic and production needs of the department. Indicative of this is the fact that only two faculty members have or will take sabbaticals within recent years and both of those faculty members have been at the university for more than fifteen years.

F. Facilities, Equipment and Safety

One of the first things that struck the visitors as they toured the physical facilities of the department, was, that although the facility is thirty years old, it has been kept in excellent condition. Not only are the facilities immaculate in terms of upkeep, but the university and the State of Wisconsin have had the foresight to upgrade the facilities as funds became available, not being content to allow the facilities to deteriorate until a crisis mandated improvements.

The principal performance space is the Barnett Theatre, a proscenium facility that seats four hundred and twelve people with additional seating for five disabled individuals. The theatre, which was built in the 1972, has an extremely wide proscenium of seventy feet and a depth of 30 feet. There is a six-foot apron that covers the orchestra pit. In order to provide a more playable space the proscenium is usually masked to provide an opening of approximately forty feet. This masking provides wing space that would otherwise not be available. In addition there are two small side stages to the right and left of the main stage.

During the planning for the facility, cost considerations forced the university to delete plans for a fly loft in favor of the creation of large spaces adjacent to the theatre for a costume shop, costume storage (certainly one of the largest the visitors have seen) and a large, well equipped scene shop that opens directly onto the main stage. Overhead there are three wired electricians and fourteen additional battens tied to a counterweight arbor system.

Although the stage floor in the Barnett Theatre is old, it has been maintained. However, plans are being made, pending fund authorization, to replace the floor. In 2002 a major renovation was undertaken to replace, upgrade and expand the original lighting and sound system. A ETC Obsession II control board, Ethernet system was installed and the sound booth was relocated to the rear of the auditorium, allowing the operator to truly mix sound appropriate to the space.

A second performance space, the Hicklin Studio Theatre, is a black box space that is fully equipped and is adjacent to the scene shop with easy access to the costume shop and dressing rooms. This space, which has a sprung floor, is also used for dance and movement classes and to facilitate this there are mirrors on one side of the theatre that can be covered by black drapes during performances. The department uses several sets of portable barres that can be stored easily when not in use. For performances the space seats approximately one hundred and sixty on portable risers. The lighting system was upgraded in 2002 and provides for a dimmer per circuit system that is fully compatible with the system in Barnett Theatre. The Hicklin Studio Theatre is utilized in the summer for the department's summer theatre program.

Both the Barnett Theatre and the Hicklin Studio Theatre have a common, well-equipped Green Room and are adjacent to two very large, well-equipped dressing rooms. In addition the department has installed mirrors and dressing tables in a very wide hallway outside the costume shop which is utilized for make-up classes. As has been noted, both the costume shop and the scene shop are extremely well organized and equipped, and would be the envy of any program. With so much available storage space the visitors wondered whether there might be a tendency to keep costumes long after their usefulness expired.

There are additional performing spaces available for department use. The first of these is the main auditorium of the Kachel Performing Arts Center, a thirteen hundred-

seat proscenium roadhouse. While the Dean of the College expressed his desire that this space be utilized more frequently by the department, its size, cost and limited availability make such usage questionable. However, the visitors were impressed with the facility, especially the front of house hospitality areas that provide interesting spaces for receptions, fundraisers and possible cabaret or musical performances. The second space is the Kachel dance studio, a beautiful space used by the department for dance classes but, on occasion that space may be pre-empted for use as a reception center or dining room.

It was obvious to the visitors that, with two exceptions, the teaching facilities of the department are adequate. There are a number of instructional classrooms within the Greenhill Center for the Performing Arts that are equipped with audio and video playback capability although much of the equipment is portable. Currently, there is a proposal that, if initiated, would require AV system upgrades in all classroom utilized for general education classes.

The visitors are concerned about the lack of an adequate instruction space for Introduction to Theatre, a course frequently with an enrollment of three hundred, that presently utilizes the Barnett Theatre. As the visitors witnessed during a class visitation, this space does not have its own audio/visual system and the size of the space is a serious deterrent for successful student/teacher inter communication.

The second space issue is the need for a permanent second dance instructional space. The department would like to covert a classroom in the basement of the Greenhill Center (Room 11) into a dance instructional space. This would require that an adjacent space presently utilized for the storage of band uniforms would have to be become available and that a sprung floor would have to be installed along with mirrors and barres. The administration is aware of this need and is considering this conversion, provided the space meets state and university requirements and funding for the conversion can be found.

The department is justifiably proud of its facilities and appreciative of the university's commitment to upkeep and maintenance. In addition to the two problems listed above, as well as the refurbishing of the stage floor of the Barnett Theatre, as confirmed to the evaluators, the department would also like to (1) add a computer to the Barnett Sound System for audio and production purposes; (2) expand the metal working capabilities of the scene shop and install a permanent pressurized air system; (3) replace steamers and sewing machines in the costume shop; (4) replace stage curtains and draperies; (5) add two computer-drafting stations in the design lab and upgrade the existing software; and (6) continue the upgrading/replacement plan for faculty/staff computers.

