

Program Review Report to the South Dakota Board of Regents

Northern State University School of Fine Arts Department of Art & Theater

BA in Musical Theater Degree Program Response Report: External Review and Self-Study August 22, 2016

Introduction

This report serves as a response to the external program review conducted by Professor Dan Miller, Director of Theater at Dakota Wesleyan University, Mitchell, SD. Professor Miller visited the NSU campus on June 1, conducting a thorough visit and examination of the following:

1. Curriculum
2. Resources and funding
3. Facilities
4. Faculty and Staff
5. Students

His report is a comprehensive assessment of the Musical Theater degree program, which outlines and details both our current strengths, weaknesses and areas for improvement. The School of Fine Arts and the Department of Art & Theater thank Professor Miller for his candor and recommendations.

Item A.1: Degree Program Strengths

The external evaluator cites many positive and productive aspects for this degree program. His assessment of the curriculum, purposes and outcomes states that this degree program is in alignment with the NSU mission, and serves the interests of the University and the public. He offers positive views of program quality relative to costs, and excellent program productivity relative to resources – both fiscal and personnel. Mr. Miller's listings of degree program strengths are as follows:

- Dedication to scholarship, creative research and creative activities.
- The department provides a strong curriculum for musical theatre majors.
- Strong general education component to a liberal arts university.
- Provides good insight to local, regional, national and world views and issues.
- Strong community outreach and engagement.
- Meets the universities and departmental mission statements.
- Experienced faculty/staff with plethora of professional theatre experience.
- Hands-on participation in the creation process of theatre.
- Exposure of students to a wide variety of opportunities within the field of theatre.
- Graduates have largely continued their work as theatre artists.
- Strong internships.
- Updated facility with Johnson Fine Arts Center
- New black box for various staging opportunities.
- Very strong relationship with Aberdeen Community Theatre

- Very strong relationship with Ft. Sisseton State Park/Fort Players
- Strong relationship with theatre professionals nationwide.

Item A.2: Degree Program Weaknesses

Professor Miller's identified three main weaknesses and areas of concern. They are as follows:

- The need for additional FTE faculty and staff to sustain the degree program's current levels of productivity and quality. This personnel issue was discussed in the self-study and corroborated by the external reviewer.
- The Musical Theater degree program should be expanded upon or modified to allow for a wider choice of theater related studies. The current emphasis upon musical theater should be maintained, but is too narrow in its scope to attract those people whose theater interests do not lie primarily in the area of music and musical performance.
- Professor Miller alludes to the on-going issues of funding and resources. While he does not make specific types of recommendations, he does acknowledge that budgets are both a concern and a limitation for this degree program.

Additional areas of concern are as follows:

- Time is needed to re-build a program after a long delay to the JFAC remodel and build.
- Assigned duties: All members of the theatre department are stretched too thin.
- Unpaid overloads - The need for release time.
- Lack of faculty for such a strong program.
- Lack of Diversity.
- Only a musical theatre degree, students want an additional, non-musical degree.
- Need for better theatre technology. E.g. lighting instruments, sound equipment, software and scene shop tools.
- Better communication is needed for non-theater event scheduling
- Students want more 'face time' with theatre faculty and staff who are unavailable due to being stretched too thin with other theatre responsibilities.
- Students want more exposure to professional theatre productions.
- Students want more actual classes and less independent studies.

For a more in-depth overview of these issues, please see Professor Miller's report, pages 3-4.

Item B: Reviewer's Recommendations

Professor Miller's recommendations are direct and to the point. They center upon:

1. Faculty and staff stress and heavy workload assignments
2. Improving faculty and staff workloads by hiring additional faculty and staff
3. Release time for stage and theater productions
4. Expanding or modifying the degree program, to allow for more areas of study

All of the above items are identified and discussed in the self-study. We view Professor Miller's recommendations as prudent, timely and reasonable. Please see Mr. Miller's report for further details and specifics.

Item C: Present and Continuing Actions

The NSU School of Fine Arts is currently in a transition stage, with a newly renovated main stage and black-box theater adding significantly to facilities resources – and potential for growth. Further, both a new Dean of Fine Arts and a new President joined NSU in summer, 2016. As such, the issues and items in both the self-study and the external reviewer’s report have been discussed, and preliminary plans and recommendations have been put forth.

It is noteworthy that the closing of the Fine Arts Center for two years has provided us with some gains - and some losses. The gains are obvious (a state-of-the art black box theatre) but the extent to which we suffered losses is now becoming obvious (the unanticipated loss of majors and minors due to the dislocation of the program for over two years). This year’s incoming class is promising, but it looks like it will take several years and vigorous recruiting to return to previous levels.

