

Indiana State University

2006 - 2007 Academic Annual Report

Department of Theater

Vision Statement

[View/Modify Vision](#)

Below is your vision statement from previous years. Please take this opportunity to review it and if necessary update it.

THE FIVE-YEAR VISION FOR THE THEATER DEPARTMENT Submitted by Arthur Feinsod, Chairperson The undergraduate program in the Department of Theater provides interested ISU students with a broad and solid foundation in the artistic, intellectual and practical aspects of theater through its diverse selection of courses and its many production opportunities. The program fosters a working environment – inside and outside the classroom, onstage and off -- that is serious, focused, rigorous, nurturing and energetic. It encourages students to collaborate, experiment and take initiative in the development of new plays and the thoughtful reinterpretation of established ones. Directly linked to Crossroads Repertory Theatre (formerly SummerStage), a professional summer theater company, the Department seeks to endow its students with a deep sense of professional ethics and standards as they create significant theater while at ISU and for the rest of their theatrical careers. Our most highly recognized program is our playwriting program, which has won numerous awards and recognitions through the KC/ACTF Midwest division. We plan to maintain our high level of playwriting accomplishment in the years to come, which depends entirely on the New Play Readings that we produce in December and the New Play Festival that is presented in February. The high level of acting and directing of our undergraduate and graduate students as well as the high quality design contributed by our design faculty have added enormously to our ability to impress KC/ACTF adjudicators and win so many awards. In other words, our playwriting excellence would not be possible without strengths in all our other concentrations. We therefore are committed to maintaining our strengths in all areas of theater, not just playwriting. We are also committed to using theater as a tool to serve the society at large and that is why we conduct theater classes at the Vigo County Juvenile Center and Ryves Hall, the latter being under the umbrella of Catholic Charities. We also are consistent contributors to Human Rights Day and Hate Crimes Conferences. We do all this because we feel that theater can raise consciousness and instruct and enrich at the same time that it entertains. Two of our faculty members have founded theater companies that are committed to making new work, which expands our vision of a department that specializes in producing new original theater pieces. Sherry McFadden has created FUSION through which we can better serve the needs of Ryves Hall as well as Sarah Scott Middle School as well as Terre Haute North. We now have on-going theater and dance classes in all three local schools. Sherry received a Promising Scholar grant for her work there. Julie Dixon has founded FAT GIRLS THEATRE with student members of our department as well as theater department alumni living in the area. They have a plan to bring her theater pieces to high schools to raise awareness about issues of body image. Julie has also applied for a Promising Scholar grant to help fund her efforts in this direction. In addition, Julie will direct one of our mainstage shows next fall. The play, written by one of our recent alums, award-winning playwright Jonathan Golembiecki, will also be entered as a KC/ACTF Participating Production entry. We also believe that our theater students need to be versatile in an overall climate that is very competitive and glutted with too many performers. We therefore feel it is essential that our students both choose an area of emphasis or concentration as a focus to their study, but also take a core of courses that promotes diverse skills so that our students can compete by virtue of the breadth of their theater knowledge in this competitive market place. Our alumni have had

remarkable success historically in starting new companies and thriving in established ones by being skilled in multiple theater areas and we hope to maintain that high level of versatility and accomplishment in the future.

Year in Review

Accomplishments

As you have heard, increasing public awareness of Indiana State University's accomplishments is crucial to building student enrollment, influencing policy makers, and developing a place of pre-eminence in the Midwest. What do you consider to be your department's accomplishments for the 2006-2007 year that will contribute to this effort? [Please list in priority order and limit to no more than 8.]

