

Academic Department Student Success Plan Update 2015-2018

Department: Theater

Department Chair: Chris Berchild

Department Mission: The mission of the undergraduate Theater program at Indiana State University is to provide students with a broad and solid foundation in the artistic, intellectual, and practical aspects of theater. We seek to provide an environment that is serious, focused, collaborative, risk-taking and nurturing. It is our goal to graduate students who will continue to grow as artists, technicians, thinkers, and engaged, productive citizens serving the public good.

Department Freshmen (1st year) Retention¹ Goal(s):

Goal One—The Department of Theater would like to increase first-year student retention in our major by approximately 2% per year, with the baseline benchmark at approximately 67% (as a rough average of the last three years of data). Our Fall 2015 official number was a significant improvement over past years, but was a statistical anomaly and would therefore be unrealistic to maintain a 2% growth per annum from 76.47%.

Goal Two—The Department of Theater would like to increase enrollment amongst students out of strong high school theater programs who could both thrive within our program and become peer leaders within their classes for our less prepared students.

Action Steps (with dates & person(s) responsible):

Action Step One—To examine and identify curricular barriers to student success within the first year and make appropriate changes. We have recently (Fall 2015) altered our curriculum significantly in order to accommodate multiple pathways to timely graduation, but need to ensure that new prerequisites and course progressions for upper-division courses are not impeding first-year success. *(Responsible faculty: Chris Berchild, Chair; Arthur Feinsod, Chair of Curriculum Committee—Spring-Fall 2016)*

Action Step Two—Establish contact with potential majors and minors early and provide immediate guidance for the major. While University College advising is important, we are finding that the sooner our students begin talking with our own advisors, the smoother the progression through the major will be. *(Responsible faculty: Julie Dixon, Department Lead Advisor; Michael Jackson, Advisor for Design/Technology Concentration—Spring 2016)*

Action Step Three—Provide first-year students with opportunities to experience professional live theater events in nearby cities (Indianapolis, Chicago, Louisville, Cincinnati). Annual performance “fieldtrips” will be arranged at the department level and will be attached to introductory courses for our first-year majors. This will engage students with practical career goals and positions associated with the

¹ Departments w/o undergraduates can adapt the retention and persistence to completion sections to serve their graduate student success purposes or alternatively, integrate into the Other Goal(s), Action Steps, and Benchmarks of focal interest to department section at the end of the template.

theater industry. *(Responsible faculty: Chris Berchild, Chair; department faculty as a whole—Spring 2016)*

Action Step Four—As part of the continuing advising process and based on collected data regarding “gateway to major” courses, we will begin to investigate opportunities for supplemental instruction or peer mentoring for our majors. We will approach our Honors Service Fraternity (APO) for assistance in establishing a system of peer mentoring within the department. *(Responsible faculty: Julie Dixon, chief advisor; Chris Berchild, department chair; and Ann Warren, staff advisor for APO—Data collection and organizational discussions will begin Spring 2016)*

Action Step Five—We would like to engage with select high school programs with campus visits and an increased presence at state and regional high school thespian conferences. *(Responsible faculty: Mike Speck / new faculty hire 2016—Beginning Fall 2015)*

| <i>Retention Benchmarks²</i> | Fall 2012 cohort: | Fall 2013 cohort: | Fall 2014 cohort: |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| (by latest department) | 64.29% | 56.25% | 76.47% |
| | Fall 2015 target: | Fall 2016 target: | Fall 2017 target: |
| | 69% | 71% | 73% |

Other Freshmen Retention related benchmarks of focal interest to department³

We would like to engage at least 50% of our first-year students in production work each year. We have found that our most successful students are those that invest their time in production—whether onstage, backstage, or in the shops. We will need to begin collecting data to help verify these observations and find ways to promote this practice. This will be a long-term collection of metrics. *(Responsible faculty: Michael Jackson, Production Manager; Michelle Souza—Beginning Fall 2015)*

Department Persistence to Completion Goal(s):

Goal One—To increase both the 4-year and 6-year graduation rates by 2% per annum. Our target baseline is again a rough average of our past three years of official data (40%/60%). Since we have one of the university’s strongest junior-to-senior retention rates, our challenge lies in diagnosing issues in the path to a timely graduation. We have already increased flexibility within our major concentrations (in the new curriculum introduced this year) so that students will not have to follow as regimented of a course progression in the future.

