Professor Margaret Gardner AC  
President and Vice Chancellor  
Monash University  

By E-Mail  

23 September 2020  

Dear Professor Gardner:  

I am writing on behalf of the Association for Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE) regarding the threatened closure of The Centre for Theatre Performance at Monash University. As President of ATHE, the largest Advocacy Organisation for Theatre in Higher Education globally, 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 “stop-out” the programs in Theatre and Dance. While I acknowledge that the challenges of these times create a need to make hard decisions, moving ahead with this potential closures would be a significant step backwards for Monash University and would have repercussions globally. On the 2020 QS Top Universities rankings in Performing Arts, Monash was ranked 20th, tied with Stanford University; such a closure would clearly be a shortsighted decision that would have significant effect on both the discipline and on Monash’s reputation across the board globally.

Monash’s CTP Theatre program at UHM is renowned for the work it has done locally and its global impact on the disciplines of Theatre and Performance Studies. Closing it would have significant impact on both academia and the creative industries across Australia and the world. From its partnership with the Melbourne Fringe Festival to the production of theatre makers and scholars who have taught and performed all over the world, the CTP has served as a change maker not only within theatre, but in allied fields and industries.

Theatre and Dance are not simply important topics of study in their own right, but across the curriculum for students pursuing other careers. As an expert in Industrial Relations an Human Resource, I am sure that you are aware that 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 Monash University.

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
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Director of Learning and Teaching
The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London