Among the many accomplishments that claim for the 2006-2007 season are the launching of FAT GIRLS THEATRE, the company founded by Julie Dixon and which had very successful performances of FAT, both here as part of the fall Hate Crimes Conference, and at the Indy Fringe. For her outstanding work and vision, Julie was honored at a ceremony at Cunningham Library in March and has applied for a Promising Scholar grant to help fund her work. Sherry McFadden's company, FUSION, continues to expand its operations. Not only did it present theater, dance, and puppetry work here at ISU as well as at Ryves Hall, Sarah Scott and Terre Haute North, she also brought their students to perform on our Dreiser stage as part of the Human Rights Day celebration and at a Theater at Four in the spring. Sherry's vision has been recognized and honored with our second departmental Promising Scholar grant. Chris Berchild, our first faculty member to receive a Promising Scholar grant, successfully directed DREAMING DUST, the first leg of a production process that has already included a performance at St. Stephen's Church on 7th St. and then will include a historical performance at St. Patrick's Church in Dublin, the same place where Handel's MESSIAH was first performed in 1743. This performance, which will occur next October, is the basis for Chris' Promising Scholar grant, the first one for one of our own faculty. In addition, we continue to excel in the new play categories at KC/ACTF. We continue our run as one of the top three playwriting programs in the Midwest (the top amongst those universities that, in their theater programs, focus primarily on training undergraduate playwrights). Undergraduates Leslie Arnold and Nathan Bayless wrote a one-act play and a ten-minute play respectively that were invited to be read at the KC/ACTF festival in Milwaukee in January. In addition, Leslie Arnold also competed in the area of Make-Up and Design for her make-up and hair design for POLAROID STORIES. For the first time since the early 1990's, one of our students was invited to represent Region III in Washington, D.C. Leslie had the extraordinary experience of taking make-up and hair design workshops with some of the finest professionals in the business as representative of Region III, which, by the way, is the largest participating region in the United States. In addition, our production of MEMORY HOUSE was invited for performance at the Phoenix Theatre after being presented as part of the Crossroads Rep 2006 season where it had a successful run. In the lobby during the MEMORY HOUSE run in August, the Phoenix Theatre staff put together a beautiful tribute to the outstanding theater artists working in Indianapolis who are graduates of the ISU Theater Department. The list was very long and unprecedented amongst the universities and colleges in the area. We were very proud. Finally, Peter Papadopoulos published his play LAST LOVE through Playscripts Inc., the hot up-and-coming publishing company for new plays in the United States.

Grants, Contracts & Off Campus Professional Service

What is your assessment of accomplishments in the area of grants, contracts, and off campus professional service? Are you satisfied overall? In which areas do you feel your department does particularly well? In which areas do you feel your department needs to improve?

For the fifth year in a row, we won a National Endowment of the Arts grant through Arts Ilina for

my upcoming Crossroads Rep production of A RAISIN IN THE SUN. I am very hopeful that this play will attract a large African American audience, which I hope will expand and diversify our present audience base. The grant has enabled us to bring professional actors from around this country and Trinidad. The lead actor for RAISIN IN THE SUN will be Michael Cherrie who is connected to the theater professionals who came to Terre Haute in summer 2004 to do the BRAND NEW LUCKY DIAMOND HORSESHOE CLUB, which shows how this Arts Illiana grant is enabling us to build on the International Initiative that we instituted between 2001 and 2005. We have had success with other grants. Crossroads Rep received a grant from the city of Terre Haute this summer to put on a performance of YOU'RE A GOOD MAN, CHARLIE BROWN especially for people served by Rvyves Hall and Catholic Charities. We also did an acting workshop for the Ryves Hall kids with the same actors as their teachers that they would see later on stage in the performance. It was quite successful and we hope to apply for the same grant this coming summer. We intend to perform PINOCCHIO not only for Ryves Hall but also at Fairbanks Park and we hope the city will provide us with the funds to carry out our plans. Chris Berchild received a \$1500 grant from the American Conference for Irish Studies. Those funds will enable us to bring one more student to Ireland for the DREAMING DUST performance. Sherry McFadden applied for a Wabash Valley Community Foundation arts grant to continue her work in the schools but she was turned down. She was, however, very much encouraged to reapply, which she plans to do. Julie Dixon has applied for several grants to bring FAT GIRLS THEATRE to various festivals. Unfortunately we no longer have anyone to write our grants for us so we are about as successful as I think we can be without outside help from a grants writer. We hope to keep trying to get additional funds for all of our various production projects. As far as professional service is concerned, we do a lot with KC/ACTF, USITT and Community Theatre. David Del Colletti does the light plot for all the shows presented the Region III Festival, Sherry McFadden is on the selection committee for all the Participating Entries throughout Region III, Linda, Sherry, Peter and Chris all serve as responders to shows throughout our KC/ACTF Region; Sherry, Linda and David bring students to USITT; and David does lighting designs for Community Theatre shows. This May I will be doing a directing workshop for all of next year's directors at Community Theatre.

