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Program/s in this review: Theatre BA _____

Specialized accrediting agency (if applicable): n/a _____

Campuses where the program is delivered: Anchorage _____

Members of the program review committee:

Brian Cook, Associate Professor and Department Chair, UAA
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1. Centrality of Program Mission and Supporting Role (700 words or less)

The Department of Theatre and Dance provides a progressive and supportive training ground for the purpose of developing the next generation of theatre artists within the state of Alaska. All of our students receive broad exposure to the necessary skills for careers in both technical theatre and performance through active participation in the process of theatre or dance production. Student actors, dancers, directors, choreographers, designers, technicians, and stage managers work on multiple productions while being mentored by our distinguished faculty of working artists and scholars. Our BA is the only complete theatre program in the state of Alaska, and local, statewide, and national theatre companies reach out to our students when hiring because they are so well-trained.

The Department of Theatre and Dance mounts four productions annually, in addition to numerous student productions and performances. Production lies at the heart of the degree program. Creative development is fostered by taking the theoretical and methodological skills experienced in the classroom and implementing the artistic processes in the final product onstage. Performers learn to build sets, design lights, construct costumes, assemble props, etc. Technicians have options for participating in acting courses or to play roles in productions to better understand design from the performer's point of view. Upper-level students culminate their departmental experience by directing, choreographing, or designing which helps them develop leadership skills while also demonstrating what's possible for newer students in the program. This approach has placed our alumni into many of the finest graduate theatre programs in the country, into professional jobs at renowned regional theatre companies across the country and at the Performing Arts Center in Anchorage. Their work at UAA has made them more capable of starting arts organizations in Alaska where self-sufficiency is paramount, and recent alumni have created theatre organizations in Alaska and across the country, including Chicago and New York City.

The department trains theatre artists and scholars to shape and reimagine the way they interpret our world by collaborating with disciplines across the UAA campus. Over the last five years many of our productions have bridged disciplines to encourage diversity in perspectives and experiences. Examples of collaboration include: *Stalking the Bogeyman* with UAA Departments of Psychology, Art, and the Center for Community Engagement and Learning as

well as community organizations; *Working and New Dances* with the Department of Music; *Eurydice*, *Radium Girls*, *Lysistrata*, and *Romeo and Juliet* with the Department of English; *Marie Antoinette* with the Department of History; *Picasso at the Lapin Agile* with the Department of Mathematics, and *Earthquake '64* with the Department of Geological Sciences. Our 2018 production of *Rain and Zoe Save the World* premiered as part of the Earth Matters On Stage Festival—which we also hosted—a triennial conference that brings people from all across the globe to discuss how the arts can impact issues like climate change, environmental justice, and green theatre practices. The latter was demonstrated in *Rain and Zoe* with costumes and sets created entirely from repurposed materials. We have toured local schools with an anti-bullying play, *New Kid*, and theatre majors and other students interviewed local Alaskans to create the student-devised *Earthquake '64*.

We cultivate bold, innovative, highly skilled artists capable of thriving in a variety of professional contexts, making our students highly sought after by theatre companies and graduate programs. UAA Theatre and Dance also has a history of partnerships with both local agencies and national organizations. Ongoing interactions with Anchorage School District act as a recruitment tool for our department. Previous successful project collaborations include working with: The Anchorage Museum, ARC of Anchorage, Perseverance Theatre, and Alaska Dance Theatre. These have consistently established our department's reputation as an innovative collaborator and performing arts leader in the greater Anchorage community. Theatre and Dance faculty and students continue to represent the department on a national platform through our associations with such esteemed organizations as the Smithsonian Institution, United States Institute for Theatre Technology, American College Theatre Festival, Earth Matters on Stage, American College Dance Association, Mid-America Theatre Conference, and the Congress on Research in Dance. Our faculty and students continue to engage a broader, global audience by expanding access to the UAA experience through our strong international exchanges with Ludwig Foundation of Cuba, Danzabiarta Cuba, and the University of Ghana West Africa.