² Department level current and historical retention and completion benchmark data to be integrated into the plan can be found through Blue Reports: <http://irt2.indstate.edu/cms/ir/blue-reports/>.

³ A retention and completion rate is an essential benchmark, but it is not necessarily the only benchmark of interest to a department. Others of interest to the department can be integrated as well.

Action Steps (with dates & person(s) responsible):

Action Step One—Examine student registration choices in the last two years of our new curriculum as they progress toward graduation. Examine why curricular choices are made that do not advance students toward graduation in a timely manner. Meet with students in the Fall of their senior year to discuss the remainder of their time at ISU. *(Responsible faculty: Chris Berchild. Beginning Fall 2016)*

Action Step Two—Though our department already engages in semi-annual audits of all of our majors and minors, advisors will mandate a 60 and 90 credit hour audit that will serve as an opportunity to discuss optimal pathway to completion. *(Responsible faculty: Julie Dixon and Michael Jackson. Beginning Fall 2016)*

Action Step Three—Work toward the curricularization of production work. Many of our students spend countless hours in rehearsal and production meetings, but they do not necessarily count toward forward movement toward graduation. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this commitment places a burden on credit-earning courses, though it is the students’ best opportunity for experiential learning. Finding a solution to this problem will allow all of our students who participate in productions to receive appropriate credit and assessment for their time spent with faculty. *(Responsible faculty: Chris Berchild, Chair; Arthur Feinsod, Chair of Curriculum Committee, and other faculty—Beginning Fall 2016)*

Action Step Four—Provide opportunities for our junior and senior majors to have contact with professionals in the theater and related industries. Though both online (Skype) and in-person networking sessions with both major industry leaders and well-placed alumni, students will be able to gain perspective and ask questions about the industry in a vocational way. *(Responsible faculty: Department faculty as a whole—Beginning Spring 2016)*

Action Step Five—Expand career-planning opportunities during a students’ final year. Integrate career-planning sessions into the major/minor capstone course (Theater Theory) to inspire students to think proactively about their career trajectory and life beyond the university. *(Responsible faculty: Chris Berchild, Spring 2016)*

| | | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <i>Completion Benchmarks</i> | Fall 2009 cohort: | Fall 2010 cohort: | Fall 2011 cohort: |
| (by latest department) | 50% (57% 6-year rate) | 10.53% (40% 6-year rate) | 34.78% (70% 6-year rate) |
| | Fall 2012 target: | Fall 2013 target: | Fall 2014 target: |
| | 40% (58% 6-year rate) | 42% (60% 6-year rate) | 44% (62% 6-year rate) |

Other Persistence to Completion related benchmarks of focal interest to department

Other Goal(s), Action Steps, and Benchmarks of focal interest to department⁴:

Other Goals:

Increase number of graduates who participate in internships while an advanced student or within a year of graduation. (Graduate school right after undergraduate school is not always advisable for theater majors)

Other Action Steps:

- Track number of theater alumni who are employed by professional companies or corporations (not necessarily in the performing arts and entertainment industry). (*Responsible faculty: Mike Speck/new faculty hire 2016. Beginning Spring 2016*)
- Send surveys to new alumni approximately 6 months after graduation (or to earlier alumni as contact information is procured) asking where they are working, how they got the job, and how they feel ISU Theater degree helped them obtain that position. This would also assist in identifying individuals for **Action Step Four** (in Persistence and Completion above). (*Responsible faculty: Mike Speck/new faculty hire 2016, Arthur Feinsod, Chris Berchild. Ongoing project beginning Spring 2015*)
- Utilize social media to contact, monitor, and promote alumni. (*Responsible faculty: Mike Speck/new faculty hire 2016. Beginning Spring 2016*)
- Actively recruit strong student leaders to apply for new Hay Scholarship for Student Interns. (*Responsible faculty: Department faculty as a whole. Beginning Fall 2016*)

⁴ Departments may have student success related goals, action steps, and benchmarks that do not fit neatly into the other categories. If so, feel free to place them here.