



AN HONORS UNIVERSITY IN MARYLAND

College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences
University of Maryland, Baltimore County
1000 Hilltop Circle
Baltimore, MD 21250

PHONE: 410-455-2385
FAX: 410-455-1095
VOICE/TTY: 410-455-3233
WEB: www.umbc.edu

June 21, 2017

TO: Antonio Moreira, Vice Provost
FROM: Scott E. Casper, Dean, College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences
RE: Academic Program Review, Department of Theatre

I have carefully reviewed the Self-Study for the Academic Program Review of the Department of Theatre (THTR) and the report of the External Reviewers. The Self-Study explains effectively the Department's many changes since the previous APR, its ongoing challenges, and a number of potential future goals. The External Reviewers' report provides uncommonly probing advice and recommendations, not just about resources but also about departmental assessment and planning activities. Both are important documents, at an opportune moment for a department with a long tradition of excellence at UMBC.

Context: To provide some context for the Reviewers' report, I offer some data on enrollment in the Department. (This is routinely part of the CAHSS Dean's report for APRs.)

Student numbers: Posted IRADS data for Fall 2016 indicate that the department had 110 total majors (primary and additional plans) and 31 minors. The number of majors is 20.9% higher than in Fall 2013 (91); the number of minors has remained between 31 and 35 each Fall since 2013.

Student-faculty ratios: In Fall 2016, the student-faculty ratio (SFR) for students in all plans was 12.6 for full-time faculty, as against 24.7 for CAHSS; it was 11.3 for FTE faculty, as against the CAHSS average of 20.7; and it was 19.9 for tenured/tenure-track FTE faculty, as against the CAHSS average of 34.7. The SFR for FTE students was 8.1 for full-time faculty, as against 19.1 for CAHSS; it was 7.2 for FTE faculty, as against 16.1 for CAHSS; and it was 12.7 for tenured/tenure-track FTE faculty, as against 26.9 for CAHSS. The fact that SFRs are lower than College ones is due to the

lab/studio nature of instruction in the discipline of Theatre: beyond the introductory level, most courses are capped at 12-18 students.

Reviewers' Evaluation:

The Reviewers offer glowing praise for UMBC's Theatre Department, in many areas of endeavor:

- Overall: The program is “a hidden gem,” with strengths “borne of careful attention to detail, depth of critical reflection, and commitment to collaboration.” This is “a program of high quality that is seeking constant improvement ... at a moment of significant opportunity to reach higher, and seeks the best pathway to get there.”
- Teaching: THTR offers “a robust and inventively assessed series of classes and participatory experiences”; students “clearly recognize that they are engaged in high quality educational opportunities, practice-based learning, and are receiving remarkable individualized attention.”
- Assessment: The program has “specific, articulate, and actionable” student learning outcome goals, and has used assessments regularly “to determine if course design is achieving desired outcomes.” Departmental learning goals are “connected to current models of the discipline in the profession and higher education.”
- Production quality: The Reviewers found a performance of *The Mail-Order Bride* to be “truly exceptional.”
- Faculty scholarship: The “scholarly work by faculty members both on campus and elsewhere is of a very high level,” with most faculty (tenure-track and non-tenure-track) “engaged in the creation of new work and new approaches to classical texts” and many “employed regularly at respected professional venues ... and shar[ing] their work at national conferences as appropriate to their research foci.”
- Physical resources: The Performing Arts and Humanities Building offers “extraordinary” resources, and the Department makes “disciplined, well-considered use of the facilities” by considering “the most effective use of space and equipment.”

The Reviewers discuss a wide variety of subjects, ranging from departmental planning to effective use of spaces. Several ideas appear in multiple places in their report, probably because all facets of THTR's work are quite interconnected. I will organize their recommendations and suggestions as follows and suggest that the Action Plan do the same: (a) Vision and Planning; (b) Curriculum (including productions) and Assessment; (c) Faculty Scholarship; (d) Student Recruitment; (e) Resources. My response below includes also some feedback on the directions articulated in the Self-Study (pp. 45-47).

(a) *Vision and Planning*: The Reviewers applaud the Department's process of planning, which the Self-Study explains has been ongoing since 2015. The Reviewers offer several specific recommendations.

