The Department of Theatre Arts
Strategic Plan

A Distinguished History of Education and Service

The Department of Theatre Arts has a long and distinguished history at Stony Brook. Established forty years ago, the Department was once a top center for theatre education and creation in the New York area. In our heyday, we had a faculty of renowned theatre artists / scholars and our full-time faculty roster was fourteen (14) strong. In 1996-97, the then Provost Rollin Richmond decided the College's focus would be the sciences, and that Theatre should be a service department. Theatre was to suffer devastating cuts as a result. We lost faculty and since that time the Department has never been able to recover or to develop. Only three hires have been made since that time, and we currently have only five tenured faculty and two Lecturers. Unlike many other departments, we have had to rely on adjuncts to deliver our core, required curriculum.

In 2007, the university administration decided it was time to invest in the growth and development of Theatre once again. A search for an outside chair to provide leadership and a new vision commenced. Funded by the president, a new hire was made just in time for our nation, and SUNY, to experience one of the worst financial crises in our history. The desire to develop theatre has remained strong; but the resources have been lacking, particularly for new faculty hires.

Nonetheless, the Department has managed to not only survive but to provide quality education in our undergraduate and graduate programs, and to produce topnotch productions with limited resources. Those productions have served not only Theatre majors but also the broader campus community, and local residents. Students have the opportunity to see live theatre, and more importantly to be involved in productions, as our casting is open to all students. Our courses are some of the most popular in the current D.E.C. sequence. After seeing a show or taking one of our classes, many students have declared Theatre as their major, chosen Theatre as a second major, or even changed majors. On the graduate level, we have one of the top, nationally recognized MFA programs in Dramaturgy. We compete successfully with Yale and Columbia.

Though small in numbers, current Theatre faculty have worked on and off Broadway, in our nation's leading regional theatres (L.O.R.T), and internationally, including prestigious venues such as Lincoln Center, The BAM Next Wave Festival, Barbican Centre (B.I.T.E.), the American Conservatory Theatre (A.C.T.), Yale Repertory Theatre, and the New York Shakespeare Festival/Public Theatre, among others. Faculty have received critical acclaim in ***The New York Times***, the ***Los Angeles Times***, ***Opera News***, to name a few, and have worked with such artists as Martin Scorsese, Steve Reich, Tony Kushner, José Rivera, Carol Burnett, Jean Stapleton, among others**.** Faculty have published books with recognized academic presses such as the University of Michigan Press and Palgrave-Mcmillan and articles in numerous periodicals such as ***Theatre Journal, The Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism, The Journal of Psychiatry and the Humanities,***

Performance Research and others. Scholarship ranges from history to theory, from Greek tragedy to Cognitive Studies in the arts, a field particularly noteworthy for a prestigious science university.

With a new direction and plan for the Department, we are poised to become a unique center for theatre arts training and for the creation of new work. As a major research university, Stony Brook has the opportunity to extend that prestige to theatre. In addition to our productions, we nurture creativity in a lab setting and promote the creation of new and cutting edge work for the theatre where the use of new technologies and interdisciplinary collaboration are essential. The very nature of live theatre and its creation is shifting, and we will be at the forefront of those new trends.

Degree Programs

The Theatre Arts department offers several programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels. With courses at our Stony Brook main campus and our campuses at Southampton and in Manhattan, students have an unparalleled range of opportunities and interact with artist-teachers, scholars and theatre professionals of the highest caliber.

BA in Theatre Arts:
The BA in Theatre offers an interdisciplinary course of study in a liberal arts context. The program is for students who wish to pursue theatre in graduate studies or the profession, as well as for those who may seek careers in other fields. Advanced students who wish to develop their craft in a particular area, such as acting, directing, playwriting or design / technical theatre, may do so through upper level course work or independent projects guided by faculty mentors.

Minor in Theatre Arts:
The minor in Theatre Arts provides the student with the opportunity to explore several aspects of the dramatic arts.

