

National Association of Schools of Theatre

JAN 27 2009

Visitors' Report

San Jose State University

San Jose, California

Ethel Walker, Theatre Program Chair

Date of Visit: November 18-21, 2008

Visiting Evaluators:

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Degrees for which renewal of Final Approval for Listing is sought:

Bachelor of Arts – 4 years: Theatre Arts

Master of Arts – 2 years: Theatre Arts

Degrees for which Plan Approval and Final Approval for Listing are sought:

Bachelor of Arts – 4 years: Theatre Arts (Preparation for Teaching)

Date: 11/27/2009
NAST Visitors' Report
For Internal Distribution
at discretion of the
Chief Theatre Executive
Any Optional Response Due
February 15, 2009

Disclaimer:

The following report and any statements therein regarding compliance with NAST accreditation Standards represent only the considered opinion of the visitors at the time of the visit. Definitive evaluation of compliance and the accreditation decision will be made by the Commission following a complete review of the application, including the Self-Study, the Visitors' Report, and any Optional Response to the Visitors' Report submitted by the institution.

Introduction:

Thank you for the opportunity to visit San Jose State University and contribute to the institutional evaluation of the BA and MA programs theatre, degree programs housed in the Department of Television, Radio, Film and Theatre (TRFT). In anticipation of our visit, we received copies of the Self-Study prepared by faculty within the program. It should be noted that this Self-Study document was a composite document designed to fulfill NAST accreditation renewal as well as an internal program review cycle (mandated review every 5 years) within the larger university. The last NAST visitation was in 1997. The most recent program review was in 2002-2003. Documents created from these evaluations and reviews were submitted as part of the 2008 NAST Self-Study to provide context for our review process. During our visit we met with the program chair, faculty and staff, students, and selected university administrators, including the Provost. We toured the department's facilities and the campus library, reviewed transcripts and files, observed classes, and attended two student performances (an evening of short plays by Terrance McNally, with the playwright present in the hall, and a more elaborately conceived and executed staging of Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew*). We wish to acknowledge and thank Ethel Walker for her time, attention, and generous hospitality in arranging the visit. At all times, with her and with faculty and students, staff and administrators, we found our conversations cordial, constructive, and frank.

A. Purposes

As outlined in the Self-Study (pp 4-7), the objectives of the unit are stated, and appear consonant with those of the college and university. The Department of Television, Radio, Film and Theatre (TRFT) offers a liberal arts based degree curricular structure with two undergraduate degrees in theatre: a traditional BA in theatre arts and a second BA in theatre arts with a focus on teacher preparation. [It should be noted that the Self-Study states that the faculty are discussing discontinuation of the teacher preparation degree (p. 5).] The program also offers an MA degree in Theatre Arts, with an emphasis on interdisciplinary studies in theatre and performance. As will be traced throughout this report, the department has witnessed rapid shifts in recent years, in terms of facility and budget issues, faculty and staff concerns, along with flat enrollment numbers overall and an increased focus on film/video production work central to the department's mission.

B. Size and Scope

The theatre program appears to satisfy all the criteria established by NAST concerning size and scope. The following comments provide details concerning several discrete NAST categories. Enrollment in the BA theatre degree and MA theatre degree (73 students and 35 students in 2007-2008, respectively) appear to be more than sufficient to conduct the program described by the unit in its literature. There appear to be sufficient faculty to deliver the traditional areas of theatre study at this time. However, given recent and anticipated retirements and additional pressures within the production areas, it is clear that faculty resources must be expanded in the areas of technical theatre and design at the first opportunity. According to the Self-Study, currently there are ten full professors, two associate professors, and one assistant professor (six females and seven males, with noteworthy diversity among the ranks). Three of the faculty members are in FERP, and two will completely retire within the year. The department also has a very large temporary faculty profile with close to 30 part-time instructors and a few MA teaching assistants. Given the location of the university geographically, the department appears to be able to hire qualified faculty to fill these non-tenure track lines on a regular basis (see pp. 19-20). As will be underscored later in this document, this shifting faculty profile is a cause of immediate as well as long term concern.

The program appears to offer adequate advanced courses and production opportunities to support the degree structures in theatre. As noted above, active integration of various aspects of film/video production and curricula across theatre offerings can be traced in the shifting overall size and scope of the program (theatre has the smallest declared enrollment within the department). This ongoing transition has, and will continue to, place pressures on all aspects of unit culture and activities and priorities.

