

April 4, 2016

PROFESSOR JAMES CARMODY, Chair
Department of Theatre and Dance

SUBJECT: Undergraduate Program Review for the Department of Theatre and Dance

Dear Professor Carmody,

The Undergraduate Council discussed the Department of Theatre and Dance's 2011 Undergraduate Program Review. The Council supports the findings and recommendations of the review subcommittee and appreciates the thoughtful and proactive response from the Department. The Council's comments centered on the following:

- **Communication** – The review committee's report mentioned that undergraduates expressed feelings of not being heard, but the report noted that the Department was taking measures to address this by creating forums for communication. We encourage the continued efforts in strengthening communication across all fronts (among students, faculty, and staff).
- **Funding** – The dire need for funding is highlighted in the committee's report; from the need for space for rehearsals to the undergraduates' request for funding to stage undergraduate productions and events. The Council recommends that the administration provide a development officer to assist in fundraising efforts for the Department, rather than relying on a faculty member who teaches a full load of courses to solicit funds. We feel that a development officer could create pathways for the Department to make connections for donations, and would help to solidify a list of possible donors.
- **Double major** – The Council supports the Department's efforts to reduce the course requirements for the major to attract more double majors. The Department mentioned that they noticed the Colleges have actively discouraged students from pursuing a second major in the interest of shortening their time to degree. The Council opined that it is more likely the case that the Colleges are simply fulfilling their obligation to enforce the double major requirements.

The Council will review the Department of Theatre and Dance again in the 2017-2018 academic year. The Council extends its thanks to the Department for its engagement in this process and we look forward to the continued discussion.

Sincerely,

Geoffrey, Chair
Undergraduate Council

cc: R. Continetti
T. Javidi
C. Della Coletta
R. Rodriguez
K. Roy
B. Sawrey
M. Sidney

The Department of Theatre and Dance is one of UCSD's signature departments, nationally recognized for excellence in both performance and graduate education. Its broad array of performance spaces, several of them models of their kind, allows it to mount a rich variety of performances and to explore whatever new horizons its faculty and students seek. Its alliance with the La Jolla Playhouse gives it an enviable connection with high-profile non-academic theatre.

The department's undergraduate program, with which our review was principally concerned, is remarkable, perhaps unique. It is, most obviously and unusually, a program offering courses of study in both theatre and dance. It is a challenging pre-professional program, yet it is accessible to non-majors, and popular with them. Further, it is an arts program that is situated proudly in a liberal-arts curriculum; its students and faculty appear unanimous in rejecting the "conservatory" model of much theatre and dance education, insisting that the department is enriched by its relationship to the strong conceptual and critical thought that is the essence of liberal-arts education, and by the liberal-arts experience that its students bring to it. We ourselves believe that Theatre and Dance is a profoundly significant part of UCSD's liberal arts curriculum, not only for its contributions to the students enrolled in its majors but also for its contributions to the many hundreds of students who take one or many of its courses, without becoming majors.

Majors, indeed, are relatively few—about 120 in Theatre and about 30 in Dance. Since 2006 they have decreased by about 20 and 15 students, respectively, though the department's Penner ratio has not changed significantly (it is now .78). The ladder-rank faculty workload is 5 courses a year, which puts it at the top of workloads, campuswide. The decrease in majors during the past few years is, we feel, directly attributable to California's economic difficulties and the consequent desire of students and parents to find a major that has a good chance of "paying off" in material terms.

Several of the department's courses are applicable to college general education requirements, and these are much in demand. Many students also take courses that respond to their personal interests in dance or acting or playwriting or other subjects, without regard to major, minor, or general education requirements. But there are serious limits—some pedagogical, but others, especially in the case of Dance courses, matters of safety—that must be imposed on enrollments in most courses in the department. Acting cannot be taught to 200 students at once. The department's Penner ratio is, therefore, wholly predictable and, we believe, appropriate.