MFA in Dramaturgy:
The MFA in Dramaturgy fosters practical and theatrical approaches to the creation of new and innovative work for the theatre through an interdisciplinary, collaborative curriculum encompassing playwriting, directing, and emerging forms and technologies. Students will pursue a course of study that includes Dramaturgy, Directing, Playwriting, Literary Management, Collaborative Processes, Theory and Criticism, Dramatic Literature and Theatre History.

MA Theatre:
The Master of Arts in Theatre immerses students in the study of theatre history, dramatic literature and theories of theatre and performance.

BA/MA Theatre:
Our newest program is a combined BA/MA degree in Theatre Arts that can be completed in five years. Students who have excelled in their undergraduate studies may apply to the program in their junior year and begin graduate level course work in their senior year.

We plan to increase interdisciplinary courses and create a certificate program in Inter-Arts Collaboration, which will give us a unique standing among theatre programs nationally.

Vision and Future

In the Department of Theatre Arts we mentor the individual student to achieve their full potential, and to be collaborative and entrepreneurial in their creative endeavors. We provide a foundation in past traditions and literature, and are committed to the development of new work for the theatre - work that embraces new media and technology that are integral parts of our rapidly changing culture. We foster academic and artistic excellence through interdisciplinary courses, innovative theatre productions / labs, interdepartmental collaboration, and Master Classes taught by professional artists from the New York theatre scene and beyond. Our close proximity to the city also makes possible professional internship opportunities at some of our nation's leading theatre institutions.

Venues / Programs for Creative Work

Students have the graduate Cabaret, where they write, direct, act, and produce original work; and the John Gasser New Play Competition, which solicits new plays from around the country and presents readings and panel discussions at our Manhattan campus. We also have a successful outreach program entitled Swallow This in which students create and tour to local schools original theatre pieces on the topic of drug and alcohol prevention. We recently initiated the Stony Brook Play Competition, which invites original work from our student body and faculty in various departments.

We are fortunate to have within one university several campuses and centers for learning that support our interdisciplinary mission. Our future includes increased collaboration with Stony Brook's own Staller Center for the Performing Arts, the area's leading presenter of prominent performing artists and a world-class film festival. We are developing ways in which our design /technical theatre students can be part of the Staller touring productions and receive credit for working 'crew' on those shows. We have partnered with the new Center for Communicating Science in collaboration with actor and science devotee Alan Alda; and with our Southampton campus, which offers courses and workshops with some of the top theatre artists in the profession, including Emily Mann, Jon Robin Baitz, Jules Feiffer, Lanford Wilson, Christopher Durang, Marsha Norman, Alec Baldwin and Julie Andrews. With the Humanities Institute (HISB), the Theatre Arts Department co-sponsored the conference Civic Performance, bringing in artists Margarita Espada, Ping Chong and Adrienne Kennedy. The department

established the VITA Award (Visionary in the Arts), presenting it to Bill T. Jones, Ping Chong and Bay Street Theatre. Finally, we are exploring increased opportunities with Long Island's Watermill Center, which has already welcomed our students. Founded by theatre director Robert Wilson, the Watermill Center fosters research and experimentation in an integrated approach to the arts for the stage.

An Interdisciplinary Approach to Theatre

We are currently developing interdisciplinary courses and increasing the number of interdepartmental projects in our programs. By combing resources with other departments and offering classes / programming that respond to the changing nature of collaboration, we will be at the forefront of arts education in the New York area and internationally.

The future of the performing arts includes crossover between traditional genres (Opera, Musical Theatre, Drama), the integration of new media and technology, and innovative ways to create new work. While we must continue to teach the specific skills of the discipline, we must also develop curricula that reflect the creative trends that are sweeping both the 'main stream' and the 'avant-garde'. No longer is there a clear distinction between those two; the arts are becoming more integrated and experimental in nature. Competitive arts training must reflect that trend.