C. Finances

The theatre program, along with the university, has been through several years of financial pressure. The program has adjusted to maintain the integrity of its offerings and the finances, although stretched, appear to be sufficient to sustain the program. Strong enrollment numbers in the major and in general education offerings support the financial resource base from within the university financial structure. But there are areas of ongoing concern. During these stark financial times, administration and faculty alike are understandably circumspect and cautious. As described in the Self-Study (pp. 23-24), expanding university enrollments have mandated increases in general education offerings at the expense of dedicated resources for major programs. In response to recent financial cuts at the state level, all new equipment funds have been reallocated and access to faculty development funds severely curtailed. Financial systems within the university appear to be sound and flexible enough to make the adjustments and realignments necessary to sustain the unit's programs during the projected accreditation term requested. In short, the fiscal reality across the state is reflected in the university's overall financial shortfalls. Members of the faculty, particularly in the film/video production area, have been successful in securing external resources for production work. And finally, although currently not a priority, theatre faculty are aware of the importance of

developing and sustaining a more aggressive external fund-raising plan to enhance the program and “fill in the gaps” created from receding state funding levels.

D. Governance and Administration

Overall Effectiveness: Leadership within the program and the department is in a state of transition. A national search is ongoing to fill the leadership position for the department. It is anticipated that this position will be filled during spring 2009. A senior faculty member, is serving as interim chair and will return to full-time faculty as soon as her replacement has been hired. Based on conversations with faculty and administrators, it is clear that her leadership is highly valued and respected during these times. The visitors are also pleased to note that top administrators at San Jose State University clearly understand and value the theatre. Particularly, the visitors received strong indications of administrative support for the program’s recent strides towards programmatic integration between theatre and film/video.

Policy-Making: The institution appears to have clearly defined curricular and educational policies that are administered by departments in consultation and coordination with various administrative units across campus. It is the visitors understanding that once the unit completes the search for a new chair, faculty will most likely return to meeting on a weekly basis and continue to serve as a committee-of-the-whole for all matters evaluation, curricular oversight, and production concern. The department has a graduate coordinator and faculty and staff members provide leadership in the areas of production relative to their individual professional expertise.

Theatre Executive’s Load and Responsibilities: As noted above, currently the position of theatre executive is held by an interim appointment who has the respect and support of all. However, once the advertised position has been filled, it is the expectation of the faculty and administration that the new chair will provide active and positive leadership to guide the unit through the process of planning for the future.

Communication: Communication appears to be very good between the unit and the administration and on many levels appears to be adequate among faculty and staff. However, as one would expect during times of transition and curricular and programmatic realignment, more needs to be done to strengthen positive communication among faculty geared towards working through issues of work load and productivity reviews and evaluations, the articulation of guidelines for production goals and procedures, and unit mission and priorities. In addition, although students interviewed expressed strong support for faculty and the program overall, some students expressed concerns about how information was shared within the unit, particularly communication that was perceived to isolate film students from theatre students. These few comments suggest that more needs to be done to “bring the students along” with the unit as shifts occur in curriculum and production activities in order to assure that theatre students are not negatively isolated from film students (or film students from theatre students) within the production program.

E. Faculty and Staff

The theatre program has an experienced and highly effective teaching and production faculty and staff. Faculty members are regionally and nationally active within their individual areas of expertise. Faculty members connect students to their own professional projects and work to mentor student work. Graduate and undergraduate students spoke highly of the quality of instruction received. During the visit the evaluators were able to visit several classes within the theatre program. Based on these class visitations, the quality of instruction reported by the students is not overstated. Clearly, this is a teaching faculty, a student-centered faculty.

It is also a faculty in need of additional teaching/production staff. Of particular concern is lack of a full-time faculty member to provide artistic guidance to the production program. Although the current MFA design faculty members are excellent, anticipated and recent retirements demand immediate action. According to the Self-Study, the recent retirement or early retirement of five tenured faculty has resulted in the hire of only one new faculty member (see p. 5) This appears to be a serious decline in faculty resources, a situation addressed only in part by the hire of some excellent staff and temporary faculty members. Given the financial picture, it is understood that a request for several positions will not and cannot be supported at this time. Nevertheless, at least one faculty hire is urgently needed. Moreover, in the future, consideration needs to be given to hiring tenure track faculty members to ensure the appropriate balance between tenure-track and adjunct faculty. (In the recommendation section below, suggestions on how to define this position to best serve the needs within the academic area as well as the production program will be outlined.)