Plans are in place to begin heavy promotion beginning this fall, with new materials and an outreach spring touring production which we intend to take statewide. Just as the university itself is expanding recruiting, the theater program is extending our past recruiting efforts and adding new initiatives.

Our new Dean, Dr. Kenneth Boulton has acknowledged the areas of concern – in both the self-study and external reviewer’s report. As department chair, I am confident that collaborative solutions to the identified areas of concern will be identified, and that reasonable plans of action towards implementation will occur.

We are heartened at the positive response given to our efforts; we understand that significant changes in senior administration will require time and patience, regarding implementing any plans of action.

In the near term, we will be working on the following items:

- Strategies for boosting enrollments
- Solutions for faculty and staff overloads
- Working on proposals to update the theater curriculum
- Doing preliminary assessments leading to the goal of NAST accreditation

This entire process has been extremely helpful in helping to establish a base-line point for future improvements, growth and success for the Musical Theater degree program.

Respectfully submitted,

P.W. Kilian

Date

8-31-2016

Peter Kilian, Chair, Department of Art & Theater

Daniel Yurgaitis

Date

8-31-16

Daniel Yurgaitis, Director of NSU Theater

Allen JaFare

8-22-16

NSU Institutional Program Review

Bachelor of Arts Program in Musical Theatre

External Evaluator Report

This reviewer has spent a great deal of time meeting with the NSU theatre department faculty, staff, students and NSU administrators, touring the campus, reading the NSU Institutional Program Review for the theatre department, assessing all enclosed evaluations, as well as becoming very familiar with the Bachelor of Arts in Musical Theatre curriculum and the theatre minor curriculum. This reviewer feels very confident with the entire process as it is within his chosen profession as a theatre artist, a university academic and as an administrator.

I. Introduction – The NSU Bachelor of Arts Program in Musical Theatre has had a very successful run over the last few years. This is evident not only in its attached assessment of its program and outcomes, but one merely has to walk onto campus and see the remodeling happening within the Johnson Fine Arts Center and the construction of a new black box theatre to see that there is great confidence from administrators towards the ever growing NSU theatre program. The introduction of this Institutional Program Review clearly states for the record not only its success as an academic program but also the success they have had in building and maintaining their program through constant dedication to scholarship, creative research, the department's creative activities and through, which this reviewer feels this department's faculty and staff excel, outreach, engagement and service activities on and off campus. This reviewer must agree with the assessment that this department "is a model for campus and community outreach and engagement. One simply has to look at what the NSU theatre department has done within the community and its involvement with the Aberdeen Community Theatre, the Fort Sisseton State Park and on campus activities to see that it is an active, service oriented academic program.

II. Program Evaluation

- A. **Mission Centrality** - NSU Theatre is committed to meeting the educational and artistic goals of the university's mission. The curriculum is appropriate to the level and purpose of the program. The uniqueness of the degree brings in students and retains them throughout their time at NSU. The program provides a comfortable, imaginative, academic environment for students in order to explore the different disciplines of theatre that not only deepens their theatre education, but their world view as well. Through the theatre curriculum, performances and production classes, students are encouraged and free to apply what they have learned in order to develop their own creativity as well as learning how to work within a collaborative environment. Through this commitment the faculty, themselves, provide a role model for leadership, integrity and creative freedom. The NSU theatre department gives students the opportunity to learn in a pre-professional atmosphere. Exploring a range of styles, the program continues to meet current trends in theatre as well as exposing students to work that deals with societal issues, topics, challenges and debates. As artisans the students, and even audiences, are exposed to theatrical events and teachings that are not just confined to local issues, but world issues as well and as a result are better informed about the world in which they live. In looking at the department assessment and the university and department mission statements this review must say that theatre is an art form that demands a clear understanding of research and critical thinking and this theatre department is committed to fulfilling the missions through their curriculum and artistic activities. Theatre is, and always will be, a social tool. This program meets all aspects of the university and the department's mission.

