

UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE
ACADEMIC PROGRAM EXTERNAL REVIEW
Spring 2022

Members of the Review Committee:

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We visited the University of Victoria Department of Theatre through a series of meetings on Zoom held April 19-21, 2022. As more than one person remarked during our visit, it is certainly regrettable that our external reviewing team was unable to visit the Department of Theatre in person. However, we want to emphasize that, for our online visit, we were received in a uniformly gracious and welcoming manner. That everyone was so friendly, and that they felt enough ownership of their place of employment that each of them independently thanked us on behalf of the whole unit, is a strong indicator of the positive culture that thrives within the Department of Theatre. That is the first important note in our review; that the Department of Theatre is functioning well is indicated by the high morale in evidence, even at the end of an exhausting pandemic. Consequently, our remarks here are focused on the relatively happy question of how to preserve and continue the work of this successful Unit rather than on the vexatious matter of how to fix a dysfunctional organization. In some respects, the great success of the UVic Department of Theatre seems a little precarious, in that it depends so heavily on the good will of all the faculty and staff. And while we found no reason to question the sincerity of that good will, we all know that good will is a commodity that can be exhausted or damaged by adverse circumstances, so we hope that this report may help to allay that risk by foreseeing some of the dangers.

Conducting the review remotely was one of two major challenges we faced. The second was that we did not have the opportunity to speak to any students whatsoever, undergraduate or graduate. Apparently, the students had been invited to participate but in the end no one stepped forward. That is a shame, because those working in the Department of Theatre concentrate heavily on making the student experience as strong as possible, so it would have been useful to hear some student perspectives on some of the changes that have taken place. Consequently, those reading the report may infer that there were a number of questions left unanswered.

These include questions we would have asked to do with:

- Student reflections on the audition process.
- Student thoughts about graduate recruitment.
- Student views on the system of graduate supervision.

- Student views on whether the equity issues raised in the open letter from 2020 (which we did not read, but heard about indirectly) have been adequately addressed.
- International student experiences.

Of course, the absence of student voices can't be helped at this point, so we will do our best to make this report as helpful as possible based on the evidence we have gathered.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations appear elsewhere in the body of the report, where they will be provided with more context. But, for convenience, we reproduce them as a list here.

- Appoint new faculty in lighting design, projection design and sound design. This is related to an outstanding recommendation made in the 2014-15 review. Possibly, this could be a single full-time position, but it might be more easily filled with more than one part-time appointee, each specializing in one or two of the three design areas.
- The plan to change the subscription season into a membership makes a lot of sense. Once this shift is accomplished, it would be a good time to approach long-time supporters in the community about establishing an endowment for the Department of Theatre. The possibility of doing so through bequests should be explicitly mentioned.
- Create some high volume service courses, possibly online, which might be taught by sessional instructors and generate revenue for the Fine Arts, which would help to pay for certain resources.
- The proposal to integrate the partnership with ICA into programming for the main season is a strong one and should be pursued. This also could provide opportunities to involve Applied Theatre students in the mainstage programming.
- Appoint a dedicated advisor to deal with students in the "self-directed studies" option.
- As part of the upcoming curriculum review, we suggest that the Department of Theatre consider the following three ideas: a) Discuss reducing the required units for the BFA to 30 or 33 from the current 36. The current program demands upon human and physical resources seem to be nearly at the breaking point, and this can't always be a positive experience for either staff or students.
- b) Discuss whether the current "self-directed" BFA (as sensible and successful as this program seems to be) is substantially different from a BA in Theatre. Is this really a distinction without a difference? At several points, the phrase "liberal arts" was used by those who work in the Department of Theatre, but strictly speaking a BFA is more

rooted in a specific artistic discipline than a liberal arts degree, which, as its name implies, ranges across more than one discipline. It seems that this is a fair description of what students are doing within the “self-directed” BFA. Perhaps the conclusion that will be reached after discussion is that it makes little difference within the Unit and so it is not worth changing. But the external advantage of a BA is that it is a more readily recognized accreditation when it comes to applying to most graduate studies, although a BFA is more readily recognized for MFA programs.

- c) Discuss whether the PhD candidacy process can be reformed to allay the overly extended times to completion: Are all three stages (comprehensive exam, special field exam and proposal) necessary? Could the comprehensive exam be dropped or combined with the special field exam into a single component? We recommend that the Department explore what other theatre departments are doing in this regard to reconsider and expedite the candidacy process.