G. Library

The holdings in Andersen Library appear to be more than adequate to support the theatre and dance curriculum. The staff is knowledgeable and helpful. The acquisition of books, videos has, up until now, kept pace with the growth of the curriculum. However, current budget reductions have had a negative impact on the purchase and renewal of periodicals. In addition to the main campus library, the department has a small supplemental library housed in the "Orange Room", a wonderful space housing several

thousand scripts, theatre books and magazines. The visitors were impressed with this space and praise the department for its fine collection.

H. Recruitment, Admission-Retention, Advisement, and Record Keeping

Recruitment/Admission-Retention

During the visitors stay the department held one of its twice-yearly Centerstage Days. It was obvious that not only were the faculty and staff involved but so were the students, perhaps the best recruiters any department can have provided. They are as enthusiastic as the visitors observed the Whitewater students to be. In addition, the department works with the admissions office in coordinating the twelve On-Campus days, which allow interested students and parents to visit the campus and have an informational session with a department member.

Participation in and/or hosting the annual Wisconsin State High School Theatre Festival is a major avenue of access to students interested in studying theatre. The department also conducts workshops and provides adjudicators for interested high schools. These in-state outreach programs are particularly important since a majority of the students enrolled at Whitewater come of communities within an eighty-mile radius of the university.

In addition to the personal or one-on-one recruitment, the department publishes material that is sent to high schools throughout the state and also corresponds with students the Admissions office has determined might be interested in majoring in theatre. Finally, the annual Theatre Camp each summer provides the department with an avenue to reach students who are just beginning to consider what college they want to attend. Although the self-study does not address the role of the Whitewater graduate, especially those teaching in areas high schools, there can be little doubt that this is an avenue of recruitment that needs further exploration and development. Until the faculty becomes more involved in regional and national theatre organizations such as MATC, ATHE, AATE and USITT, recruitment efforts of the department will remain state based.

However, with the recent growth of the department, the issue of recruitment is likely to be moderated by issues of enrollment management. Consequently, the department may want to consider whether its recruitment program needs to find ways to reach a higher caliber of student as well as students with special interests that would meet the more specialized needs of the department in such areas as teacher education and technical theatre, and the possibility that admission to the BFA program will be by audition rather than by the student meeting the requisite admission criteria.

Advisement

As most administrators will agree, the role of advisement for a student is one of the major components in the retention of that student. At Whitewater advising is one by individual faculty members on a semester-by-semester basis. This advising is important because the department utilizes a "hold" over registration and a student cannot register until the adviser has checked the student's academic status and has advised the students as to which courses need to be taken next. In addition, the advisor is able to relate to the student his/her development, strengths and weaknesses as viewed by the faculty as a whole.

The department conducts a mid-year post-mortem, wherein all faculty members give input to each advisor concerning each advisee. The BFA program also requires a feedback meeting with all sophomore and junior majors. The senior project, about which the visitors have some concern, requires a self-evaluation conference with faculty and staff. The advisement process concludes with an exit interview with the department chair although the visitors were uncertain as to the specifics of this interview and how negative issues raised by the student would be addressed.

The effectiveness of the advisement system can be judged by the fact that the department has an attrition rate of between 8% and 10%, certainly a more than acceptable rate. Undoubtedly the retention rate is aided by the fact that students view the faculty as highly accessible and decidedly interested in the welfare of the individual student.

The visitors concur with the department in its recommendation that the Annual Review include all freshman and sophomores and that the feedback system to students be improved. This is especially important in the area of teacher education where some students expressed concern over confusion regarding required courses and the forthright determination of the time it will take a teacher education major to complete his/her program especially if that student is a transfer student.

Record-Keeping

A review of the departmental records indicated that the records of graduated students were in good order although at times there was a great deal of repetitive information kept in non-chronological order. Of concern to the visitors was the fact that current student records are kept by the individual advisors and consequently it was impossible to review these records and assess them against university enrollment records. It was suggested that this system needs review and some system that could ensure the safekeeping of all undergraduate records be considered.

J. Published Materials

The unit's recruitment and production publication are more than adequate in communicating the unit's image. The web page is informative and attractive. Credit for these materials must be given to the department's arts management staff person.

K. Branch Campuses, External Programs, etc.

N/A

L. Community Involvement and Articulation with Other Schools

The department views its "community" as not only Whitewater but also the theatre community of Wisconsin and the Midwest. While Whitewater itself is a relatively small community, the department does attempt to provide quality theatre and to make that theatre available at a reasonable cost. How successful this outreach is debatable, for as is all too often the case, the theatre offerings are confused with the offerings of the Center for the Performing Arts. Perhaps the strongest community involvement is the annual children's theatre production that tours the area around Whitewater and provides a direct link between the department and local/regional schools.

The department's link to the Wisconsin and regional theatre is through its work with the Wisconsin High School Theatre Festival and through the department's participation in the American College Theatre Festival. Both of these relationships have proven beneficial for the department. The visitors believe that even greater relationships could be developed if (1) non-performance faculty members had greater incentives and support to work in regional theatres, and (2) the entire faculty became more involved in some of the more academically recognized organizations within the theatre community.