Equally predictable and appropriate is the high expense of Theatre and Dance, which is dependent on equipment and facilities and the experts who operate them, in ways in which most departments in the humanities and social sciences, and even many departments in the natural sciences, are not. We believe that Theatre and Dance is well worth its price, although we note with concern that some of its most important extramural funding is "going away" (the generous bequest of the late Mandel Weiss, for instance, was intended to go away in a finite period, and

that is happening). Block grants provided under the Charting the Course initiative are also going away.

In this connection, we commend two points to the consideration of UCSD's administration:

1. Investment should be made in success, not mediocrity, and the Theatre and Dance department is successful.

2. Theatre and Dance appears to be one of UCSD's better development targets. While some potential donors are interested only in medical projects, others want to help something that entertains and inspires. That "something" is Theatre and Dance, yet at present development officers come and go, leaving no vigorous or coherent program to enhance the department's support. We are pleased to find that the department is doing its job, by reaching out to alumni and local donors, especially small but reliable ones. Undergraduate students have raised money for their own performances. We hope that UCSD can address the development issue in a way that will be productive both now, while we are in the economic trough, and in the future. Our conversation with the Dean of Arts and Humanities convinced us that he fully appreciates the importance of Theatre and Dance and is personally very concerned with its development. We hope that this concern is widely shared in administrative and Senate circles.

In reviewing the department, we found two words continually recurring, two words constantly in use by faculty as well as students. Those words were "passion" and "hunger." The message, unanimously agreed upon, was that Theatre and Dance ministers to the hunger of undergraduate students to express themselves artistically, and to learn, in a rigorous way, how to do that difficult thing. It is obvious that both faculty and students are moved by real passion, a passion that urges students to address themselves to the challenge of performance, and faculty to devote themselves to working closely with students in a great collaborative endeavor. Although the faculty of Theatre and Dance has a high course load, faculty members volunteer their work in ways that go far beyond the five-course rule.

We wish to note, with emphasis, that our review was greeted with remarkable participation by every segment of the Theatre and Dance community. Many graduate students and lecturers, virtually all the regular faculty, and more students than have ever been encountered in a review of this kind met with us to share intelligent and lively comments on their experience of the department. (The student turnout was especially impressive, because our visit happened during finals week.) The department chair and vice chair were articulate and very informative. We learned a great deal and, frankly, enjoyed our visit to the department community.

Our assessment of the department is strongly favorable. Nevertheless, we believe that our review enabled us to identify a number of problems, which we are confident the department will address. The areas in which we saw difficulties (and, ordinarily, strengths as well) are discussed under the headings below.

Courses, Majors, and Facilities

This review is the first to be held since the revision of the Dance major in 2005, and it is performed in anticipation of a revision of the Theatre major, expected to be formally proposed to the Senate in fall 2011. Our committee did not pre-review the new major, although it appears to be a great improvement over the current one. What we say here is obviously a response to conditions arising under the current majors.

Theatre students complain that they lack suitable places for rehearsal, and informal performance spaces (including classrooms). It appears to the committee that many tensions could be alleviated simply by expanding the operational hours of Galbraith Hall, especially on the weekends, and providing online scheduling and clear protocols for student accountability in the use of space.

Facilities in Dance are of very high quality; but because of budget cuts and the great popularity of dance classes, they are overcrowded and not up to the demands of some courses. It was noted by Dance students that the new MFA has reduced the faculty's ability to provide undergraduate courses. Yet there is a strong need for smaller class sizes where training in acting, directing, playwriting, dancing, and choreography are involved. The necessarily low-enrollment courses in these areas are "paid" for in large part by the large-enrollment general-education courses that the department also supplies.

In Dance, students expressed strong appreciation for their training but were concerned that courses were not set up to allow for sufficient advancement technically. There were questions about access to a sufficient number of composition courses. Besides Introduction to Choreography, there are only two upper division required courses in composition. Students value the required course in Movement Analysis but feel that this course, which runs as a survey of somatic techniques, does not go into enough depth. Questions were raised about whether it could become a two-part course. In general, there is a problem with students of very different skill levels taking the same classes, because more differentiated offerings are not available.

