

Date: March 9, 2020

To: Cathy Sandeen, Chancellor

From: John Stalvey, Interim Provost *John R Stalvey*

Cc: John Petraitis, Interim Dean, College of Arts and Sciences
Brian Cook, Associate Professor; Chair, Department of Theatre & Dance
Colleen Metzger, Associate Professor
Susan Kalina, Vice Provost for Academic Affairs
Claudia Lampman, Vice Provost for Student Success

Re: **AY20 Expedited Program Review Findings – Theatre BA**

I have reviewed the dean's findings, the program's response to the dean's findings, and the completed Expedited Program Review Template for the Theatre BA.

Recommendations

My recommendation is to accept the decision and recommendations of the dean and request to delete the program after admissions have been suspended and the teach out has been completed. Demand for this program is modest to low. While of high quality, the program is costly, and the institution cannot sustain this program. Students interested in this field will have access to the Film and Performing Arts program at UAF.

Decision

Recommend Deletion

Date: Feb. 28, 2020

To: John Stalvey, Interim Provost

Cc: John Petraitis, Interim Dean, College of Arts and Sciences

From:

Dr. Brian Cook, Associate Professor and Chair, Department of Theatre and Dance;
Prof. Colleen Metzger, Associate Professor, Department of Theatre and Dance

RE: AY20 Expedited Program Review: Optional Program Response to Dean's Recommendation

Program in this review: BA in Theatre

Introduction

Implementing change can move at a glacial pace, and while the Department of Theatre and Dance has been making changes each year to try and raise enrollment and lower costs, it is clear that Interim Dean Petraitis doesn't feel that there has been a dramatic enough change. However, making a hasty, irrational decision by eliminating a department which has significant community support, delivers excellent education, and provides significant value to the university is not an effective solution. As the dean himself acknowledges, the department has recently made significant changes to curriculum to allow students to more swiftly move through the program and to harness more student credit hours from production. Those changes will come into effect this coming fall if we are not deleted and in teach-out mode. We have made the changes, we have a range of potential partnerships that would interest students, and we already have a strong program, which the dean also acknowledges. Instead of elimination, we should be given the opportunity to see how our changes pay off and to pursue the opportunities open to us to create a more sought-after department. We will detail those opportunities below.

Only CAS has utilized the "deletion" designation, where all other colleges recommended programs only be suspended. Further, unlike many programs, our department was not offered any chance to reimagine or alter our program toward cost savings. It is worth considering how the theatre program could survive even through this difficult budget situation, especially considering the praise provided by the dean in his recommendation. We will do so in this document.

Critical (Un)intended Consequences

It is a fact that in deleting this program, the administration is making it impossible for Alaskan students to gain education and training to pursue theatre (or dance) as a career. As the dean specifies, there is no alternative program in the state which offers a full and complete BA in Theatre. This would also significantly impair the other theatre companies in Anchorage and elsewhere.

The most significant consequence is that eliminating this program removes the opportunity for students to create art and tell stories via performance. The dean mentions the low percentage of students who matriculate in with a theatre major, and therefore implies that theatre education is not valuable enough to preserve. However, this metric is far from being a useful number in assessing a program's value. A significant number of UAA students change their major more than once, and a lot of students enter college not knowing at all what they want to study. Those who may be considering theatre also have their heads filled by people telling them that theatre is a bad choice because they'll never get a job. Students entering UAA are all seeking a program that matches who they are and what they want to pursue; that is the essence of selecting a major. For some students, that takes time, and even when they find their passion for theatre, they're not able to major because their parents won't let them or because they're afraid to. We've told our majors numerous times how brave they are to pursue a theatre degree when so many people are telling them lies about the benefits of theatre education.

In our program review document, we outlined very clearly how the belief that a theatre major leads to joblessness is false. There are many jobs in theatre, both within the state and Outside. However, the joblessness belief is self-reinforcing, and so students do not select theatre as a major initially. When they come into contact with our program, and realize the potential for a life-long career, they chose to major in theatre. Our expedited program review listed career options in and out of state, specifically listing all the companies across the state producing work each year. Every one of those theatre companies have UAA theatre alumni at their heart. We are sure you have read many letters of support for our program from them. Without the UAA theatre program to filter professional theater practitioners into local theatre companies, you are not only cutting the only place to study theatre in the state, but may be in turn responsible for the death of other theatre companies in the state.

