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TO: Mike Mahon
President and Vice Chancellor

DATE: October 20, 2022

FROM: Alan Siaroff
Chair, Academic Quality Assurance Committee

RE: Drama Program Academic Quality Assurance Review

In accordance with the U of L *Academic Quality Assurance Policy and Process*, the Academic Quality Assurance Committee approved the review of the Department of Drama at its September 22, 2022, meeting.

The Self Study Committee for this review comprised of: Dr. Justin A. Blum (Program Review Coordinator), Lee Burkes, and Mia van Leeuwen.

The review produced four documents:

1. Self-Study Report. Written by the Self Study Committee. Received September 1, 2021.
2. External Review Report. Written by Wes D Pearce (University of Regina) and Christopher Brauer (University of Winnipeg) based on a virtual site visit from November 26 to December 2, 2021. Received February 3, 2022.
3. Program Response. Written by the Self Study Committee. Received May 17, 2022.
4. Dean's Response. Written by Shelley Scott, Interim Dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts, received August 18, 2022.

The Program Review Committee was given the opportunity to respond to the Dean's Response and they indicated that they did not feel the need to do so. An Action Plan was crafted based on these four documents to provide guidance from the Provost & Vice-President (Academic) to the Interim Dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts.

1. Self Study Report

The body of the report noted several strengths of the Department of Drama:

- All degree programs include practical experience both in and out of the classroom working on course projects and productions.
- Strong community connections result in students regularly taking part in volunteer and semi-professional opportunities.
- The Department of Drama receives much resource support to deliver the curriculum and enable student and faculty research and creative activity, including equipment and materials in addition to facilities use.
- The Department of Drama benefits from a young and energetic faculty cohort.
- Students are comfortable with and have confidence in faculty members.
- Faculty members strive to remain current and active in their fields.

The following weaknesses and challenges were mentioned in the body of the report:

- Inflexibility within the Bachelor of Fine Arts degree programs.
- Significant student attrition between years two and three.
- Alumni indicated they wanted more opportunities: for collaboration/cross over with students in other departments; for film/tv training; and to learn auditioning skills.
- Drama incurred a 20% budget reduction last year which reduced the scale of individual productions and the ability to hire outside artists and placed significant pressure on Fine Arts administrative staff.

The Self Study Report asked for External Reviewer feedback on several areas:

- Retention, Recruitment, and Curriculum
- Drama's Place in Liberal Education
- Education Combined Degrees
- Development and Integration of Cinema
- Institutional Structures and Budgets

The Self Study Report identified that the Department of Drama is currently:

- Seeking ways to become more directly involved in the University's liberal education mandate.
- Having discussions about how the trade-offs between depth/rigor and breadth/freedom in current degree structures serve the department.
- Actively looking for models of university programs in Canada in which the disciplines of live performance and moving image study work productively together.

2. External Review Report

The External Reviewers' Report noted many **strengths**:

- Despite significant budget cuts and a lack of contract teaching support, the Drama program is successfully delivering theatre training in all areas in a way that is ensuring the employability of their grads in a variety of arts disciplines and is also providing transferable skills to support students who choose other career paths.
- The Drama program is, year-on-year, delivering a four-show mainstage season of high-quality productions, in addition to pursuing substantive programs of research and creative work.
- A testament to the quality of the department's offerings is the steady and robust year-on-year enrolment numbers that, even during the pandemic, seem unflagging.
- The faculty clearly feel a deep commitment to the work the department does, and, in their interviews with us demonstrated a real care and sense of mission.
- This personal investment is contagious and is reflected in student attitudes.

The External Reviewers' Report discussed **challenges** in the report:

- Students/graduates in all streams speak unanimously about challenges getting into required courses either because of sequencing issues, lack of options, low caps, or poor communications about course/schedule changes.
- Dedicated faculty and staff are trying to do too much with too few resources.