Teaching

We would like to highlight innovative approaches to teaching. Has your department developed any pedagogies or practices you'd like to share with us? Please describe briefly.

We are constantly trying new things and developing new initiatives in our teaching. Linking our playwriting and acting classes together has enabled our playwrights to have trained actors read their scripts at the various stages of development. It has become one of our secret weapons contributing to our playwriting reputation through KC/ACTF. Moreover, FUSION and DREAMING DUST were both offered as classes and community service and productions have emerged out of class work rather than as extra-curricular activities.

Course Scheduling/Enrollment Management

How is the department making sure that students are able to get the classes they need to graduate in a timely manner?

We were asked to spread our classes out throughout the day and in so doing, some classes that traditionally had good numbers attracted few students because we were biting into work hours and evening commitments. We can't afford to do that anymore. We eliminated several classes and reassigned some faculty whose student numbers were not sufficiently high. We had to let some courses go with low numbers because students needed those courses to graduate.

Outreach

What are the outreach opportunities for your discipline? (non-traditional modes of delivery and timing, etc)

In terms of Outreach, we are teaching theater to the needy of Vigo County in new and exciting ways. For the second year in a row, we taught a regular drama class in the Vigo County Juvenile Center every Tuesday and Thursday. Last year it was taught by Christina Summers who is now the theater teacher at the International High School in Indianapolis. This year our contingent was led by graduate student Jolene Long who taught the class both semesters, with help from Lindsey Smith in the Fall and Paige Biggs in the late Fall and Spring. Each semester culminated in public performances attended by the Superintendent of schools and other Vigo County dignitaries. Even more exciting is that Christina Summers put together a handbook for doing this kind of work in similar kinds of institutions, which we plan to publish and distribute in early fall. Jolene, Lindsay and Paige tried out this handbook without consulting Christina as a test; with what was learned, revisions are being made, which will help make it an even more useful text. Thanks to the generosity of the Lilly Foundation and the Very Special Arts and Arts Illiana, we will publish and distribute this handbook to the heads of Detentions Centers all over Indiana. On May 16th, Christina, Jolene, Paige and I will present this handbook to administrators from detention centers throughout the state. We look forward to telling them vivid true stories of how the creativity of theater helped turn people's lives around, right before our very eyes. Moreover, FUSION has been bringing theater, dance and puppetry to Ryves Hall and Sarah Scott Middle School throughout this year and last. It culminated in a performance comprised of our own ISU actors and dancers joined by young actors and dancers from Ryves Hall in the spring 2006 in the performance of A DAY IN THE LIFE OF... This spring a show consisting of people from Ryves Hall, Sarah Scott children and our students was presented at Cunningham Library and in Dreiser Theater as part of Human Rights Day. This was also made possible in part by the generosity of the Promising Scholar grant that Sherry received. Moreover, our productions of FAT and LOVE/FANTASY were the centerpieces of the Hate Crimes Event this fall. Not only were these performances very well attended they were followed by talk backs and discussions on the issues raised by these shows. Jean Kesteller was our featured speaker after FAT and Linda Maule led the discussion about date rape after the performance of LOVE/FANTASY to raise consciousness about these painful issues. Obviously we do more than our share of Outreach events to inform the community about pressing issues and to teach theater, dance and puppetry and use these forms of creative engagement to help children and our own students to grow and mature into more responsible citizens of Vigo County, Terre Haute and ISU.