2. Program Demand (including service to other programs), Efficiency, and Productivity (7 year trend; 1400 words or less)

Seven-year degree and/or certificate awards trend

On average there has been about eight graduates per year over the last seven years. When the department had three new hires in 2015-2016 several students who could have graduated delayed a year or two to take classes with the new faculty, likely resulting in the dips in 2017 and 2018. We have 17 students prepared to graduate in the next two years.

Credits Per Degree (Average Credits Earned)

The data are so inconsistent that it's difficult to assess a trend here. Our average is near the required 120, and our students don't on average have more than 10 credits over 120. However, it's not surprising to us that these numbers are a bit higher than an average of 120, because while our students don't need to take more than 120 credits, they are usually excited to do so when there are new classes offered that they haven't yet taken.

Seven-year majors or program enrollment trend

We have seen a decline in the number of students majoring, although we are potentially on a growth trend, increasing by 12 majors from 2018 to 2019. Our 2019 number is roughly equivalent to the average over the seven-year period, which is 55. The theatre major count in Banner as of 1/27/2020 is 60 current majors, nearly all of them still active in the department.

While we recognize that having a healthy number of majors brings in student credit hours and therefore tuition dollars, the smaller number of majors does benefit our students; they get hands-on attention and excellent advising through their course of study to prepare them for the job market or graduate school after graduation.

Theatre is also a field in which parents and students want confidence in the program they're entering, and the news of budget cuts and faculty turnover is stifling our enrollment and our efforts to recruit.

Finally, the loss of the theatre minor is also a contributing factor. We're aware that the numbers don't reflect a historically high interest in our minor. At least 10-15 students per semester ask one of us if we have a minor. Perhaps in the past, "minors" didn't officially declare the minor, but they became committed to our program thinking they were a minor until they eventually got so involved that they declared a theatre major. Our costume designer Colleen Metzger has a personal account from when she was a college student: "I can state from personal experience that the theatre minor is a gateway into the department. I was a student who first took theatre classes for fun and then eventually surprised myself by graduating with a theatre major. The minor provides students a safe way to take theatre classes when students have a different major in mind, when their parents condemn a theatre degree, when they don't believe theatre is a viable career...and the minor allows us to enthrall them with what is possible."

Course pass rates

We are in line with University-wide pass and DFW rates.

Internal demand

Our GER offerings in both theatre and dance are usually popular with students from all around the university, and we're expanding those options (see next section). We also have a number of courses that bring in non-major students, especially our Introduction to Acting and our Theatre Production Techniques classes. Dance technique classes also serve students from all across campus.

Seven-year Student Credit Hour (SCH) production trend

We have seen a decline in SCH production. The key to expanding our credit hours is recruitment, and we place it at the forefront of our service and productions each year. Local and statewide tours like help promote our program to local schools, and we invite local high school students to attend our production offerings at reduced rates. We've faced a number of challenges recruiting high school students over the last couple of years with the news of the university's struggles making headlines. But, as noted above, we have still increased the number of majors we have between AY2018 and AY2019.

We've also discussed with Alaska School Activities Association developing and hosting a state-wide high school theatre competition that would parallel the State Drama/Debate/Forensics (DDF) competition, but the current uncertain budget circumstances have prevented us from moving forward with the idea.

The final place we can expand credit hours is to capture more credit hours from our production program. The vast majority of the teaching each of our faculty do is actually in production, but as those are not taught classes, we don't generate student credit hours for a lot of the teaching we do. We have made some headway with our latest curriculum revision, and when it takes effect next year, we will see what sort of impact it has.

SCH/FTEF and Enrollment/Full Time Equivalent Faculty (FTEF) and FTES/FTEF

Our SCH/FTEF ratio has declined over the past seven years; the spike in Dance for AY 2018 is likely due to the departure of our dance term instructor. We should see a similar spike in theatre for AY2020, because we lost two faculty prior to the start of the fall semester. We currently have five faculty with one specializing in dance. The dance minor also employs adjuncts for the various types of dance they offer. With the implementation of our program revision in Fall 2020, our curriculum should be more accessible and easier to navigate for students considering our BA. That, plus additional engagement with high schools for recruitment, should shift the trend. The impact of the loss of faculty will also improve these numbers.

