

THE ESSENTIAL RELATIONSHIP: CURRICULUM AND PRODUCTION
A USITT/ATHE POSITION PAPER
Supplement to TD&T Winter 1994

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INTRODUCTION

Because the live theatrical experience is the core of higher education in the theatre, a workable synthesis joining significant aspects of curricular and production practices is vital to the success of every theatre program. Students must be given opportunities to reflect on and learn from their creative work. They sometimes hold the mistaken belief that learning about and learning to do theatre are discrete and isolable activities. In the short run, programs without a workable synthesis of production and curriculum tend to burn out the creative energies of students and faculty members. In the long run, the tension between curriculum and production jeopardizes the viability of educational theatre on campus and in our society.

In this document, the Association for Theatre in Higher Education advocates principles and proposes questions which can help theatre programs to integrate their curricular and production practices. This statement extends the positions taken in "Workloads for Theatre in Higher Education" jointly authored by ATHE and USITT. While its intended audience is theatre educators, the document may also be of indirect use to academic administrators, theatre professionals, and others concerned with theatre in higher education.

PRINCIPLES AND QUESTIONS

The ATHE-USITT "Work-loads" document calls for "careful, specific, and clear formulation of the artistic and educational mission and goals of [each departmental] program." A mission-and-goals statement should clearly define the department's: (1) nature and purpose; (2) size and scope; (3) artistic and intellectual expectations; and (4) use of available and projected resources. The relationships between curriculum and production should inform this statement; adequate time and procedures to monitor and develop these relationships must also be provided. The following principles and questions have been devised to assist programs in formulating a mission-and-goals statement which takes account of the essential relationship between curriculum and production. Not all of the questions following each of the principles will be relevant to each theatre program, but enough pertain to all to ensure adequate analysis.

THEATRE STUDENTS MUST BE ABLE TO INTEGRATE THEIR KNOWLEDGE OF LEARNING ABOUT AND LEARNING TO MAKE LIVE THEATRE AS A COLLECTIVE, COLLABORATIVE, AND RECIPROCAL ACT.

* How does the department ensure that the production experience grows out of a plan for what the student needs to learn and do at a particular point in his/her education?

* Do curricular and production practices assist students in synthesizing their historical/critical knowledge with the skills they are developing in production?

* How does the program inculcate in students an understanding of the whole of theatre art while addressing the demands of a competitive theatre market for specialized, high-level skills?

* How does the department provide and protect sufficient time and opportunity for students and faculty to reflect on the context, processes, and results of the production experience?

* To what extent do extra-educational concerns-box office revenue, institutional priorities, faculty careers, etc.-threaten the integration of curricular and production practices?

* To what extent does the scale of productions determine their perceived value among faculty, students and the academic and local community?

THEATRE EDUCATION IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF ARTIST/ SCHOLARS PRIMARILY DEDICATED TO TEACHING.

* Do the department/college promotion, retention, and tenure procedures establish teaching in the classroom and production laboratory as the highest priority?

* Are time and resources allocated by the department and institution to insure preparation for high-quality teaching in both venues?

* To what extent do departmental procedures forge clear links between teaching in classrooms/studios and in productions?

* In what ways are faculty encouraged to serve as models of artistic and scholarly excellence for their students?

THEATRE STUDENTS MUST BE EDUCATED THROUGH A BROAD RANGE OF THEATRICAL, SCHOLARLY, AND CULTURAL EXPERIENCES.

* During a student's matriculation, to what extent do required courses and the season offerings encompass a wide range of periods, genres, and styles?

* Do the students' curricular and production experiences effectively teach them the importance of ethnic, gender, and cultural diversity?

*What courses and/or opportunities are offered which encourage students to see, discuss and write about or participate in professional productions?

* To what extent do season offerings and curricular requirements challenge students to formulate new approaches to explain their experiences?

* How does the department provide opportunities for students to participate in the creation of new scholarship and new theatrical work?

THEATRE EDUCATORS MUST ADOPT PROCEDURES AND USE TEACHING PRACTICES WHICH FOSTER MUTUAL RESPECT, CREATIVE RISK-TAKING, AND AN APPRECIATION OF LEARNING AS A LIFELONG PROCESS.

* How does the department utilize the dramaturgical expertise and creativity of many of its faculty and students to shape its productions?

* Do the activities through which students learn in the classroom and in production reinforce the values of trust and collaboration?

* What departmental procedures encourage or inhibit special offerings designed to culminate in or relate directly to production?

* How does the department protect the processes of learning from the pressures of delivering a product in classroom and production work?

* What department policies and procedures encourage or inhibit a "crisis management" approach to making theatre?

*How does the department encourage artist/scholars to become leaders in pedagogy, research, and experimentation?

* How does the department create an atmosphere where the joy of independent and lifelong learning is fundamental?

PROGRAMS MUST PROVIDE STUDENTS WITH SPECIFIC METHODS AND SUFFICIENT TIME AND FLEXIBILITY TO BECOME INDEPENDENT LEARNERS.

* How do curricular and production practices create a need, a desire, and various methods for independent learning?

* How much flexibility does the program have for students to work independently or with each other?

CONCLUSION

USITT and ATHE recommend that theatre programs evaluate the relationship between their production and curricular practices in accordance with the above principles and questions. On the basis of such an assessment, many departments may decide to examine the number and scope of their productions, to reform their curriculum, and to explore new pedagogical methods in all arenas of learning. In return, educational goals and objectives may be better served, and students, faculty, and staff may find greater satisfaction in their scholarly and artistic lives.

The ideas for this statement were developed at several joint meetings between representatives of ATHE and USITT between 1991 and 1992. The following people contributed substantially to the final document: Willard F. Bellman, California State University, Northridge; D. Bartlett Blair, Wright State University; Carole Brandt, The Pennsylvania State University; Firman H. Brown, Ohio State University; Raynette Halversen-Smith, Kent State University; Mark Heckler, Siena College; Gil Lazier, Florida State University; Bruce A. McConachie, College of William and Mary; Donald L. Rosenberg, Miami University of Ohio; Bob Schmidt, University of Texas at Austin; and Jim Symons, University of Colorado at Boulder.

SUPPLEMENT TO TD&T WINTER 1994