As noted above, faculty morale during this transitional time, although positive for the most part, appears to have been strained—small wonder given the pressures of creating an integrated unit culture between theatre and film during a time of diminishing and challenging finances and declining faculty numbers. As described in university documents, faculty members work under a system-wide contract and collective bargaining drives and shapes certain aspects of the work environment. Consequently, the university does have a competitive sabbatical and faculty development program and a clearly articulated tenure process. Nonetheless, it appears as if the new Chair will need to convene the faculty and staff (full time and part time, tenured and non-tenure track) to systematically work through those expectations and processes of individual responsibility and collegiality central to unit governance and planning. To do so will be necessary for the unit to build on the areas of strength existing and/or desired among and across the faculty ranks.

F. Facilities, Equipment, and Safety

Past program reviews and the 1997 NAST review document underscored the necessity and challenges of providing renovations to existing spaces housing the theatre program (see 1997 NAST Report, pp 5-6). The visitors are pleased to report that in recent years upgrades and repairs have been completed which have transformed storage areas and the interior of the Hal Todd Studio Space (Self-Study p. 9). Faculty offices, classrooms and labs, and production areas appear to meet NAST standards of size, scope, and safety. Continued upgrades to the overall physical plant, including improved editing studios for video, would only enhance the

ability to attract students to the program. In addition, it appears that safety is stressed throughout the theatre operations (safety guidelines are circulated along with mandatory training and oversight in all work spaces). The equipment in all production areas has been adequately maintained and appears to be professionally supervised. Finally, it should be noted that the visitors came away from the visit particularly impressed with activities within the costume area. Faculty leadership in that area appears to be exemplary in all regards (in terms of organization, maintenance, and the establishment of a professional working environment).

G. Library and Learning Resources

The tour of library holdings was arranged and conducted by the Department Librarian. The space and holdings appear to be more than adequate to support the undergraduate and graduate programs in theatre. The new library is a beautiful structure, with a civic as well as university mission, which provides varied sources of financial support for holdings and programming. The building is conveniently located right next to Gillis Hall. (It should be noted that this new library was anticipated during the last NAST visit and now consolidates all major university library holdings.) The Department Librarian is knowledgeable and provides expert oversight of theatre holdings, including a special collection of media materials. As would be expected in a new facility, computer access to resource data venues is first-rate and provides adequate resources for undergraduate as well as graduate research. It is clear that this library is a jewel at San Jose State University.

H. Recruitment, Admission-Retention, Record Keeping, and Advisement

1. Recruitment, Admission, Retention

Undergraduate Program: Enrollment in the undergraduate BA Theatre Arts appears adequate. However, enrollment in the BA Theatre Arts (Preparation for Teaching) appears small with only 4 students in the past seven years (see Self-Study p. 8). Consequently, the department is seriously considering eliminating this degree option. It should also be noted that enrollments in the theatre minor appear adequate and stable.

Undergraduate students apply and are admitted through the CSU system process monitored by the Office of Admission and Records.

Recruitment for the theatre program appears to be achieved primarily through electronic and published materials, including a departmental web page and an on-line newsletter called Performances (see www.TVRadioFilmTheatre.com) Other recruitment activities reported in the Self-Study include a touring performance ensemble called S.T.E.P. This group tours area middle and high schools, as well as local organizations, and provides a glimpse at the opportunities for theatre study at SJSU (see Self-Study, p. 15).

Retention data, based on institutional records reported in the Self-Study, suggest stability within the major (flat growth in the number of majors) with an increase in enrollments in general education courses (see Self-Study, pp. 13-14). Last year, in an effort to enhance the

retention of Latino and African-American students, two professors conducted an orientation program designed to address issues of retention with these students considered at risk populations within the student body.