Assessment

Please share your stated student learning outcomes.

We expect our students to constantly improve as they develop skills in both the practical and intellectual aspects of theater. We assess this through rubrics that students have to fill out with faculty members after each production is complete. It allows the students and faculty to reflect together on the process. In addition, we assess all productions with post mortem meetings first in the Department Faculty Meetings behind closed doors and then publicly at the Theater at 4 directly following the closing of the mainstage performance. At these meetings faculty, students and staff are free to evaluate both the process and product and consider ways of improving what we do and how we do it.

Strategic Initiatives

Community Engagement I

Please summarize your faculty's efforts in community engagement this year.

Our department is constantly, even obsessively, involved in community engagement this year like the past five years. FUSION, Fat Girls Theatre, the Hate Crimes Conference, the Human Rights Day Events, theater classes at the Vigo County Juvenile Hall have all been discussed above and all make up significant elements of our strategy to use theater as a tool for social improvement. We were told by Nancy Rogers that our efforts were a crucial part in ISU receiving the important designation as one of the elite schools in terms of culturally engaged institutions. We are very proud of this fact. But we are also engaged in "enriching the cultural life of the community" through Crossroads Repertory Theatre (formerly SummerStage). Every summer we produce four or five mainstage shows and a number of New Play Tuesday readings, all of which reach not only residents of Terre Haute but, also, according to our surveys, 12 counties in Indiana, 6 in Illinois and 2 in Ohio as well as respondents from 16 different states. This shows that we have a wide regional reach in culturally enriching the wide area around Terre Haute. Moreover, between our academic year productions and our Crossroads Rep production in the summer, we estimate that we reach 8,000 people per year, which means that, since I arrived here in August 2001 we have reached around 50,000 theater-goers. We try to mix our showings with classics, new plays, musicals, comedies and dramas and so we have used theater to expand the intellectual and artistic horizons as well as to entertain a large number of our fellow citizens. All seven faculty members and three staff members are involved in some aspect of virtually every production we do. We assess all mainstage productions, do a retreat every spring with all faculty and staff participating, and are constantly reflecting on the work we do at all faculty meetings so that our community engagement requires participation and assessment from our entire team.

Experiential Learning

What is your vision for experiential learning in your department?

We implement experiential learning every day in our classes, especially our hands-on arts classes such as acting, directing, playwriting, designing and technical theater. All of those areas are built around the students learning by doing in old John Dewey fashion and we do this every day of the week (including weekends and evenings during rehearsals which go on constantly). We do not need to extend this; we are already doing it to the maximum. I am sure that we have the best contact hour ratio of any department on campus, except, perhaps, music.

Fundraising Activities

What steps have you taken to support fundraising activities in your department? How can your efforts be supported?

We are constantly having to fundraise in our department. We are always having to solicit contributions from the community for them to help make productions happen during the summer season as well as the school year. We have been very fortunate to have some very generous patrons such as Gretchen and Don Jennermann, Phyllis and Ned Dye Turner, Harriet McNeal, Sherry Dailey and others who have made it possible not only for us to do theater in Terre Haute but to take it to Ireland, Germany, and other places. This year we have continued getting a steady stream of contributions through the Foundation. Last year we raised over \$20,000 from Charter Members of Crossroads Rep and many of those patrons have equaled or surpassed their earlier contributions this year. We continue to raise money through Arts Illiana, the Indiana Arts Council and the National Endowment for the Arts and we are constantly soliciting ads for our program as well as opening night sponsorships from area restaurants. We also have been very fortunate to enjoy supplemental subsidy from the College of Arts and Sciences and President's Society. But we are always keeping our eyes open for other streams of possible funding that will enable us to maintain our high standards for the academic year and summer theater activities. We are proud that at least two of our faculty members (Chris Berchild and Sherry McFadden) have won Promising Scholar Grants for

their activities which bring our theater and our name abroad to Ireland and throughout the community, respectively. We are hopeful that Julie Dixon will be a third Promising Scholar from our Department; she applied for a grant recently though we haven't heard an answer yet.