If this program is deleted, the possibility exists for a time where there will be not enough people with theatre experience in the state to adequately produce theatre, requiring the importation of specialists from outside the state who will only stay here temporarily. With quality theatre education and more theatre students produced in the state, the more they would seek opportunities to create their own companies and hire other UAA grads in Alaska. Anchorage is a large city; it certainly can support a fully-professional theatre that produces only in Anchorage. Our students have the skills and abilities to create such a theatre. More theatre in Alaska means that high school students have experiences with theatre and will be committed to studying it in their home state.

Beyond keeping the arts in Alaska alive, the theater department also helps keep students alive. Theatre is renowned for its therapeutic effects (we in fact listed many scientifically-based facts about the healing power of theatre in our EPR), and many students study theatre because they not only enjoy it, but it helps keep them mentally healthy. In a state where so many people suffer from depression, suicidal impulses, and seasonal affective disorder, participating in and viewing theatre is scientifically proven to bolster a positive attitude. Further, when the deletion was announced two current students announced that "this program has saved my life." We have had numerous students across the years that would say the same thing. Suffering from crippling depression, ADHD or other mental health issues, only their work in theatre was able to help them cope. The loss of theatre as an art form in Anchorage is concerning, the loss of future students because they don't have access to a theatre community is heartbreaking.

Future Partnerships and Program Growth

We mentioned in our EPR that we had been in talks with the Alaska School Activities Association about creating a high school theatre competition as part of the Drama/Debate/Forensics (DDF) state competition. If we were to pursue this, it would not cost the department any extra funds (as ASAA would pay for the costs of the competition), but it would yield greater connection between high school students from all around Alaska and UAA Theatre and Dance. As arts programs are shuttered statewide, it benefits both our program and potential students by keeping theatre in high schools and building a connection between them and our program. We could also apply for grants for our faculty to travel around the state for short theatre workshops. The more interaction we have with high school students, the more they will see theatre at UAA as a viable option.

Perseverance Theatre is under new artistic direction, and they have already reached out to UAA about wanting to collaborate more deeply in future seasons. They are restructuring and have announced a desire to produce more productions in Anchorage and liaise with more local theatres. They have also discussed the idea of renting out the UAA performance spaces for some of their Anchorage season, which would bring both revenue as well as potential new audience members into our theatres. Plus, students would have opportunities to work on professional productions while still at UAA, making the UAA theatre program more attractive to potential students.

A similar collaboration with Momentum Dance Company is also in development, as are ongoing discussions between UAA Theater and Dance faculty and the Performing Arts Center in Anchorage about ways to work together.

Alternative Options

Although we were not given the direction to consider alternative cost-cutting measures, the dean did write that “if the program continues it must find a way to close the gap between what it takes to train the students and the finances it has for that training.” To that end, we offer several suggestions:

1. We believe some short-term changes could help keep costs down to maintain a smaller theatre department until we see how the budget situation turns out long-term and assess if the curriculum changes made within the department will help boost enrollment. One option would be for us to focus mostly on teaching and producing small shows that can directly be tied to a course being offered.
2. Allowing attrition to reduce the budget, as has already been happening. Both our term instructors and our tenure-track scenic design professor and technical director have recently departed. It is likely that we may lose our sole untenured faculty member within the next year.
3. Our faculty could be moved into other departments, and productions could become a club activity that represents a smaller portion of our workloads. Some classes which could continue to be offered are our general education classes (Theatre Appreciation, Dance Appreciation, Introduction to Acting [becoming a GER in Fall 2020], Historical and

Contemporary Drama courses, the Theatre History sequence) along with many of our successful courses like Makeup for the Stage, Theatrical Production Techniques, and many of our capstone (492) courses, including History of Musical Theatre, LGBTQ+ Theatre, Dramaturgy, and Theatre for Social Change.

There are of course more drastic cuts that could be made to our staff, our faculty, and the overall program without deleting it entirely. While those cuts would potentially lower the value of the program to the theatre students, we are more than willing to have a conversation regarding how to maintain the Theatre BA program on a far-reduced budget.

It is detrimental to the state of Alaska to not have a forum for theatre education. Artists want to be educated in Alaska and make art in Alaska. Perhaps currently the budget cannot allow the theatre department to remain as it currently exists, but surely a university with such wise and innovative minds can conceive of another way for theatre education to continue to exist in the state of Alaska. We ask that given the opportunities we have created for our program, that you allow us to continue to exist.