Class Size (Average Class Size)

There is not wide fluctuation in this category, though theatre has more of a decline than dance. However, it's important that we note a couple of things about this number for theatre and dance classes. Though we are not a member, we follow the National Association of Schools of Theatre (NAST)'s best practices for teaching studio courses in theatre or dance, which recommends a cap at 16 for classes focused on creative work. Most of our courses are also limited to the size of the room we are teaching in (costume shop = 10 students; makeup room = 12 seats [though this is a class that regularly fills and could have more students]); the Harper Studio, where most of our acting classes are taught, can only accommodate about 20 students in an acting class; more students than that is a safety issue for most physical movement or for teaching stage combat with weapons. The scene shop can only support a certain number of students especially when power tools are in use.

Cost/SCH

The numbers for both theatre and dance appear to fluctuate from year to year, so it's hard to discern a trend.

Tuition Revenue/SCH

The trends for both theatre and dance match the overall trend for the university at large.

External demand

Even prior to graduation local theatre companies are snapping up our students; they frequently work on Perseverance shows and at the Performing Arts Center on touring productions. But for students eager to work outside Alaska, those who have applied to outside summer jobs have been 100% successful. Many of our students choose to remain and work in Alaska after graduation, but each year a percentage leave the state to attend graduate school or work professionally in theatres across the country.

Program Funding

The department relies upon fees and tuition, but we do not fully cover our faculty's salaries with tuition dollars at this time. We were challenged by the dean after our AY2018 program review to

reduce our costs so that by AY2020 60 to 65% of instructional costs were covered by fees and tuition, so that has been our target. In the past two years the department has reduced from eight faculty to five bringing us significantly closer to this target number without our having to sacrifice a lot of student credit hours as we are still teaching the courses that were bringing in the most tuition revenue. The changes that we have made regarding GER classes and streamlining our theatre curriculum will continue to help raise our numbers. We also receive recurring extramural support for our productions from the Atwood Foundation each year since 2015, and specific grant support for individual projects has been received from Alaska State Council for the Arts, New England Foundation for the Arts, Rasmuson Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts, Alaska Children's Trust, Alaska Native Health Tribal Consortium, and the Harper Touring Grant.

3. Program Quality, Improvement and Student Success (1500 words or less)

The BA in Theatre at UAA is a high-quality department with high-quality faculty. Our acting professor is currently starring in a play with Perseverance Theatre; a play our costume designer managed just closed on Broadway; our scenic professor was lured away by the famed Chicago Fly House; our theatre history professor just co-edited and wrote an introduction on political theatre for *Theatre History Studies*; our dance professor has a forthcoming book documenting extensive fieldwork in West Africa and Cuba; and our lighting professor recently lit a professional production of *Sister Act* in Phoenix. UAA is not running a fluffy, theoretical theatre program. We are producing the best theatre work in the entire state (not kidding). The students are learning theatre from nationally respected, working theatre artists who keep their finger on the pulse of what is new and cutting edge in the theatre industry.

We are constantly aiming to improve the education we provide. We just submitted an overhaul of our entire curriculum, which will be instituted in Fall 2020. As requested by the Dean and Provost we removed our three concentrations, which will result in a single-track, more efficient program where students still can shape their course of study by selecting different elective options at the lower- and upper-division level. Our curriculum requirements are more streamlined; students will now only be required to take three entry-level classes versus the five required by our old curriculum. Finally, with the revision of the GER humanities requirement allowing major courses to count, our majors won't have to take any additional fine arts or humanities GER courses, resulting in getting them to graduation more swiftly.

We are also working on a consistent rotation of classes that will better make use of the small faculty we now have, while at the same time providing students with ample options to take classes that interest them. We have also listened to our students: because of jobs and family and other courses, many find it difficult to complete six semesters of technical practicum. We will now allow students to complete two of the six semesters with performance practicum, so that actors will get major credit for having performed in a show. We will thus capture more credit hours with our practicum requirements because performance-focused students will be incentivized to sign up for credit when they are in a production.

Online Courses

As many of our classes as possible are offered online to make them accessible to students state-wide. These include our Historical and Contemporary Plays classes, Theatre Appreciation,

Theatre History, and eventually Dance Appreciation (currently in development). However, the kinesthetic and collaborative nature of theatre production makes certain classes nearly impossible to teach via distance – the fine detail of drawing, the collective nature of creating an acting scene or directing a show – many of our classes are too hands-on to translate digitally.