- Goal-setting: At a Fall 2017 departmental retreat focused on vision and priority setting, reflect on alignment with the UMBC Strategic plan; and seek to hone the various goals in the Self-Study to three “memorable and achievable” items with “specific tactics to realize them,” possibly by combining elements of different goals listed in the Self-Study. *I do not precisely agree with this recommendation. The seven values identified in the Self-Study are compelling; although some might be fruitfully combined, none should be sacrificed. Actions that simultaneously advance multiple values*

(e.g., moving the field forward and preparing students for today's field) might receive some priority in the planning process.

- Collaboration: “That the department seek, and the college create, opportunities to foster deliberate and specific connections to queries and issues of other disciplines across the university,” including STEM areas.
 - The College and University have been working to develop cross-disciplinary efforts in areas such as health equity, public humanities, the environment, and cybersecurity.
 - *To the extent that engaging more directly in these conversations can help Theatre deepen connections with University-wide initiatives, this could be valuable—not primarily for potential funding (though that could be an ancillary benefit), but rather to connect students’ experience across fields and possibly bring more students and faculty into contact with THTR’s work.* Such collaborative endeavors would need to enhance, not undermine or supplant, THTR’s disciplinary objectives.
- Inclusion and Diversity: The Reviewers recommend that “The department’s season selection process should seek out and prioritize work that places the stories, voices and bodies of minorities on stage in fully committed ways”—*a recommendation with which I concur strongly, and a desire which the Department articulates in its Self-Study.*
- National visibility:
 - “Seek opportunities to engage with the Association for Theatre in Higher Education to disseminate work explored and created at UMBC.” *This is certainly worth exploring.*
 - “Consider accreditation by the National Association of Schools of Theatre.” *I would need more information about why this is desirable: whether peer institutions routinely seek NAST accreditation; what benefits accrue from such designation (e.g., whether it makes a difference in student recruitment), etc.* If NAST accreditation would impose significant additional costs on the University (e.g., mandates for additional resources), it is unlikely that we would pursue it.

(b) Curriculum (including productions) and Assessment: The Reviewers’ recommendations mostly concern alignment. (See below under Resources regarding faculty hiring.)

- Course-level vs. program-level changes: The Reviewers write that, notwithstanding how THTR has “closed the loop” through assessment in specific courses, “it was not clear . . . where [assessment] is used to make program level changes.” They recommend that a faculty committee “gather all course learning outcomes, and align those with the four learning goals of the program to answer the question, ‘are all program learning outcomes served by the course learning outcomes?’ (and to what extent). Look for disconnection among course objectives in the overall curriculum as perceived by students.”
 - The Reviewers note a potential disconnect between course-level and program-level assessment. *I recommend that THTR work with the Faculty Development Center to devise an assessment plan that helps the Department better link assessment of program objectives with specific learning outcomes.*
 - One byproduct of this disconnect may be what the students reported to the Reviewers: all instructors do not use the same vocabulary to describe objectives. *Stronger program-level assessment may help address this concern.*
- Surveys of graduates: The Reviewers recommend “link[ing] student success after graduation to stated student learning outcomes of the program” and collaborating with IRADS (institutional research) to include this item in surveys of graduates. *I think this is an excellent*

idea, if such a question does not already appear in UMBC's surveys of its graduates. The first step is for THTR to consult with IRADS.

- **The Self-Study identifies a number of other potential directions (not exclusively curricular).** These range from experiences at particular points in a student's career (first-year experience, senior BFA project) to reinstating a certification path in secondary education. They also include different sorts of thematic content, connected to civic engagement and current issues, cross-disciplinary questions, etc. It is encouraging that the Department is thinking so creatively and comprehensively about the possibilities. In its discussions, a key question may be not "whether" but "when": which innovative ideas to pursue in what order, over the next three to five years.

(c) Faculty Scholarship: The Reviewers' recommendations appear at various points in their report.