Graduate Program: Enrollments within the MA program appear stable as well and more than adequate for the size of the graduate faculty, indeed any major increase in enrollments will seriously erode faculty abilities to oversee the program in terms of thesis advising. Admissions are coordinated with the Graduate Studies Office and appear to be carefully monitored. Retention within the MA program does not appear to be a concern although some data may suggest that some students are slow to complete the program (time to degree completion). This is a difficult area to track and explain, but the faculty is urged to do so in order to provide data for potential workload discussions within the unit as well as institutional planning and projections.

2. Record Keeping and Advisement

Record keeping at both the undergraduate and graduate levels appears to be satisfactory. Student records are maintained in a central university records system (PeopleSoft). Advisors also maintain student files to capture audit sheets, correspondence, and such materials central to that task. And finally, the department carefully archives all MA thesis documents in a faculty conference room.

I. Published Materials – Web Sites

The department publishes and distributes a variety of programs, flyers and brochures. As discussed previously, the unit also has web-based publicity and programmatic materials. Based on student feed-back and this review, the visitors recommend that these on-line resources be carefully reviewed to ensure accessibility, utility, and appeal to a student audience on a regular basis.

J. Branch Campuses, External Programs, Use of the Institution's Name for Educational Activities Operated Apart from the Main Campus or the Primary Educational Program

Not applicable.

K. Community Involvement and Articulation With Other Schools

As part of the California state system of higher education, SJSU is linked to other state supported institutions, a status that provides specific transfer articulation processes.

In terms of community involvement, the theatre program has a strong record of outreach, including ACTF involvement, performances in the local schools (as previously described), and participation in various university programs. The Self-Study documents the unit's commitment and activities to reach and engage diverse populations within the region (see p. 21). In addition, in terms of professional theatre and film work, the unit aggressively works

to link students to the professional world within the Bay Area. This faculty commitment towards (and experience within) professional theatre organizations and the film industry is clearly an important aspect of the potential learning environment within the theatre program (see page 22).

L. Non-Degree-Granting Programs for the Community

Not applicable.

M. Standards for (A) Independent Postsecondary Theatre Units Without Regional or Other Institutional Accreditation and/or (B) Proprietary Institutions

Not applicable.

N. Programs, Degrees, and Curricula

1. Undergraduate and Graduate Programs and Review of Student Work

Bachelor of Arts – 4 years: Theatre Arts

This degree is being submitted for renewal of Final Approval for Listing. The degree consists of university general studies requirements as well as required courses in the major (30 units are core requirements, with an additional 15 units of electives). An additional 12 units are also required to maintain the liberal studies emphasis within the degree requirements. This distribution appears to meet NAST guidelines since 52% of the degree program is in general studies and the remaining 48% is in theatre studies. It should be noted that the Self-Study reports that faculty may consider shifting degree requirements to enhance professional training (see page 10).

Bachelor of Arts – 4 years: Theatre Arts (Teacher Preparation)

This degree is being submitted for Plan Approval and Final Approval for Listing. The degree is listed as a 72 unit program: 44 units are completed in theatre with an additional 27 units in English. It should be noted that six of the 44 units are general education courses. In addition, all students must complete university general studies requirements. This distribution appears to meet NAST guidelines since 37% of the degree program is in theatre studies. The Self-Study reports that, given the lack of student demand for this program, this program may be dropped.

Master of Arts – 2 years: Theatre Arts

This degree is being submitted for renewal of Final Approval for Listing. The degree is a 30 unit program designed to provide an interdisciplinary approach the theatre studies (primarily focusing on the intersections of theatre studies with media studies and performance studies). The program requires at least 15 units of graduate level courses, including courses exploring research approaches appropriate to theatre studies as well as seminar courses in history,

theory and critical practices. A thesis is also required (1-4 units). This distribution appears to be meet NAST guidelines in that at least 50% of the courses are graduate level.

NOTE: In addition to these degrees, the department also offers a Bachelor of Arts in Radio, Television, and Film. In the visitors' opinion, this degree does not fall under NAST purview and is being reported simply for information purposes. A complete description can be found in the Self-Study pp. 8.

The evaluators encourage the institution to submit curricular tables for all programs and degrees in an Optional Response to ease the Commission's review of curricular programs.