Assessment

Under our old Assessment model, we focused on how the student perspective changed during their time at UAA, but the new model focuses on more tangible evidence of the student experience in the Theatre Department. Our new assessment plan includes multiple checkpoints along the way, examining artifacts such as acting scenes from Introduction to Acting and technical output in Technical Practicum. The assessment cumulates with the Portfolio and Resume class which showcases the student’s accomplishments during their time at UAA along with preparing them for the post-graduation job search. This leaves students with qualitative evidence of growth in their personal skills and artistry. Updating the assessment plan at the same time we overhauled our curriculum meant the overall impact of the program is more in sync than it has ever been.

High-Impact Teaching Practices

Theatre students experience copious amounts of service-based activities during their time at UAA. Some of it is in production, such as doing matinees for school children, but many volunteer at high schools or local theatres, perform for community events etc. They generously volunteer their time to the department without the requirement of an assignment, working feverishly to build sets, create costumes, memorize lines, and program lights because their love of the craft drives them to work as hard as they can.

Often theatre is regarded as a creative outlet, and it is, but our students are able to demonstrate critical analysis, sharp research, and competent writing skills. Two to three students each year complete a departmental honors thesis project with a significant research and writing outcome, we have production dramaturgs compile acres of research for each show, and research papers are required in the theatre history courses.

The most significant part of a theatre degree is the collaborative experience – theatre is not a solo art form, and students work closely both with the faculty and fellow students, both in class and on productions, developing people skills that are valuable no matter where life takes them.

Each show and each class is a common intellectual experience for our students. The theatre students are a cohort and when they graduate, they haven’t just made friends, they’ve created a network of fellow theatre practitioners who will connect them with opportunities and offer guidance and assistance down the road.

So much of the theatre degree is based on internships, practicum, and “field experience,” the “field” being represented in our shops and on our stage. We run a purely professional theatre business where the students participate as personnel via their yearly practicum requirements. This prepares actors, designers, and technicians alike to enter the professional world ready to work. The faculty diligently assist students in applying for internships to gain that professional

experience, and the capstone class Resume and Portfolio ensures that students leave UAA armed with all the tools to get hired as well as the experience.

Student Support

The theatre department is extraordinary because of how much time we spend with our students. During tech week we often spend twelve hours a day with them, and we see them daily in the technical shops and at rehearsal for hours on end. Much of this time is not formal class time; therefore, we get to know them on a much deeper level than students in a typical lecture course. Beyond traditional academic advising we become advisors and mentors on a much deeper level. A significant proportion of our students are part of the panoply of the LGBTQIA+ community or have learning difficulties (dyslexia, ADHD), and students often seek our advice on these issues. Colleen Metzger spent several hours assisting a newly trans woman in purchasing body padding and female shoes for her larger feet. Brian Cook spent four years mentoring a student with severe ADHD who is now working at a professional theatre company. Beyond the more serious support the students also require mentorship when working on artistic projects such as directing or designing a show. We pride ourselves on the amount of hands-on experience students get working on shows, but it does require an epic amount of work to see a student through an entire production. We also spend a significant amount of time prepping them for grad school interviews, facilitating resume and website creation, and helping them seek employment.

