Indiana State University

Academic Department Student Success Plan
Annual Update: 2016-2019[1]

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 within the liberal arts tradition. We engage students in an environment that is serious, focused, collaborative, innovative 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) Retention Goal(s):

Goal One—The Department of Theater would like to increase first-year student retention in our major by approximately 1.5% per year, with the baseline benchmark at approximately 66% (as a rough average of the last three years of data). Our Fall 2014 official number was a significant improvement over past years, but was a statistical anomaly and would therefore be unrealistic to maintain a 1.5% growth per annum from 77.78%. The difference between the target and actual numbers for 2015 can only be explained by the sudden jump in the number of incoming students settling back into the statistical norms.

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[2] (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—AY 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/Fall 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

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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 theater industry. Due to funding, this actions step has been challenging, but we did see a growth in first year retention the last time we were able to dedicate specific funding to this goal (AY2014-15) *(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 Tresa Makosky, faculty advisor for APO—Data collection and organizational discussions began Spring 2016 and continue through AY2016-17)*

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 Sheldon—AY 2016-17)*

Retention Benchmarks (by latest department)	**Fall 2013 Cohort:** 56.25%	**Fall 2014 Cohort:** 77.78%	**Fall 2015 target & actual:** 66% (target), 52% (actual)
	Fall 2016 target: 67.5%	**Fall 2017 target:** 69%	**Fall 2018 target:** 70.5%

Other Freshmen Retention related benchmarks of focal interest to department

We strive 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: Mike Sheldon, Production Manager; Michael Jackson and Michelle Souza—AY2016-17)* **Data collected in 2015-2016 indicates that most students that are actively engaged in production work will retain into their second year.**

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.

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. Begun 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. Begun 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—Begun 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—Begun 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 2017)*

Completion Benchmarks (by original department)	**Fall 2010 Cohort:** No data	**Fall 2011 Cohort:** 43.75%	**Fall 2012 target & actual:** 40% (target), 53.33% (actual)
4-Year Graduation	**Fall 2013 target:** 44%	**Fall 2014 target:** 46%	**Fall 2015 target:** 48%

Completion Benchmarks (by original department)	**Fall 2008 Cohort:** 40%	**Fall 2009 Cohort:** 70%	**Fall 2010 target & actual:** 60% (target), 52.63% (actual)
6-Year Graduation	**Fall 2011 target:** 62%	**Fall 2012 target:** 64%	**Fall 2013 target:** 66%

Other Goal(s), Action Steps, and Benchmarks of focal interest to department:
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 Sheldon. Begun Fall 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 Sheldon, Arthur Feinsod, Chris Berchild. Ongoing project begun Spring 2016*)

- Utilize social media to contact, monitor, and promote alumni. (*Responsible faculty: Mike Sheldon and Ann Warren—monitor of Alumni Facebook page. Begun Spring 2016*)

- Develop new minor/major in Entertainment Technology to attract students to the department who are more interested in industry-specific hard-skill sets. (*Responsible faculty: Chris Berchild and Michael Jacksn. Beginning Spring 2017*)