Quality

Quality

Please provide 1-2 suggestions to increase the ability of your department or the University to meet the criteria above.

I am not sure what "criteria above" refers to but I am sure there are ways the department or the University can better meet them. If you mean the Strategic Initiatives, I feel we in the Department of Theater are meeting those criteria in many ways but that we can always do more and do better. But I do have some comments about quality. The university needs to hold on to quality basic liberal arts disciplines while pursuing experiential learning and community engagement. Philosophy and Physics Departments, for example, can never excel in these areas, but it doesn't mean that they don't play a key role in the liberal arts education of our students. They also need to be protected. Anyone with a strong intellectual predilection -- and I hope one day that we intend to try to appeal to those kinds of students, too -- will probably not want to attend a university that doesn't have free-standing departments in philosophy and physics. They also wouldn't give the time of day to a university whose university summer honors features motor sports rather than a theme like Creating a World Community in the 21st Century, or, Building Tolerance and Understanding in a Pluralistic World Culture, or, Technology and Ethics -- something that shows we are thinking about the big issues, not zoom zoom zoom. Theater has been relegated to an afterthought in Summer Honors if that is the theme as it had been in Program Prioritization since that process decided that Theater is not worthy to be called a program of distinction, one of the have nots. So what do I tell my faculty? Keep working your hearts out but don't expect anyone to notice because the arts and hardly any of the liberal arts matter enough to be deemed "Programs of Distinction." Why have the recent former chairs of the Art Department and the Music Department left and left entirely demoralized? Is it because the arts don't seem to matter to this University or is it because the liberal arts don't seem to matter? Or is it both? Something to contemplate in the wee hours.

Feedback

This section is to allow you to share your ideas for enhancing enrollment, dealing with budget and other challenges facing the university community.

It is vital that the University maintain its strongest commitment to the liberal arts mission of the College of Arts and Sciences and that quality liberal arts instruction is never efficient and that a business model should never be the final word in assessment. With the lack of assessment tools, we have had to resort to counting, and that has led to a major demoralization and loss of connection to our primary responsibility of delivering quality education to our students. We strongly believe that merging departments and prioritizing, which divides departments and programs to the haves and the have nots is terrible for the morale of the faculty and the university community in general. To force the Philosophy Department to beg at every door and the Physics Department to fold within Chemistry and the Sociology Department to disappear within Psychology and to get rid of the graduate theater program which, though it has small numbers, has had a very illustrious history is penny wise pound foolish; we will have a hard time attracting the best students when we have a school that looks like a patchwork. And there have been other poor decisions such as having Summer Honors focus on Motor Sports. All of these decisions are flashy but do not contribute to an overall feeling of a school that values a quality liberal arts education. The Theater Department is a quality department but we have now been deemed as a substandard department that doesn't deserve the special attention that the promising programs will have. How do you think that makes us feel

when our faculty work ridiculously long hours in rehearsals and still maintain high quality classrooms. It is a miracle that we have kept our faculty and staff in tact but it is because we enjoy working together even though our lives are very stressed in keeping a quality program together without official university recognition. I hope that the University rescinds program prioritization and reorganization once it realizes that it has demoralized the very departments and programs that have contributed mightily to the university's reputation. Numbers do not tell the full story and I am saddened that we have resorted to supply-and-demand thinking rather than a bolder vision for what a quality university can be in the 21st century.