Recent Student Accomplishments

- One current student completed an internship at the Illinois Shakespeare Festival, Summer 2019, and has accepted another at Trollwood (Minnesota) for Summer 2020. He has also costume designed two mainstage shows here at UAA.
- Another current student was the costume designer for *Little Women* produced at the Pier One Theatre in Homer, Summer 2019. She has just designed a show in our mainstage season.
- One alumnus accepted an acting and production apprenticeship at American Stage in St. Petersburg, FL (2019-20 season). He also directed a show in our mainstage season as part of his departmental thesis, and he received two grants from the Office of Undergraduate Research and Scholarship during his time at UAA.
- One alumna entered the MFA program in scene design at the Ohio State University in Fall 2019. She also designed scenery for two UAA mainstage shows, including her departmental honors thesis project.
- One alumna got hired as Wardrobe Supervisor for Muhlenberg College Theatre & Dance in Allentown, PA, 2019-20 school year.
- One alumna is a 2018 Rasmuson Individual Artist Awardee, was accepted to study with an internationally recognized dance company in Havana, Cuba, and is currently an adjunct faculty in our department. She has multiple offers for graduate programs in dance.
- One alumnus entered the MA program in theatre at the University of Oregon in Fall 2019.
- One alumnus recently graduated from the MFA program in scene design at University of California, San Diego.
- One alumnus is in the final year of the MFA program in scene design at the University of Alabama.
- One alumna recently worked at the Chautauqua Opera (New York) and just moved to New York City. She was listed as one of the “Six Theatre Workers You Should Know” in the May/June 2019 issue of *American Theatre* magazine.

4. Program Duplication / Distinctiveness (300 words or less)

There are no duplicate programs in the state; UAA offers the only BA in Theatre and the only dance program of any kind in Alaska's university system. UAS has no program since Perseverance stopped teaching the few theatre classes they had been. UAF has a theatre concentration within the Film and Performing Arts major, but they do not offer a full complement of theatre courses, especially in design or technical theatre.

Alaska, in spite of its small population, supports a staggering number of theatres. We constantly fight the falsehood that theatre isn't a lucrative industry to enter, but beyond the plethora of local theatres, there are union touring companies that take shows around the globe and 75 LORT (union) theatres nationwide, which are far outnumbered by the non-union theater houses across the country. There are always jobs in the theatre industry, and our students' multi-faceted pedagogical experiences—actors take design and technical courses and technicians take acting classes—mean they graduate with skills in multiple areas making them immensely hireable. Theatre students can also take jobs in film or television.

The technical shops and rehearsals are run as if UAA were a professional company and our students graduate primed to enter the professional theatre workforce.

5. Summary Analysis (500 words or less)

The BA in Theatre does not offer courses that just teach students how to act or sew or draw, but we train them with the necessary skills so that they can enter any professional job and think on their feet, work collaboratively, speak confidently, and solve problems creatively. We do this not only in classes but also by creating performances that unite the university and reach into the community, spark dialogue, and cover issues that are timely and locally inspired.

In addition to choosing powerful seasons, our students also graduate with professional, hands-on experiences rarely seen in students who graduate from our institutional peers. Brian Cook has steadily built up a directing program that's enabled three students to direct plays as part of the department's season. It's extremely rare for undergrad students to be trusted with directing a mainstage, fully realized production. We have a fourth student slated to direct next year. Our students have also designed for our mainstage productions, something often not available until graduate school. Our performers take on challenging roles that push them to grow as artists. UAA students graduate with resumes packed with hands-on, high-level experience that is getting them hired at regional theatres and scholarships to graduate school.

But a theatre education is valuable even if students do not pursue professional theater work. Corporations actively seek out theatre students because they have the out-of-the-box thinking, collaboration, creative problem solving, public speaking, and people skills they are looking for. Forbes magazine in 2014 discussed the topic, and we are looking to develop an "improv for business" class as a way of both training theatre majors to do such work as well as give business and other students techniques to use as they get jobs in the marketplace.

Finally, we want to clear up some misconceptions about theatre:

- A. People don't think theatre is a STEM department, but theatre classes teach engineering, chemistry, math, and computer technology - to name a few.
- B. People don't think theatre is scientific, but theater arts help teach and interpret the sciences.
- C. People think theatre is "just for fun," but anyone afraid of public speaking (the number one phobia in America) could soothe their fears and gain confidence with an acting class.
- D. People don't think of theatre as a medicine, but it helps people stay healthy, including strengthening the immune system, reducing tension and stress, and improving mental health.
- E. People think theatre is easy, but studies show attending theatrical shows can make you smarter since it engages both sides of the brain.
- F. People think a theatre degree is only helpful if you work in the theatre, but the skills taught in theatre classes are valuable in almost any job – and are moreover great life skills.
- G. People don't think theater is a "stable" field for a career, but over 5.4 million jobs in America are based in the arts and cultural industries.

All of this is supported by numerous news articles and studies.