- B. Program Quality - The NSU Theatre Department offers students a strong, artistic learning environment. The atmosphere is conducive to academia, but students are also encouraged to explore their talents, creativity and the depths of their own imagination. Through strong on campus and off campus resources students are provided a large number of opportunities to increase their liberal arts knowledge and theatrical knowledge/experiences. Faculty and staff have a great deal of professional and academic experience and are always engaged in scholarly, creative, professional activities, and service projects that enhance instructional expertise in their areas of specialty. This is then shared with all involved, thus increasing the quality of the program. In addition, the department provides opportunities to view quality theatrical events in other cities and their involvement with the Kennedy Center American College Theatre Festival and only increases their student's exposure to the world of theatre and provides them early opportunities for networking, not to mention the professional internship possibilities provided to students. The department is fortunate to have a wonderful depth of diversity regarding interests, specializations and experience within the faculty and staff.
- C. Costs - The costs of the program as outlined within the NSU Institutional Program Review appear to be in line with traditional budgets of similar theatre programs within liberal arts universities across the country. Though this program, and others like it, do not create a lot of money, this reviewer can tell you, that based on interviews with the theatre department faculty, the money that is brought in through theatrical activities helps support the program and its production season. As with any arts organization, this reviewer will state, there is never enough money provided to the arts and many are expected to be self-sufficient.
- D. Program Productivity - The department has had good, albeit slow, success with enrolling students into its program. However, this success has seen a decline over the last couple of years, not due to anything the department has done, but due to the delays with the remodel of the JFAC and the building of black box theatre. This has had a negative effect on the program and its recruiting of students. In addition, all theatre classrooms and performance venues were unavailable and the program had to make due finding alternative locations to educate and to perform.
- E. Plans for the Future - The NSU theatre department is looking forward to being back in the Johnson Fine Arts Center and getting back to work with its mission. They wish to get back to numbers similar to those before the JFAC remodel. The department will also be looking at better utilization of the theatre minor component within the department as it relates to better support of theatrical events. The department would also like to look into the creation and addition to the curriculum of costume, makeup, design and dance classes.

In addition, they will be looking at curriculum changes that will better supplement the remodeled facility. This would include future course offerings and discussions and meetings within the department and university in preparation for an effort at future accreditation with the National Association of Schools of Theatre (NAST).

III. Overall Assessment

A. Strengths

- Dedication to scholarship, creative research and creative activities.
- The department provides a strong curriculum for musical theatre majors.
- Strong general education component to a liberal arts university.
- Provides good insight to local, regional, national and world views and issues.
- Strong community outreach and engagement.
- Meets the universities and departmental mission statements.
- Experienced faculty/staff with plethora of professional theatre experience.
- Hands-on participation in the creation process of theatre.
- Exposure of students to a wide variety of opportunities within the field of theatre.
- Graduates have largely continued their work as theatre artists.
- Strong internships.
- Updated facility with Johnson Fine Arts Center
- New black box for various staging opportunities.
- Very strong relationship with Aberdeen Community Theatre
- Very strong relationship with Ft. Sisseton State Park/Fort Players
- Strong relationship with theatre professionals nationwide.

B. Limitations

- Time to re-Build a program after a long delay to the JFAC remodel and build.
- Time: All members of the theatre department are stretched too thin.
- Overload. The need for release time.
- Lack of faculty for such a strong program.
- Lack of Diversity.
- Only a musical theatre degree, students want an additional, non-musical degree.
- Need for better theatre technology. E.g. lighting instruments, sound equipment, software, and scene shop tools.
- Need for a dedicated musical theatre keyboard.
- No compensation of overload work.
- Communication of out of department scheduling
- Students want more 'face time' with theatre faculty and staff who are unavailable due to being stretched too thin with other theatre responsibilities.
- Students want more exposure to professional theatre productions.
- Students want more actual classes and less independent studies.

IV. Recommendations

Based on interviews, observations and knowledge of the program and other similar programs nationwide, the evaluator has many recommendations.

Recommendation: The addition of a fourth instructor/employee to supplement the scheduling, running of technical aspects and hosting of events in the fine arts building and for the Krikac Auditorium. This recommendation is based on the current workload of Tina Hanagan, NSU Theatre's technical director. At present, this individual is stretch way to thin, being responsible for several areas and the technical elements of these areas for scheduled events. Events that are sometimes slated at the same time or overlapping. These events are not only NSU events, but

outside organizations occasionally rent these spaces and there have been instances when Ms. Hanagan has needed to be in two or three locations at one time and must choose which one takes priority, leaving the other spaces to wait for her to arrive late, or sometimes not at all. In discussions with Ms. Hanagan, she states that she does not like to do this, as it really does reflect poorly upon the department and the university, but in most instances cannot be avoided. Another aspect of this, which was brought up by faculty and students, was the need for better scheduling communication. Unfortunately, the other two faculty members within the department are not available to support Ms. Hanagan as their own workloads prevent from assisting. At present it is an issue, but with the newly remodeled spaces and the addition of the new black box, the fear is that usage within JFAC will increase making this issue worse than what it is now. In addition, it is this reviewer's observation that this goes far beyond the requirements of her position which is Technical Director. A job that requires her to build the technical elements for each of the theatre department's productions as well as sometimes designing sound, lights and scenic elements for NSU productions as well as overseeing budgets, purchasing of materials and supervising student work crews. Ms. Hanagan's extreme workload was brought up by all who were interviewed, administrators, faculty, staff and students. In fact, when interviewing students, about Tina Hanagan, the first thing they said about her was "Busy, busy, busy!"