During the visit the evaluators observed a variety of classes and attended two public performances. The classes observed were expertly taught and the class dynamic was uniformly positive and engaged within the respective student populations. The production of the short plays of Terrance McNally in the smaller ensemble theatre and the production of Taming of the Shrew in the large performance hall were both ambitious and adventurous. The quality of student worked evinced in these stagings match what should be expected in a liberal arts oriented department and reflects positively on the degree programs artistic standards. The visitors found the costuming in the "concept driven" Shakespeare staging (design and execution) to be of a professional standard, an artistic contribution that greatly enhanced the overall impact of this student-directed production.

2. Study of the Transcripts of Recent Graduates and Comparison with Catalogue Statements

The review of undergraduate and graduate transcripts indicate that these documents appear to match degree requirements as advertised.

O. Theatre Unit Evaluation, Planning, and Projections

The format of the Self-Study document does not clearly guide the reader through aspects of unit planning and projection in ways that isolate those items particular to the concerns of the BA offerings and activities in media studies and those unique to theatre arts. Indeed, with the purposeful faculty efforts during the past decade to integrate aspects of these degree programs, it is oftentimes difficult (and perhaps unhealthy) to think about, write about, and plan for them in isolation one from the other. However, therein lies the major challenge for this department. Besides a call for increased enrollments in the theatre major particularly in the technical theatre areas and continued application of assessment data to teaching, the Self-Study does not provide an adequate long-term plan (see pp. 19-20). Calling for "permanent faculty" to lead the way in this planning, it is clear that this is a recognized major area of concern at this time.

P. Standards Summary

The following statement regarding compliance with NAST accreditation standards represents only the considered opinion of the visitors at the time of the visit. A definitive decision

regarding the institution's submission will be made by the NAST Commission on Accreditation following a complete review of the application (including any Optional Response to the Visitors' Report submitted by the institution).

The Theatre Arts curricula and program elements appear to be in compliance with NAST standards at this time.

Q. Overview, Summary Assessment, and Recommendations for the Program

1. Strengths

- A major strength of this program is the dedicated faculty and staff.
- Recent upgrades to the library and some areas within the theatre facilities should be considered major strengths.
- In addition, diverse and talented students are enrolled within the program.
- The potential for a uniquely integrated program that links theatre and media.
- Exciting and vital links to the community and the professional worlds of theatre and film.
- Strong support from the university administration.

2. Short-term and long-term improvements

- The need to secure at least one full-time tenure track faculty member in technical theatre/design.
- The need to secure a tenured department chair.
- The need to engage in serious and coordinated long term planning to address areas of stress within the program, particularly issues of resources and emphasis within the production program that may fail to integrate film students with theatre students in productive and mutually supportive and respectful ways, issues of faculty work load and respectful evaluation, and budget allocation, fundraising, and student recruitment.
- The need to approach all curricular revisions with a careful eye toward accreditation standards, particularly the expressed desire to increase the number of professionally oriented production/performance courses within the major. Issues of faculty size, production budgets and other constraints may make a shift to an accredited BFA program problematic and difficult to justify, create, and sustain.
- There appears to be a growing reliance on adjunct or non-tenure track faculty to teach classes and work in the production program. In order to maintain an appropriate balance between tenure-track and non-tenure track faculty, a plan to replace retiring and departing faculty with tenure-track faculty members needs to be developed.

Recommendations for Immediate Action

With the recent and anticipated retirements in the area of design and technical theatre, it is imperative that a faculty member be hired to work in all areas of design. Based on conversations with administration, the visitors are optimistic that this request to hire will be supported. If for any reason this hire is delayed, a temporary plan will need to be made to fill this gap. Failure to do so will severely limit this unit's ability to function.

The same call for resources must be made in terms of leadership. The visitors were pleased to learn that the search for a Department Chair is ongoing. Although the current Interim Chair has the skills and the support of faculty and administration to continue in this role, it is her desire to return full-time to the classroom. Consequently, this leadership hire must be secured before the necessary and important long-term planning process can go forward.

The visitors suggest that the department consider a name change to more accurately describe the emerging mission and focus (such as Media and Theatre Arts, or some other appropriate title to be determined as part of the planning process).

The visitors also urge the unit to continue to cultivate the integration of performance studies faculty from across campus into the production area as well as the graduate faculty.

And finally, the visitors urge the unit to aggressively partner with other units on campus to develop and pursue fund raising to support unit priorities and faculty develop (research and creative work).