GRADUATE SCHOOL PROGRAM REVIEW
DEPARTMENT OF THEATER AND DANCE

May 11, 2006

Review Committee:
   Dominick J. Casadonte, Jr. Chemistry and Biochemistry, Chair, TTU
   Tina Fuentes, Art, TTU
   Alan Shinn, Music, TTU
   Tice L. Miller, University of Nebraska, Outside Reviewer

Overall Program Assessment:       Good +

Program Overview and Vision

   The Department of Theater and Dance (THAD) offers three post-Baccalaureate degree options: 1) the Masters of Art degree in Theater Arts, a degree emphasizing breadth of knowledge, 2), the Master of Fine Arts degree, a terminal degree with emphasis in performance and pedagogy (a change from the previous “acting and directing” track, as suggested by the National Association of Schools of Theaters during the Department’s last accreditation in 2002), design, playwriting, or arts administration, and 3) a Ph.D. in Fine Arts, a multidisciplinary degree involving Art, Music, and Philosophy. The Ph.D. student with a major area in theater must choose two tracks of concentration from history/theory/criticism, acting and directing, design, arts administration, and playwriting.

   The mission statement and vision for the Department of Theater and Dance are well articulated and ambitious. What one notices immediately upon an examination of the vision to “exhibit and promote the highest standards” is that while, on the one hand, the number of graduate students in both the Masters and Doctoral programs has increased by 50% in the past five years (clearly within the action portion of the department’s mission; this reviewer notes that the number of graduate credit hours generated has almost doubled in the past five years), the number of faculty in the department has increase by only 20% over the same time period. The ability of the Department to continue to exhibit and promote the high standards they have set for themselves is becoming increasingly compromised by the limited number of faculty. The number of faculty at Texas Tech in the Department of Theater and Dance is between 50 and 100% lower than at their peer institutions. This results in faculty workloads that are excessive (30 – 50% higher in 2004 than comparable units with Texas Tech). Clearly, if the Department is to follow their vision, additional human resources are needed. The committee has noted that in comparison with the review of six years ago, the Department has made significant improvements to their programs and have been good stewards of the resources provided.

   Special attention within the vision of the Department should be paid to the Ph.D. program in Fine Arts. This program satisfies a much-needed niche market for students who wish to teach at either smaller, four-year or Masters-granting institutions as well as Ph.D.-granting institutions. It is an innovative program (as indicated by the National Association of Schools of Theaters during the Department’s last accreditation). As an indication of its success with regard to promoting the mission and vision of the Department, the numbers of Ph.D. students in the
program (31) is larger than any of the peer institutions listed (and indeed, one of the largest numbers in the country). The success of this program and the M.F.A. program continues to place a strain on the limited resources of the Department, and this situation must be addressed. It is suggested by the committee that the number of faculty lines (FTE) be increased from the current 11-13 to at least 16-24.

**Faculty Productivity:**

The faculty members who have been recently hired (2005) are coming with very strong credentials and national reputations. This complements the research strengths that are evident among other individual existing faculty. These individuals have continued their research productivity since the last review and have maintained a high level of local, regional and national productions. Their visibility has been greatly enhanced through touring, design exhibits, publications, presentations, and collaborative works, to name a few.

The faculty members are strongly encouraged to continue their commitment to excellence by exploring the opportunities provided by the TTU Internal Grants for Research, Scholarship and Creative Activity in the Arts and Humanities. This would give faculty an extended opportunity for many of the achievements listed above. Members of the faculty indicated that the faculty should receive more credit for directing and designing Main Stage productions, and they felt that more faculty lines in Design Technology, History/Theory/Criticism, Movement/Dance, and Arts Administration were needed.

The teaching workloads seem to be excessive, noting especially that 2004 reflected a substantial jump in productivity over the previous year. Furthermore, the department averaged more than the college or universities production for that same year. The faculty’s commitment to service to the program and university is to be commended. The workload could show a little more balanced distribution amongst the tenured/tenure track faculty and caution should be taken not to overload the junior faculty. Another workload component that should be considered is the marked increase in GPTI’s. In order to better assist, guide and mentor the GPTI’s, there needs to be an increase in faculty to the program. Given that all graduate students are mentored once they enter the program, the faculty workload immediately increases. This is a particular problem given that the THAD program has seen a progressive increase in the number of GPTI’s over the past six years. Of particular note is the extremely large Ph.D. and M.F.A. committee loads of two of the faculty.

**Quality and Quantity of Graduate Students and Graduates**

As indicated previously, the number of graduate students in the program has increased significantly over the past five years. With the increase in quantity is a concomitant increase in quality as attested both by an increase in GRE scores (by 50-100 points depending on the year) and faculty self-assessment. There is a reasonable gender diversity in the department, while the ethnic diversity could be improved, perhaps by more vigorous recruiting at HBCU and Hispanic-serving institutions. Still, it is noted that the number of African American students in the program has increase by 100% over the course of the past five years.