M. Non-Degree Granting Programs for the Community

N/A

N. Standards for (A) Independent Postsecondary Theatre Units etc.

N/A

O. Programs, Degrees, and Curricula

The department's curricula appear to comply with appropriate NAST standards. Through formal classes combined with numerous faculty-supervised production opportunities, students are receiving the training and experiences set forth in the NAST Guidelines.

The Bachelor of Arts appears to meet appropriate NAST standards with its graduates entering careers in law, the social services and business. The BFA program also appears to meet NAST's standards sending many of its graduates on to graduate school and the professional theatre arts. The Bachelor of Science in Education appears to meet NAST guidelines sending its graduates into the secondary teaching profession.

The visitors note with praise the faculty's efforts in the area of assessment. We were also impressed that, while the assessment process is new, the faculty is pleased with its progress to date and eager to improve on it as it moves along. Much work has been done in this regard and the documentation on assessment in the Self-Study is indeed impressive. The visitors also note that the mission of the BA and BFA could be clarified. Both degrees state that one of the options of graduates of both programs is further work at the graduate level. This is usually reserved for the traditional liberal arts BA students, leaving the BFA students to pursue work at the professional level.

Also, the visitors noted that more careful and systematic tracking of alumni is lacking making it difficult to discern exactly who is doing what after graduation from the program. Obviously, knowledge of and contact with alumni would bring numerous other benefits to the unit.

The visitors attended a performance of *THE PHILADELPHIA STORY*, a main stage production on Friday evening. The production was staged in the Barnett Theatre and presented a real challenge for the department not only because of the size of the cast but also because the set was illustrative of the problem faced by the unit when utilizing this extremely wide proscenium space. The acting was of a caliber one expects from a program the size of Whitewater and the visitors were especially impressed with the performances of several members of the cast. The direction was generally effective although there were some blocking problems caused by both the set design and the placement of furniture. Also, an unnecessarily large outdoor patio area downstage as well

as stage right, was rarely used. It also forced the living room to be too far upstage, causing congestion in that room and forced actors, blocked in the upstage areas, to strain in their vocal projection. A smaller stage right patio area would have sufficed. Moreover, had the lighting not been at the same intensity on these exteriors as it was for the interior, perhaps this would have helped the viewer focus more on the living room. Of special note were the costumes designed which beautifully captured the flavor of the period. The visitors were impressed with the detail in the costumes and the excellent tailoring of the men's suits. The sound design illustrated the need for a skilled sound designer whose work could compliment the production.

The unit has a long-standing commitment to general education. There are five courses that serve in this capacity: Theatre Appreciation, Introduction to Theatre, Dance Appreciation, Contemporary Dance Technique I, and World of the Arts. This is an exceptionally high number of courses available for general education credit and while the department and college are to be congratulated for making such courses available, both units need to assess the teaching loads of the theatre faculty responsible for the delivery of these courses, especially World of the Arts as they impact on the delivery of required theatre courses for majors.

P. Theatre Unit Evaluation, Planning, and Projections

The re-accreditation process, along with the program review bring conducted campus wide, has afforded the Department of Theatre and Dance the unique opportunity to undergo an intense evaluation of itself, of all components of the unit. There is much to be proud of since the unit's first NAST accreditation review. This is a unit that has done much planning and knows that it must continue to undergo an evaluation of its assessment processes and other procedures newly put into place. The Self-Study carefully outlines a list of priorities that the department has set for itself. The visitors found these priorities to be realistic and to the betterment of the unit. One area that is promising for the college and department to explore is that of Dance. With the addition of a new Dance faculty member, it appears that the entire departmental faculty, students and dean are aware of the exciting possibilities of the growth in this area. Possible expansion of curriculum, an additional dance studio and the integration of dance and theatre in production, all make for a productive future of the two disciplines.

Q. Standards Summary

According to the visitors, there appear to be no operational or curricular standards issues negatively affecting the theatre unit.

R. Overview, Summary Assessment, and Recommendations for the Program Strengths

1. Well trained and collegial faculty
2. Supportive Dean and Provost
3. Chair that facilitates and builds consensus

7. Steady growth in enrollment and high percentage of retention
8. Serves the general education program of the university
9. Effective assessment process for the BFA program
10. High morale of students
11. Strong mentoring of students
12. Limited but effective use of guest artists
13. Adequate production budget

Recommendations

1. Review possibility of expanded staffing in performance area.
2. Address low faculty/staff salaries.
3. Secure additional space for rehearsals and dance instruction.
4. Excellent facilities
5. Strong ACTF involvement
6. Good community relations
4. Clear up confusion in theatre education advising.
5. Develop system for tracking and utilization of alumni.
6. Increase faculty/staff participation in national professional associations such as NAST, ATHE, AATE, and USITT.
7. Institute careful monitoring of the University tenure and promotion document.
8. Secure instruction for sound design.