The committee inquired about the ability of Theatre majors to petition out of Theatre 101 if they have successfully auditioned for a performance project. We were concerned that this might allow for the creation of two performer tracks: one for students who can secure their own roles in productions, the other for students who stick to course work and have fewer performance opportunities. Our questions were answered, but we do note that there is a tension between the commitment to offering a liberal-arts education in Theatre, balancing performance experience with contextual course work; and a striving for excellence in performance, stimulated by high-level productions and competitive auditioning.

Students in both majors expressed concern about a lack of regularity in course offerings and were worried about their ability to complete their major when required courses were not always offered on time. Students referred to a “smorgasbord” of non-required courses. The flavor of that “smorgasbord” isn’t bad: faculty keep up with new interests and are committed to sharing them with students in courses appropriate to them. Nevertheless, regularity of required course offerings is an essential concern for any department.

Graduate-Undergraduate Program Relationships in Theatre

The graduate Theatre program is nationally esteemed and a crucial object of the department's concern. From the point of view of the undergraduate program in theatre, the graduate program has both good and bad effects (which appear also in other schools that maintain graduate theatre programs).

Undergraduate theatre majors value the opportunity to be mentored by outstanding MFA colleagues, but they cite a number of practices that, they believe, result in graduate students' gaining preference in resources, treatment, and value from the department. Issues that undergraduates cite include:

1. Departmentally funded production of plays by graduate but not undergraduate students.
2. A graduate-student mentoring system that often doesn't work because graduate students are too busy or unwilling to mentor undergraduates.
3. Diminishing class opportunities because of limited finances, which are redirected to graduate classes.
4. A focus on professional careers for graduate students, but not for undergraduates.

We understand that resources are limited, but we still believe that practical efforts can be made to reduce the perception that undergraduates are "second-class citizens." More opportunities for undergraduates can be created. We recommend, for instance, either the creation of a showcase for graduating seniors that both highlights their work and has them create a resume, headshot, and short reel; or specific designation of resources to students' spring "underground" productions. (We would recommend both, but we are aware that money is limited.) Production of selected scenes by undergraduate playwrights could also be a feature of the showcase. Both Theatre and Dance majors asked for more assistance in bridging their studies to the “real world.” Besides the creation of a senior showcase, there might be a course frankly entitled “Surviving and Making Art in the Real World.”

We recommend that the department rethink the practicums so as to create specific mentoring and learning opportunities. Directors and other professionals connected with the plays can give undergraduates their insights into the creative process and the vision behind the productions. We suggest, as well, that the department consider ways in which the graduate-student teaching

seminar can emphasize the graduate's role as mentor to undergraduates.

Faculty Mentorship and Advising

Undergraduate theatre students are extremely enthusiastic about individual faculty members, but they cited a lack of opportunity to be mentored and advised by faculty in a consistent way, together with the faculty's (self acknowledged) lack of familiarity with the intricacies of UCSD's administrative system. The result, these students say, is a lack of faculty guidance about the program itself and about life after graduation. The student-produced spring shows seem especially needy of guidance and advice. Dance majors cited no such difficulties.

We suspect that either a senior showcase, and the preparation it would require, or a curricularly supported final festival would help students address "life after school" issues. We suggest that a symposium, a series of workshops, or a seminar about the professional world and its opportunities might also enhance the undergraduate experience. The spring show, though run entirely by students, should include a systematic educational component, provided by mentors assigned to each work. As we noted before, practicums should be modified to include opportunities for students to meet with the director and learn more about the artistic and intellectual approach to the work.

Students in Theatre believe that lines of communication and coordination regarding their production needs and available resources are deficient. We recommend that a production committee be created to meet quarterly to identify and organize the resources that will be needed and forthcoming for undergraduate productions, including self-productions. The production committee should consist of faculty and undergraduate students.