One troubling statistic is the recently low number of students who matriculate once accepted. It has been suggested by the faculty and corroborated by the students that one possible reason for this is lack of competitive funding for GPTIs and TAs, especially when the cost of
tuition and health care are factored in. Additional university resources for competitive packages will perhaps improve matriculation rates.

The graduates of the program have found in most cases satisfying career paths based on their degree options. Student mentoring and advising was considered to be very strong. The students suggested that Directing and Acting classes could and should be scheduled at the same time. More help with job placement and networking was a strong concern and need voiced by the students as well.

Two paramount issues need addressing according to the students in the program. These include 1) student workloads. The students indicated that 20 contact hours per week was excessive, especially if they are, in addition, required to be involved with the Main Stage productions at night (they felt that not everyone should have to audition for these productions). A recommendation of 12 contact hours maximum for GA/GPTI’s seemed more appropriate to them, and is in line with other departments on campus. 2) More safety training is needed in shops. A shop manager staff position needs to be added. GA/GPTI job security was indicated as a concern because of the Theater Department’s philosophy of having a third of the positions new every year with only a one-semester contract guaranteed. The cost of summer school is also a concern. Scholarships are needed to continue with health insurance. Graduate students need more supervision of the classes that they are teaching. Overall, the graduate students self-rating of their experience averaged out to a B/B+.

Curriculum and Program of Study

The committee overall was impressed with the breadth of areas of concentration offered. Of particular discussion was the Ph.D. in Fine Arts and whether all of the degree programs were necessary. The outside reviewer was concerned about the appropriateness of the Ph.D. degree, since the M.F.A. is largely a terminal degree today at many institutions. The outside reviewer did indicate, as did the rest of the committee, however, that the degree was innovative. The other members of the committee, and indeed the faculty, indicated that the Ph.D. degree fills a much-needed regional niche with regard to students who are interested in teaching at institutions of higher education. It was suggested that perhaps the Department consider the need for the M.A. degree and the Ph.D. emphasis in design with regard to current corporate practices. Adding more courses in Literature/Criticism for the Ph.D was an approach also suggested by members of the review committee. One suggestion by the outside reviewer was that the Department consider either as an addition or as a replacement degree the possibility of an M.B.A. in Arts Administration. The examination process for the Ph.D. emphasizes the breadth of learning in the fine arts. The students and faculty suggested that, while difficult, the system generated students who were prepared for a wide variety of career options. The single largest problem voiced by the students was the lack of ability to find sufficient acting and, especially, directing opportunities during their time in the program. An additional theater performing arts space would help to obviate this problem. The committee’s analysis of the program of study indicated that the M.F.A. program is comparable to those of other institutions (e.g., the University of Colorado), while the Ph.D. program is most favorably compared in type to the D.F.A. program at Yale.
Facilities and Resources

One of the most pressing issues regarding the quality of education in the graduate program of the Department of Theater and Dance is that the facilities remain very inadequate and unsafe as noted by the NAST accreditation team in 2002. *There is only one classroom (which also serves as the Green Room) in the theater complex.* The lack of rehearsal space greatly affects those graduate students pursuing a major in performance and pedagogy. *Many high schools in Texas have better theater facilities.* This affects the recruitment and retention of quality graduate students.

A majority of the classes are being taught in other buildings on campus and that creates an uncertainty about future availability. There is also a problem with accessibility and storage when borrowing classroom space from other departments. Although small, the acquisition of the Speech/Hearing space is an improvement that should be noted since the last graduate review. This facility is mostly used to house faculty offices and TA/GPTIs. There is one small room that is used to teach Lighting Design. The renovations were all funded with the Theater Department’s own budget. Also since the last review, renovations have been made to the theater lobby and restrooms including wheelchair access. While this improves the Theater Departments’ public face, the rest of the facility needs updating and renovating and falls short of complying with the Americans With Disabilities Act. Of great concern is the dance studio because it is scheduled for demolition by 2007 and, although there are no graduate classes in dance, it is vital to the performance and pedagogy M.F.A. The space to replace these facilities including two faculty offices is currently unknown.

The greatest facility concern involves the safety and health of the graduate students that are required to work in the production shops. Graduate students in the Theater and Dance Department are required to work twenty hours a week. Some of these contact hours involve teaching but the rest is made up in the scenery and costume shops that do not meet current safety codes. Again, this is a recruitment, retention and liability issue that needs addressing in a timely fashion.

The need for new facilities is clear, and attention should be given to specially designed classroom, rehearsal and production spaces that meet the needs of the Theater and Dance Department as well as the ADA and safety code requirements. Faculty office that are the converted closets are inappropriate for a graduate faculty that are trying to raise the profile of the unit. A separate classroom and performance space that is separate from a music performance space is essential, as the needs of the two units are greatly different. Attention to space and facilities issues would do a great deal for the morale and productivity of the faculty and graduate students in the Department of Theater and Dance.