Date: February 21, 2020

To: John Stalvey, Interim Provost

From: John Petraitis, Interim Dean, College of Arts and Sciences

Cc: Brian Cook, Associate Professor; Chair, Department of Theatre & Dance
Colleen Metzger, Associate Professor

Re: AY20 Expedited Program Review Findings

Program/s in this review: Theatre BA

Specialized accrediting agency (if applicable): None

Campuses where the program is delivered: Anchorage

Members of the program review committee:

Brian Cook, Associate Professor and Department Chair
Colleen Metzger, Associate Professor

Centrality of Program Mission and Supporting Role

UAA's mission is to discover and disseminate knowledge through teaching, research, engagement and creative expression. UAA is committed to serving the higher education needs of the state, its communities and its diverse peoples. It is also committed to instruction at multiple academic levels, success of all students regardless of their higher education goals, and service to the diverse peoples and communities of the state. UAA's core themes are (1) Teaching and Learning, (2) Research, Scholarship and Creative Activity, (3) Student Success, (4) UAA Community, and (5) Public Square. UAA values international and intercultural education, diversity of experiences and perspectives, and the diversity of our unique location in Southcentral Alaska that comes from the Alaska Native peoples of this area.

The College of Arts and Sciences contributes to UAA's mission with a suite of programs that provide, among other things,

1. general education courses for undergraduates in CAS and other Colleges,
2. opportunities for undergraduates to pursue majors in the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences, and the arts, and

3. opportunities for faculty and students to pursue research and creative activities in CAS's academic disciplines,
4. graduate programs for advanced studies.

Given decreased enrollments across UAA and significant budget cuts to CAS, the challenge is to serve UAA's and CAS's missions with only 75% of the funds it had in 2018-2019. CAS's shrinking budget is especially challenging for programs that rely on state financial appropriations through CAS because the programs have a gap between (a) the total costs of everything the program does and needs, and (b) the tuition CAS receives to cover those costs. This describes most programs in CAS: most rely on state appropriates and CAS has 30% less than it had two years ago.

CAS's Department of Theatre & Dance contributes to CAS's and UAA's mission by contributing options for general education in the arts, providing students the opportunity to major in the discipline, and for faculty and students to do research and creative activity in that area.

Program Demand (including service to other programs), Efficiency, and Productivity

Since 2013 the program averaged about 8 awards per year, with notable peaks (like 11 in 2019) and valleys (like 4 in 2018). The 23% decrease in the number of majors parallel the drop across CAS. Offering a BA in Theatre (including a concentration in Dance) is a costly effort, involving expenses for lighting, costumes, stage construction, training, and safety. Although the Department should be commended for reducing its instructional costs since 2016, its student credit hours and tuition also dropped, and the Department has a substantial gap between its tuition and its direct costs for faculty to teach the courses. Furthermore, when the full salaries and benefits for everything faculty do (instruction, research, and service) are considered, the Department has a steep deficit that required state appropriations. (To their credit, faculty recently redesigned the program to make it more efficient in the future.) Another challenge for the Department is that it draws the attention of comparatively few first-year students: since 2013 only 53 high-school students selected Theatre as their initial major, averaging only 6.6 per year, well below the median for CAS. Lastly, with an average of 8 awards per year, the Department is in the bottom 25% of CAS programs in degrees awarded.

Program Quality, Improvement and Student Success

The program has high quality. With a Student Per Faculty ratio of 9:1, students in the department experience small classes (average class size of 11), they receive hands-on training from faculty who have impressive professional, real-world experience, and they gain invaluable experience working closely with others students on performances, giving them practice in teamwork on complex tasks. The program was just redesigned to improve its efficiency and reduce its costs.

Program Duplication / Distinctiveness

Whereas UA students can get some coursework in Theatre and Dance at UAF and/or UAS, the UAA program is the only one in the state that provides comprehensive training in this field. Nowhere else will UA students get a program of studies that teaches acting, directing, lighting, costume design, and set design.

Commendations and Recommendations

The program is commended for serving passionate and talented students with passionate and talented faculty. If the program continues it must find a way to close the gap between what it takes to train the students and the finances it has for that training. Substantial and ongoing extramural support is probably necessary. The faculty also should be commended for the hard work they put into their expedited program review submission.

Decision

Deletion. Budget cuts are forcing CAS to offer fewer programs to students in the future. Historically, this program attracted relatively few students and was not able to operate without a steep deficit. Although unfortunate, CAS likely cannot sustain this program beyond its current cohort of students. Program deletion requires approval by BOR and NWCCU.

Submission date: Originally, 1/31/2020; revision, 2/07/2020

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
Colleen Metzger, Associate Professor, UAA

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.