Recommendation: The addition of a Bachelor of Arts in Theatre degree into the program/curriculum. As stated above, NSU's musical theatre program is a very good, vibrant program that has garnered a lot of attention within the region. But as a supplement to this outstanding program it is highly recommended that there be the addition of a The Bachelor of Arts degree program incorporates a liberal arts education with a thorough study of the dramatic arts and would supplement the current BA in Musical Theatre, bringing in students who have a keen interest in theatre, but not the musical side. These would include students who have an interest in directing, stage management, costuming, designing, straight acting and the technical elements of theatre. Which, after observations and interviews and the expertise of Josh Frachiseur and Tina Hanagan, NSU theatre is very strong with, or in the case of the latter a BA in Technical Theatre would be recommended if NSU wants to distinguish itself differently from other similar programs in the state. This reviewer would like to note that this recommendation was also outlined, by the students interviewed, as a necessity for the current program. In all honesty, a musical theatre degree and a technical theatre degree would go hand in hand and be very unique and now, with the newly renovated fine arts building and the addition of the black box theatre, the timing of such an addition could be more perfect.

Recommendation: The addition of another faculty member within the department to alleviate workload issues with all members and to supplement a growing program. At present all faculty and staff members within this program can be considered as being in 'overload' status. Professor Daniel Yurgaitis has been in perpetual overload status since he first arrived at NSU (without compensation) and this is a lot to ask of a faculty member, especially one whose duties go far beyond the typical 9:00 to 5:00 job.

I am going to go off topic here as I think it should be pointed out, for the record, what theatre departments have to do. As a theatre academic in South Dakota and Indiana I can tell you that there is a huge misconception about theatre. Many believe it is easy and that it can be done by anyone at any time and be done quickly. This is absolutely not the case. There is a great deal of planning and organization that must happen before a show can even start. (Finding the right play, creating a budget, finding a production team and then each member does an analysis of the show

based on their field of expertise, creating a rough schedule, and then meeting to make sure all are on the same page) Once that is done, then you can start the process of bringing that play to the stage. (Auditions, rehearsing, designing, arrange for the creation or purchase of sets, costumes, and props within the budget and needs of the show. Publicity, box office, promotion) Then the productions in front of live audiences. (Box office needs, front of house needs, actor, and show needs from show to show, etc.)

In an effort to outline the need of another faculty member, let me quickly outline the duties of those in a typical theatre company. Now these are just the duties of a single theatre occupation in a non-academic setting. Now mind you, most of these are done outside the standard academic hours of 9:00 to 5:00 and done during rehearsals in the evening. I understand that these may not be 100% accurate to this specific department, but it does give a good understanding of what is required outside the academic setting.

Dan Yurgaitis - Director, Choreographer, Producer

Producer

- Creates a master production schedule
- Provides production budget outline for each show
- Becomes familiar with the roles and responsibilities of other key players in the mounting of a production
- Coordinates and is responsible for all aspects of production, both technical and artistic
- Organizes, prioritizes and manages finances, personnel, and scheduling
- Keeps up to date on all developments from inception to final wrap-up of the project
- Ensures everyone has a clear job description and is able to do their job effectively
- Fosters team spirit
- Engages designers and department heads in consultation with the director
- Attends all production meetings, the first rehearsal, all of technical week, and opening night
- Oversees for transportation of technical items, costumes, props, furnishings, etc. to the theatre
- Ensures all departments have completed their cleanups and returns of borrowed or rented equipment
- Works within a budget

Director

- Helps in the creation, reviews and provides feedback on the proposed production schedule/season
- Assesses and analyzes every aspect of the play: plot, character, mood, concept, rhythm, style, both literary and theatrical
- Brings together the numerous complex portions of a production – including script, actors, set, costuming, lights, sound and music – into a unified whole
- Researches the playwright, the period, and the style
- Makes arrangements and oversees the audition call
- Executes and interprets the artistic components of the show (what the show is really about)
- Rehearses, blocks/choreographs and prepares the actors
- Communicates the artistic vision to the production team
- Attends all production meetings

- Works within a budget

Choreographer

- Auditions the dancers and may make recommendations to the director for casting
- Schedules dance rehearsals with the music director and the stage manager
- Teaches the cast members how to execute the choreography
- identifies and trains a dance captain, if appropriate for the show
- Leads choreography rehearsals
- Blocks and directs those areas of the play that move into and out of the musical numbers
- Functions as a movement coach throughout the show, particularly if it is a period piece and a certain style of movement is required.