A new initiative for our Graduate Cabaret, a venue for creative experimentation and the development of inter-art projects, brings students together from the departments of Music, Art, and the Consortium of Digital Art, Culture & Technology (cDACT), which Theatre was instrumental in forming, to share their work. This has been so successful that students are already planning future events.

We are building upon an established track record of collaborating with other departments. In the past, Theatre faculty have directed and/or designed opera productions for Music, and have collaborated with faculty and students from Music, Art and cDACT on numerous Theatre mainstage productions. This year we are co-producing an opera double bill with Music, which will provide opportunities for many of our undergraduate and graduate students.

Expanding the definition of Dramaturgy and adding tracks in our current degree program are other ways in which we will meet our goal.

Growing Graduate Programs

Theatre has proposed the following expansion of our graduate program to include two tracks to the existing MFA in Dramaturgy: 1) MFA in Dramaturgy / Playwriting; 2) MFA in Dramaturgy / Directing. We will utilize existing resources, such as our collaboration / cross-listing of courses with Stony Brook Southampton, and existing programming at Stony Brook Manhattan.

The addition of the two degree 'tracks' in Playwriting and Directing is keeping in line with our focus on the development of new work / plays. The addition will permit us to increase substantially graduate enrollment and revenue. The tracks will also help develop further our newly established association with Stony Brook Southampton; and will enable us to expand our programming at Stony Brook Manhattan by tapping into the professional theatre scene and hiring established theatre artists-teachers. This expansion and exposure will give us a higher national profile, which will further increase enrollment.

As New York is considered the center for theatre in the country, it follows that we would make optimum use of our Manhattan campus by providing workshops, master classes and symposia. Since Stony Brook University is a top research institution, it is also logical that our graduate program will focus on the development / creation of new, cutting edge theatre work, and strive to become a prominent center for innovation in the field.

Dramaturgs serve as Literary Managers, interacting with artistic directors and playwrights on the development of new work; and as Production Dramaturgs (production research, panel discussions and symposia, program notes, lobby displays, archives, etc.) working in collaboration with directors. By offering tracks that expand the scope of dramaturgy to encompass playwriting and directing, and by offering programming that fosters cutting edge 'devised' work (multimedia collaborations, installations, performance art, etc.) along with new plays by emerging writers, we are providing a unique and highly marketable degree program.

To initiate this program expansion we are already capitalizing on existing resources. For example, we have added two graduate level courses in Directing by cross-listing two upper-level undergraduate courses (THR 438 / 439) with Graduate level courses (THR 638 / 639.) In addition, we are cross-listing courses with the MFA in Creative Writing at Southampton, and are collaborating on summer programming with their prestigious Playwriting Conference.

Enhancing Undergraduate Programs

We offer a BA in Theatre, which allows students to study all facets of the art form in a Liberal Arts context. A well-rounded, interdisciplinary education is essential for every undergraduate, whether the student pursues a career in the theatre or chooses another profession. Theatre is the ultimate liberal art as it encompasses the study of history, diverse cultures, politics, world religions, visual arts, psychology, sociology, anthropology, science, new media, language, poetry, music and literature. Our BA is designed to foster intellectual curiosity, critical thinking, and, of course, imagination and creativity.

Currently our acting curriculum is strong, with two full-time, tenured faculty members who have worked professionally at the highest levels and have trained with masters in two of the most reputable and desired acting techniques: Meisner and Michael Chekhov. By offering these two approaches, our undergraduate students are receiving invaluable and highly competitive actor training that will prepare them for the best

graduate schools and for the profession. Our actor training is enhanced by guest artists, including Julia Gibson, who, in addition to an impressive acting career, has taught at the most prestigious theatre schools and was recently asked by Tony Kushner to serve as acting coach for the New York revival of his Pulitzer Prize wining play ***Angels in America.*** We plan to further enhance our acting curriculum with the addition of guest artists / master teachers, who have recently taught for us and who wish to return. We can achieve this by collaborating with Southampton and helping to develop a graduate acting program there, which could involve our most talented upper division undergraduate students.