- "Commissioning grants in combination with travel support, for development of ensemble work and new plays in processes of collaborative discovery that can only be met by producing actualized productions." (This may be connected to the directions described in the Self-Study as "support new play development, both in coursework and the production season" and "support workshop productions outside of the regular season.")
 - The College currently provides research support for CAHSS faculty in the form of travel grants to present/exhibit at conferences or other venues (up to \$1,200 per year per faculty member); competitive Dean's Research Awards (up to \$5,000, no more than every second year); and Summer Faculty Research Fellowships in conjunction with CAHSS research centers, including CIRCA (grants of \$6,000). Other existing sources include InterArts funding (a sum to each arts department every year) and the various programs of the Office for the Vice President for Research (VPR). *I recommend that Theatre first investigate the precise boundaries of each of these existing programs, after which it might consider recommendations to the administration if there are ways to apply them more aptly to performance.*
 - *Following such exploration, I would need more information about commissioning grants before entertaining a proposal.* What is the typical amount of such grants, and what do they cover? Might such grants be more useful to THTR faculty, individually or collectively, than some existing research funding programs? If programs as currently devised do not align with the needs of a particular discipline, I am open to discussing discipline-specific alternatives, both within the College and with the Provost, VPR, Office of Institutional Advancement (OIA, for potential external funding), etc.
- Scholarship of teaching and learning: The Reviewers suggest that faculty "examine and write about best practices around the formation of a creative ensemble of theatre faculty and students at UMBC," either for "national journals" and/or for "national and international conferences." *Given faculty time (which is not unlimited), this suggestion could serve to expand our national profile and provide an opportunity for faculty scholarship.*

(d) Student Recruitment: The Reviewers offer three strategies, each with various approaches. None of these is a specific recommendation, but *I do endorse developing, prioritizing, and pursuing coherent strategies.*

- "Engage students from all disciplines on campus in order to enhance the local reputation of the program." THTR has made efforts in this direction, for example with free tickets to some performances of each production. Pursuing cross-disciplinary partnerships, including with STEM departments as appropriate, might also expand the reach. I also suggest consulting with Student Affairs and Enrollment Management about some role for THTR in

Welcome Week activities, to provide new students an early experience of the quality and opportunities of our Theatre program.

- “Engage as fully as time will allow in national conversations about the program” (through national and regional conferences) “and by getting high school teachers and high school students to campus.” *The latter seems imperative, in my view, and I hope that the arts recruiter in Enrollment Management will be of assistance in arranging such visits.* (One possibility might be to arrange a daytime weekday performance of one or two productions per year, specifically for groups from local high schools.)
- “Focus on community college students ... in related disciplines within a 100-mile radius.” THTR has already begun to pursue this good idea in discussions about Articulation Agreements with several area community colleges. I trust that THTR makes faculty colleagues at these institutions aware of our productions, and perhaps the Department and/or Enrollment Management could offer opportunities similar to those made available to high-school teachers and students.

(e) Resources: Here I collect various recommendations from throughout the Reviewers’ report.

- Faculty Hiring:
 - The Reviewers recommend hiring in the area of Acting and Movement, a gap since a 2016 retirement. *I am pleased that we will search in 2017-18 for a tenure-track Assistant Professor, to begin in Fall 2018. I expect that the Department will work closely with the UMBC STRIDE Fellows and the Dean’s Office to devise and execute a broadly inclusive search.*
 - *I also recommend strongly that THTR actively recruit candidates for Postdoctoral Fellowship for Faculty Diversity.* I expect that the next round will more explicitly invite candidates with terminal degrees other than the PhD (e.g., MFA), and the Dean’s Office can discuss with the Provost’s Office the challenges of time-since-degree for disciplines such as Theatre.
- PAHB Equipment and Maintenance:
 - The Reviewers note, correctly, that the University has provided considerable support for THTR’s increased expenses associated with its new home in the Performing Arts and Humanities Building. These resources include a significant operating budget increase (thus far nearly \$60K to base funding, with another nearly \$30K currently provided annually), as well as several new technical staff positions. The Dean’s Office has also funded a building-wide front-of-house manager position, which addresses needs articulated in THTR’s Self-Study.
 - The Reviewers note, also correctly, that more needs to be done. In particular, “Internal commitment must be found to deliver stable, predictable finances toward constant upkeep of the equipment inventory.” Four years ago, THTR prepared a multi-year maintenance/funding plan for all of its equipment; the Department has recently updated that document. *There must be a University-level discussion of funding for ongoing maintenance and replacement, which department and college operating budgets are not typically equipped to bear.*
 - “Management level physical plant personnel must get engaged and direct the repair/replacement of any non-working elements of the building systems (including intercom, audio, video and even lighting elements determined to be ‘of the building’). This needs to be documented, and referred to annually.” *I agree entirely. THTR faculty and staff should not bear primary responsibility for physical plant maintenance, even if they possess skills for on-the-spot troubleshooting.* The PAHB Operations Manager works closely with

Facilities, DoIT, and other campus offices. It may be necessary to convene representatives of all these units to identify and document arenas of responsibility.