Josh Frachiseur – Scenic Designer, Lighting Designer, Prop Designer, Sound Designer

Scenic Designer

- Researches time period to ensure period accuracy to the extent possible
- Creates a set design
- Collaborates with director, costume and lighting designers on a colors
- Creates a set of accurate drawings for the builders
- Creates drawings for props/furnishings coordinator
- Attends first rehearsal and presents design concept to director
- Attends load- in and set- up, dress rehearsals, etc.
- Coordinates scenic artists and set painters
- Coordinates props and furnishings with the appropriate coordinator

Lighting Designer

- Creates a lighting design
- Collaborates with director, set and costume designers on a colors
- Creates a lighting plot, ground and elevation plan
- Creates cue sheets
- Attends cue- to- cue rehearsal and makes and necessary changes
- Coordinates rental of additional lighting equipment
- Attends load- in, lighting hang, lighting focus, level set, dress rehearsals, etc.

Prop Designer

- In accordance with the director's vision, builds, borrows, rents props or furnishings
- Supplies rehearsal props and/or furnishings
- Attends load- in and set- up, dress rehearsals, etc.
- Arranges to replenish or repair props and/or furnishings during the run

Sound Designer

- Collaborates with director on establishing a sound design (effects, soundscapes, ambient music)
- Collaborates with other designers
- Creates a sound plot (speaker location, etc.)
- Creates cue sheets
- Attend cue- to- cue rehearsal and make any necessary changes
- Coordinates rental of additional sound equipment
- Attends load- in, sound system set- up, level set, dress rehearsals, etc.

Tina Hanagan - Technical Director

- This person builds the show with help from various crews

- Organizes and costs technical needs of the show — materials for the set, lights, costume materials and rentals, sound equipment and props
- Supervises, coordinates and balances technical needs of the director, designers and department heads
- Manages and directs the crew and technicians up to the final dress rehearsal
- Attends production meetings
- Attends cue- to- cue rehearsal
- Supervises load- in and set- up,
- Attends technical- only rehearsals, technical rehearsals, dress rehearsals
- Works within a budget

There are so many things that must happen in order for a season of shows to be produced. What I am getting at here is that I feel administrators need to realize that each theatre department is not just an academic department, but a full-fledged production company. Responsible for a theatrical season of shows.....oh, yes, and the teaching of all theatrical elements to students during the day.


This reviewer recommends an additional faculty member/members to alleviate the workload issues and academic overload issues within the current department of theatre at Northern State University.

Recommendation: Release time should be given to those theatre faculty members whose duties also include directing a production or other time consuming artistic projects that are a part of the theatrical season. This reviewer recommends that NSU faculty release time be given and defined as allowing faculty time off from teaching and other responsibilities to focus on artistic research. At present the full-time workload in the NSU theatre department, consistent with University policy, is four courses (12 hours) per semester, which may be comprised of classroom and other teaching, advising, committee assignments, and/or administrative duties. The goal of the recommended release time is to distribute and, so far as possible, to equalize responsibilities among the faculty in ways that accomplish the department's teachings, scholarly and academic mission as well as its artistic endeavors as part of its theatrical season. It is recommended that the faculty be given $\frac{3}{4}$ on and $\frac{1}{4}$ release. Meaning, $\frac{3}{4}$ time be spent teaching classes (3 classes) and $\frac{1}{4}$ release time be given for artistic roles as part of the NSU Theatre season.

V. Persons Interviewed

Provost - Dr. Alan LaFave
 SFA Interim Dean - Dr. William Wieland
 Director of Theater - Daniel Yurgaitis
 Department Chair - Peter Kilian
 Assistant Professor of Theatre - Joshua John Frachiseur
 NSU Theatre Technical Director - Tina Hanagan
 Academic Advisor - Tracy Jurgens
 Theatre Student - Halley Hubbard
 Theatre Student - Tyler Lanam
 Past Theatre Student - Seth M. Honerman

Respectfully Submitted, July 28, 2016



Daniel L. Miller
 Associate Professor of Theatre, Dakota Wesleyan University