Departmental Advising and Student Access to Curriculum

Students in both Theatre and Dance expressed frustration about course enrollments: non-majors sometimes fill up a class before the majors can enroll. We were happy to learn, therefore, that the department has already taken steps to ensure that majors will not be blocked out of courses that serve as prerequisites for upper division work, or for that matter, from training courses that are critical to their development. This "preferential enrollment" is essential for students to make their way to the degree in a timely manner. Unfortunately, students and even faculty do not understand the steps that have been taken--an aspect of the information and communications problem that we found in several features of this necessarily complex department.

One of our chief concerns involves the difficulty that Theatre students encounter in getting clear information about how to work with the curriculum. We heard many suggestions that the departmental website and catalogue copy offer more and clearer information. We ourselves found it difficult to imagine ourselves as students successfully using these sources to map our journey to graduation. Because the majors have requirements that are not always easy to deal with in a straightforward way, clear charts of the possible ways to navigate from freshman year

to graduation are imperative. This is especially true for students who avail themselves of the opportunity to design their own pathways, reflecting their own interests. Besides information about courses, students need more clarity about auditions--the procedures, qualifications, and logistics.

Nothing, of course, can replace one-on-one advising. The departmental advisor has a demanding job. He or she needs to understand not only the rules but also the purposes that created the structure of each degree, the roadblocks that students encounter, and the multiple ways to get past these roadblocks. We encourage the faculty and the department administration to provide a clear sense of goals for the undergraduate advisor, and to prioritize his or her work in accomplishing the various tasks that are included in the job as a whole--protecting faculty and students from aimless, repetitive, and flawed attempts at communication about courses and requirements; protecting the integrity of the curriculum; assuring students that the department welcomes them and wants to treat them as individuals whose success is important; and, most significant, assisting students to move through the curriculum as easily and comfortably as possible.

The Theatre-Dance Relationship

The merger of Theatre and Dance offers a unique opportunity to people on both sides of the transaction. There is already ample evidence that undergraduate majors, specifically the Theatre and Dance double majors, have been favorably affected by the dialogue between choreographers and directors, by collaborative projects, and by synthesis of the two fields as they contextualize each other. The two majors overlap in the area of the production practicums, and it is here that undergraduates have best access to their cohorts in the other major.

It would be wise to acknowledge an abundance both of benefits and of potential conflicts. Each field brings its own interesting "culture" of process and product, its own history of connection and affiliation, its own styles of communication. We hope that as the two majors grow closer they will find more opportunities to build on each other's strengths.

Faculty are already working on shared production projects. These should be encouraged to continue. On a practical note, we hope that the two majors will be able to coordinate the scheduling of their distinctive activities--so that, for example, theatre and dance performances are not scheduled simultaneously.

An Admissions Possibility

Speculating on the future of the department and of UCSD, we considered the possibility that Theatre and Dance might petition the Academic Senate's Admissions Committee to recommend, for freshman admission, students who showed promise of creative excellence but who might not be eligible for admission under other academic criteria. We do not recommend this as a means of increasing ethnic diversity, though that might well be its effect. Also, we are aware that in a

department with only about 150 majors, the number of such students would be small. Further, we are not recommending that students be admitted to the University because they would contribute to a certain department's program, without being able to succeed in other academic respects; such a proposal would be cruel and self-defeating. We know that some students admitted in the way we mention might need some academic support and mentoring to ensure their general success. Nevertheless, we suggest that the measure should be considered, preferably by Theatre and Dance in conjunction with other Arts departments. We think it might enrich both the departments in question and the interesting mix of creative people who form the community of UCSD.

In conclusion, we want to emphasize that the problems we have noted should be seen in perspective. Everyone who participated in our review—students, faculty, staff, and the committee itself—regards the Department of Theatre and Dance as remarkably successful. We found in the department a lively, energetic, enthusiastic faculty, and an undergraduate student body that merits the same adjectives. The chair and vice-chair of Theatre and Dance are notable for their detailed and accurate understanding of an exceptionally complicated department and for their thoughtful, dedicated work on the vexing issues of the current period. Money will remain a problem until the University recovers from its current financial difficulties, but we believe that Theatre and Dance is on the right course.