

## Theater

A department in the College of Humanities and Fine Arts offering the B.A. and M.F.A.

### ■ The Review Process

This was a standard AQAD review. Reviewers were:

Robert Skloot, chair (University of Wisconsin, Madison)  
Robert Chapel (University of Virginia)  
Barbara Grossman (Tufts University)

### ■ Main Issues

The visiting team found the department to be “comprised of able and talented faculty staff” dedicated to the “highest teaching and artistic standards.” It found the department ready to “establish itself as a regional center of true excellence.”

According to the team, “without question, the most urgent matter that needs attention deals with the poor state of the department’s physical facilities.” Inadequacies of the Rand Theater, of teaching and shop space, and of technical infrastructure prevent the faculty and staff from doing their best work. The most pressing need cited was replacement of the theater lighting system. The team stated that new lighting would improve performances, better prepare students, free up staff time, and make it possible for the department’s two theaters to operate simultaneously. Other needs cited were for a computer lab for scenery design and new sewing machines for costume instruction.

The team also identified a number of staffing and curricular issues. The reviewers said they were “surprised” at the department’s 3-3 teaching load, which they described as “unlike any we know of in comparable theater departments.” While the team commended the department for its commitment to teaching, it also cautioned against “pursuing the ‘numbers game’ of accepting additional students into the program.” The team suggested two strategies for reducing teaching load:

- Consideration of a reduction in the credit requirements for the major. The current 42-credit requirement was found to be 25% higher than the norm, and a reduction to 36 credits would allow for greater use of electives and more opportunities for undergraduates to pursue double majors.
- Creation of different “tracks” in the major that would allow faculty to focus on specializations in the upper division.

The team also commented on suggestions that the department might pursue development of a B.F.A. program in addition to the current B.A. The team counseled against such a move “absent a huge increased expenditure for personnel,” and recommended that energies be put into refinement of the existing B.A. and M.F.A.

The team noted that the department “could well use at least one new hire,” but observed that the focus of such a position would have to be determined following the department’s efforts to develop a strategic plan.

Finally, the team commented on fundraising and collaboration as tools to assist the department in its continued development. The department was advised to develop a fundraising plan in consultation with the Development Office, so as to target projects most effectively and avoid having the burden of fundraising fall exclusively on the department. In terms of collaboration, the team noted that the Theater department is one of a number of arts organizations in the areas, and that it is an "opportune moment" for the department to fully explore opportunities for collaboration that could be of mutual benefit. The team found the faculty open to such collaboration, particularly with the New WORLD Theater and the Fine Arts Center, and urged expansion of these discussions to the other Five College institutions.

## ■ Results of the Review

The department "enthusiastically" endorsed the team's findings, saying that "with investment from the university, we will work to implement" the recommended changes. The department noted that the AQAD review was "only the first step in a larger process," and committed itself to develop a strategic plan to address curriculum, hiring priorities, collaboration, and administrative structures. As part of this process the department indicated it would consider reducing the major's credit requirements and explore different tracking approaches, and would not pursue development of a B.F.A. program. The department also described increasing collaborative activity, including "revitalizing its relationship with New WORLD Theater. Other new activities being pursued include a certificate program in multicultural theater and a summer directing institute.

The Dean expressed general agreement with the team's recommendations. She identified renovation of the Rand Theater as "a top capital priority for the College," and reported that College and department funds have been used to underwrite a feasibility study for renovation of both the Rand and Curtain theaters. The Dean also noted that the Provost had already provided the funding necessary for the replacement of the theater lighting system. The Dean strongly encouraged increased collaborative activity, including the possibility of a shared Visiting Playwright position.

In terms of curricular and staffing issues, the Dean noted that specific responses would have to await the department's planning process.