

Program Review Executive Summary

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Western Oregon University: Theatre Department

Majors Reviewed:

- B.A. and B.S. in Theatre
- BFA programs in Acting, Production Training and Theatre Education

Dates of Program Review: Academic Years 2019-21

Report Submitted: July 2021

(Report delayed and external review waived due to 2020 pandemic)

Date of Executive Summary: October 2021

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:
THEATRE DEPARTMENT (CREATIVE ARTS DIVISION)**

The Theatre Department commenced a formal program review during the 2019-20 academic year, but had to pause the self-study during 2020 when the pandemic essentially shut down Theatre at WOU except for those courses that could be delivered (though in a subpar fashion) online. The 2020 retrenchment process on campus also created existential uncertainty that made it wise to press the “pause” button on the self-study. In order to position itself as well as possible after these twin crises, the Theatre Department proactively implemented many of the recommendations that emerged from its self-study report during the 2020-21 academic year, which rendered an external review superfluous. Thus, as happened with several other programs that were under review during this time frame, the external review was waived. The self-study was finalized and submitted to the LAS Dean in July 2021, with many of its recommendations having already been underway or fully implemented.

The program review emphasized the following programmatic strengths:

- a. Outstanding faculty members and leadership, balanced across curricular needs (acting, set design, costuming, production, and so forth)
- b. Strong marketing skills and awareness of appropriate target audiences
- c. Diverse and inclusive programming and casting that engages the broader community
- d. Strongest first-year retention of any program at WOU (75+%)
- e. Two resident theatre programs (Valley Summer Shakespeare and Portal Theatre) that provide institutional visibility and community engagement
- f. Innovative offerings, such as devised theatre, stage combat and acting for the camera
- g. One of only two BFA options in the state of Oregon, which attracts many potential new students (even though some of those students go on to complete a BA or BS option instead)
- h. Strong data regarding which marketing efforts yield the greatest number of new students

The following challenges were identified:

- a. Theatre is arguably the program most negatively impacted by pandemic, due to difficulty of effectively teaching its content remotely and safety concerns surrounding our return to campus (please note that this challenge is in line with national norms, with live theatre being one of the sectors most adversely impacted by the pandemic)
- b. Ongoing challenge of making the case for Theatre’s importance to key stakeholders
- c. Lack of visible ethnic diversity among current faculty
- d. Reduced faculty FTE due to faculty member currently serving as Creative Arts Division Chair, which has reduced Gen Ed offerings and consequently weakened departmental metrics
- e. Facilities limitations with Rice Auditorium being outdated and non-ADA compliant

Opportunities include:

- a. Potential for growth through developing capacity in Theatre Education
- b. Grants may provide opportunities to attract more ethnically diverse performers and audiences to campus

- c. Bringing live theatre back to campus will enhance community engagement and institutional visibility
- d. Resumption of in-person K-12 education will facilitate building new relationships with local feeder schools

At the same time as the self-study was being conducted, the Theatre Department pursued several ideas for improvement that were emerging through the review process. The matrix below shows some of the key developments during and since the time the self-study was completed.

IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX

New Program-Driven Initiatives	Completed/Ongoing	Underway (Target Completion Date)	To Be Done (Will be Ongoing)
Develop a new BFA initial licensure with concentration in Theatre Education	X		
Develop and implement a marketing plan for the Theatre Education concentration	X		
Focus on targeted recruitment		X	
Develop DEI statements to guide diversity, equity and inclusion efforts	X		
Pursue grant opportunities to support diverse programming	X		
Revise of the BA/BS core to include Design Aesthetics, enhanced acting, voice and movement classes	X		
Convert additional major courses to General Education, in multiple categories		X	
Streamline acting curriculum	X		
Rebalance number of elective credits	X		
Offer Gen Ed classes in multiple modalities such as online and hybrid	X		

Continuation of Ongoing Effectiveness	Completed/Ongoing	Underway Target Completion Date)	To Be Done (Will be Ongoing)
Continue to lobby and seek external funding for Rice Auditorium improvements	X		
Maintain and build upon positive relationships with feeder high schools	X		

Continue with identified DEI efforts	X		
LAS Dean Recommendations	Completed/Ongoing	Underway Target Completion Date)	To Be Done (Will be Ongoing)
Explore and implement strategies for diversifying both faculty and students in Theatre	X		
Continue to stay in touch with alumni and use alumni success stories for future recruiting	X		

The challenges of this self-study, in light of the pandemic and retrenchment crises, led to a nonstandard timeline for curricular changes and marketing enhancement efforts. Under these circumstances, it is especially commendable that despite the multiple pressures it was under, the Theatre Department not only completed its self-study but proactively implemented many of its findings. It is hoped that as the pandemic eases, more students will set their sights on college, and the Theatre Department will be well poised to take advantage of this moment with a new, relevant curriculum and a well thought-out, targeted marketing campaign that is likely to draw new students to campus. The Theatre Department is to be commended for doing this important and challenging work during difficult circumstances, in an attempt to “get out ahead” and position itself well for an expected rebound. As LAS Dean, I enjoy working with Creative Arts Division leadership and appreciate the many value-added contributions of all our performing arts and Theatre in particular.