- Operating Budget, echoing the Reviewers: *The portion of increased operating budget associated with the PAHB not yet funded to base (\$29.2K) should be so funded as soon as practicable, through the University's strategic budgeting process. Until such base funding occurs, this amount must continue to be funded annually (50/50 between Dean's Office and Provost's Office).* Since 2013 the Dean's Office has also been funding annually \$10,400 (as well as approx. \$4,000 for student workers or part-time staff in added operating budget, associated with THTR's curricular redesign rather than with the move into PAHB. Ideally, this amount would be added through the strategic budget process, *making the total increase \$43.4K.*
- The Reviewers offer several additional suggestions for potential external funding:
 - “Seek cross disciplinary funding with STEM areas for equipment support that can share projects and teaching/learning and joint student/faculty research opportunities.” I am not sure what this means.
 - “Provide faculty and student technical know-how as a resource to area schools and small theatres,” apparently building on a pilot program developed by THTR's lighting design faculty member. *This might be worth pursuing as a potential arts partnership with local organizations, for external grant funding. We should explore its feasibility with OLA.* This idea may well involve legal issues (e.g., working with potentially dangerous equipment off campus).
 - Consider renting PAHB facilities to professional ensembles without their own resident facility, at times of year when the spaces may be available. *The PAHB Operations Manager has developed fee schedules and guidelines for such uses of each performance space by external organizations. We already make similar arrangements for the Linehan Concert Hall; I encourage THTR (in conjunction with the Director of Arts and Culture in OLA) to explore the options for the Proscenium and Black Box Theatres—though theatrical use of spaces will differ from music use (which is often of very limited duration).* This suggestion may dovetail with the idea, mentioned in the Self-Study, to host regional theatre events.

Overall, the Reviewers prioritize the resource needs as follows; I have indicated above my recommendations as to approach:

1. Planned, regularized support for equipment repair and replacement throughout PAHB.
2. Funds for incubation of creative production projects to support faculty creative work.
3. Tenure-track replacement in Acting/Movement.
4. Assistance with internal and external marketing and messaging—for which I recommend *conversation among relevant offices about the most effective approaches, before we discuss possible funding.*
5. Stabilizing operating budget by moving the current one-time annual funding to base.

Conclusion

UMBC's Department of Theatre has a long, distinguished history—and a bright future. Over the past four years, the Department has moved into spectacular new teaching and learning spaces. We have hired outstanding new faculty and technical staff members, several of them into newly created positions. Theatre has revamped its curriculum with an eye to developments in the discipline. Its emphasis on “New Plays and New Ways” represents both a continuation of its innovative history and a statement about what lies ahead.

Over the next several years, THTR faces three interconnected challenges, all identified in the Self-Study and the External Reviewers' report. First, the Department is already at work consolidating the accomplishments of the past several years, through a planning process that includes this APR. Early in the new academic year, the faculty and staff should discuss and determine how to prioritize among many attractive ideas for further directions, with an eye to the University's Strategic Plan. Second, the Department recognizes the need to recruit students and especially faculty from a broad range of backgrounds, and to produce "plays and playwrights of more diverse voices." These goals are mutually reinforcing: accomplishing the latter should help with the former, and vice versa. Third, the Department, the Dean's and Provost's Offices, and other campus units (Facilities, OIA, etc.) must collaborate soon to devise and fund a plan for continuous maintenance and upkeep of THTR's equipment and spaces, building on the work already done.

By meeting these challenges, we will fulfill the promise represented by both the new building and the phrase "New Plays and New Ways": to educate our students at the horizon of the discipline and prepare them for 21st-century careers, to sustain and model nationally our innovative creative and scholarly work, and to provide the University and broader community with state-of-the-art productions in the thought-provoking tradition of UMBC Theatre. I look forward to working with the Department and appropriate administrative offices to continue and extend the superb work of this foundational department.