President Mike Driscoll  
Indiana University of Pennsylvania  
Submitted by e-mail

30 October 2020

Dear President Driscoll:

I am writing on behalf of the Association for Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE) regarding the threatened closures of programs in Fine Arts at Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP) and the restructuring you have proposed, along with accompanying faculty retrenchments. As President of ATHE, I speak on behalf of approximately fifteen hundred faculty members, university administrators, adjunct and part-time faculty, and graduate students across the world and I encourage you to seriously reconsider the proposal to close the BA programs in Theater/Musical Theater. While I acknowledge that the challenges of these times create a need to make hard decisions, moving ahead with these potential closures would be a significant misstep as IUP moves forward into the twenty-first century.

In speaking with colleagues and students at IUP, I am further shocked by the lack of respect demonstrated in how this process has been handled. Announcing a significant restructuring and then failing to attend a Union Meet and Discuss that day seems an act of bad faith, which seems to have been followed by troubling communications gaps and lacks of clarity and consideration for your colleagues.

At a moment when there is global emphasis on the need to engage diverse voices, to expand and move forward, challenging canons and received modes of pedagogy, I note that the proposed retrenchment of five of the nine tenured faculty from the Department of Theater, Dance and Performance will likely undo the significant development you might have made institutionally, by getting rid of all the members of faculty who have been hired since 2013. Indeed of the faculty likely to remain in theatre, I understand that only one will have been hired in the twenty-first century. Is this truly a forward-looking decision, in line with the current moment and building towards the future?

Theatre is not simply an important topic of study in their own right, but across the curriculum for students pursuing other careers. I note that historically many of the students who are drawn towards IUP for the Musical Theater program end up studying in Theater and other programs, as well as creating their own concentrations. Regular studies and surveys of business leaders show that the skills and knowledges taught in studying these art forms—collaboration, creativity, clear communication, public speaking, improvisation, emotional intelligence—are valuable across all career paths. In her excellent 2012 book *Artistic Literacy*, Professor Nancy Kindelan clearly articulates the value of theatre pedagogy to the contemporary learner, writing “A theatre program’s high-impact curricular and pedagogical practices develop Liberal
Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) essential learning outcomes by encouraging cross-departmental connections, improving problem-solving skills through active rather than passive learning, and enriching cultural understanding and civic responsibility through problem-based inquiry—the study of plays and performances” (118). I hope that you will look at and carefully consider such texts as this, or Jill Dolan’s Geographies of Learning (2001) or Michelle Hayford and Susan Kattwinkel’s 2018 Performing Arts as High-Impact Practice, as you look at the future of teaching Theatre at IUP.

I am happy to discuss this further with you, should you have questions or concerns. I can be reached at president@athe.org.

Sincerest Regards,

Joshua Abrams, PhD
President, Association for Theatre in Higher Education

Director of Learning and Teaching
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CC:
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