Of concern has been our recent move away from fully mounted productions, to more experimental labs, where we focus on process rather than product. It is our goal, however, to return to full scale productions that will serve both the undergraduates and graduates. Before we do so, we must ensure that we are providing our students with a strong education in the fundamentals of the subject. That includes theatre history and dramatic literature (from the classics to contemporary), areas in which our curriculum is severely lacking.

Returning to Productions

Recently, we had to decide in favor of shoring up our curriculum in deficient areas over producing fully mounted productions. By so doing, we compromise a major aspect of the study of theatre. Theatre is a living art form and plays / new works are meant to be seen and experienced. Theatre productions provide an invaluable service to our students, to other departments, and to the local community. Presenting theatre enables us to play a role in the important public interaction and image of the university.

We hope to return to productions, while maintaining the newly introduced practicum/ labs which also provide valuable learning opportunities for a larger number of our students.

Providing a quality, well-rounded education as well as presenting a season of productions were once part of a thriving theatre department that had sufficient faculty and staff.

Increase Faculty / Guest Artists

With new resources, we plan to increase our full-time (tenure track) faculty and visiting guest artists / lecturers. By increasing faculty numbers in the areas already discussed, we will be able to provide the crucial foundation described above. We must also increase numbers to include theatre design and technology. Due to the hiring freeze and budget cuts, we had to cease a search in Set Design and subsequently lost the line. We do not have a faculty member in Set Design, and currently have an adjunct teaching Lighting Design. We do not have faculty in other crucial areas of production, including Stage Management and Sound Design. Even the smallest of theatre departments have faculty and staff in those important areas. Lacking them renders our

design shops, which also provide important classroom instruction, nearly inoperable.

Perhaps it is useful to view theatre classrooms / studios in the same way we view research labs in chemistry or biology, for example. They require staff, equipment and state of the art technology to recruit the best scientists and students. Labs promote the research and professional contributions of their faculty, serve the university at large through their potential innovations / inventions, and help to build a national, if not international, reputation. The 'lab' is the model for successful theatre schools throughout the United States.

We have made some staffing changes to enable us to afford Visiting Guest Artists, which are also needed to ensure the best possible instruction in the craft and to fully utilize our Manhattan connections. Guest Artist lines are flexible and enable us to hire high profile theatre professionals who would not otherwise commit to a year-long teaching assignment. These artists would teach master classes in Manhattan, and also at our main campus. The lines will also enable us to hire guest artists to participate in readings, workshops and productions of new work, thereby raising the bar of excellence in our programming and providing excellent mentors for our students.

Student Recruitment

We are confident that with the implementation of this strategic plan, we will recruit the best students through advertising in Art Search, Playbill.com and American Theatre Magazine (a high profile publication for the advertisement of professional theatre programs). We will identify target schools (high schools for our BA program, and undergraduate theatre programs for our MFA) and recruit vigorously at those institutions, including mailings, campus visits, and invitations to our panels and conferences held at SB Manhattan. We will also tap into the annual unified interviews that are part of the University / Resident Theatre Association (U/RTA), which provides a central location where potential graduate students can apply / audition for competitive schools. In order to become a member of U/RTA, a theatre department must demonstrate that their program is of a high caliber and is equipped to recruit and train talented students for the profession.

Conclusion

There is very strong potential in the Theatre Arts Departments. With a vision for the future that includes interdisciplinary collaboration, curricula that lay a solid liberal arts foundation, while also providing the skills to create and produce cutting edge work, we will reclaim and surpass our once prestigious place within the university.

SUNY is currently experiencing tragic cuts in the arts and humanities, cuts that will have a lasting, negative impact on the very nature of education. (SUNY Albany, for example, recently eliminated its theatre department.) We hope that by achieving our goals we will help Stony Brook University achieve excellence in the arts as well as the sciences.