The External Reviewers' Report contained 13 **recommendations** for improving and/or maintaining the Department of Drama:

1. Improve access to senior-level courses.
2. Cross-list with other departments and create distinct courses for non-majors.
3. Create requirements or opportunities for tech and performance students to integrate with student-made films from the cinema stream and ensure there is a filmmaking basics course for Drama/Education combined degree students.
4. Individuals who make up the Drama Department need to communicate with each other in a more meaningful manner.
5. Create a more distinct path for Education students – one that takes advantage of performance and directing courses, but also includes writing, tech and design courses and perhaps basic filmmaking as well.
6. Reevaluate what kind of Drama degree(s) this cohort of instructors can best create to ensure the department aligns with the University's strategic imperative that they offer "destination" degrees.
7. Investing in an external Strategic Planning facilitator to determine what a "BFA for 2022" means.
8. Increase community engagement.
9. Reduce the number of mainstage shows, and/or consider not "fully mounting" all shows.
10. Address issues of course-plan rigidity across all streams.
11. Address the historical relationship between staff and faculty.
12. Restore full funding to Theatre Xtra.
13. Directly market to catchment high schools with a focus on traditionally under-represented students.

3. Program Response

In their Program Response, the Self Study Committee addressed the recommendations from the External Review Report:

1. <i>Improve access to senior-level courses.</i>	The Department of Drama commits to making this a focus of conversations around strategic planning at our 2022 year-end retreat and other future meetings.
2. <i>Cross-list with other departments and create distinct courses for non-majors.</i>	We are open to this possibility and are particularly open to examining ways in which our minor in theatre studies can be made more attractive to students in disciplines like Music, English, Art, and Modern Languages. If the suggestion is rather that we cross-list courses offered in other departments to use them to fulfill drama studies requirements for our majors, we have in fact been consciously moving in the opposite of this direction. We have done so in part because of the irregularity with which some departments offered cognate courses, and in part because of mismatches in departmental and intellectual cultures that made some of the drama studies courses we required our students to take in other departments a poor match for the skills they need to develop. While we are open to and enthusiastic about giving students options for courses in other departments to fulfill drama studies requirements, we feel that maintaining a robust and reliable number of such offerings within our own department, and maintaining the faculty cohort necessary to offer them, are important medium- and long-term priorities.

3. <i>Create requirements or opportunities for tech and performance students to integrate with student-made films from the cinema stream and ensure there is a filmmaking basics course for Drama/Education combined degree students.</i>	The Department of Drama commits to making this a focus of conversations around strategic planning at our 2022 year-end retreat and other future meetings.
4. <i>Individuals who make up the Drama Department need to communicate with each other in a more meaningful manner.</i>	The Department of Drama commits to making this a focus of conversations around strategic planning at our 2022 year-end retreat and other future meetings.
5. <i>Create a more distinct path for Education students – one that takes advantage of performance and directing courses, but also includes writing, tech and design courses and perhaps basic filmmaking as well.</i>	The Department of Drama commits to making this a focus of conversations around strategic planning at our 2022 year-end retreat and other future meetings.
6. <i>Reevaluate what kind of Drama degree(s) this cohort of instructors can best create to ensure the department aligns with the University's strategic imperative that they offer "destination" degrees.</i>	The Department of Drama commits to making this a focus of conversations around strategic planning at our 2022 year-end retreat and other future meetings.
7. <i>Investing in an external Strategic Planning facilitator to determine what a "BFA for 2022" means.</i>	The Department of Drama commits to making this a focus of conversations around strategic planning at our 2022 year-end retreat and other future meetings.
8. <i>Increase community engagement.</i>	The Department of Drama commits to making this a focus of conversations around strategic planning at our 2022 year-end retreat and other future meetings.
9. <i>Reduce the number of mainstage shows, and/or consider not "fully mounting" all shows.</i>	We commit to having these discussions in a fulsome and open way, though we understand recommendations such as "reduce the total number of mainstage shows from 4 to 3 [and] consider whether all productions need to be "fully mounted" to be offered as two among many possibilities to address chronic issues with workload on students and faculty and strain on resources caused by the current season structure. A reduction in the number of mainstage shows would leave us without sufficient opportunities for the student projects required in the BFA Performance and BFA Tech and Design curricula as currently configured. A reduction in the number of productions would also jeopardize our ability to recruit and retain students, who frequently report that these firsthand opportunities are a key part of what draws them to this University and department. We believe that changes to the

	<p>scale (e.g., designating some as having a reduced “fringe-style” approach) or production process (e.g., having one or more shows be the direct outcome of one or more department courses, with class time used for rehearsals) are more appropriate first ways to address the problems the report rightly identifies. A reduction to the number of productions should be considered only after other alternatives have been meaningfully attempted.</p>
<p>10. <i>Address issues of course-plan rigidity across all streams.</i></p>	<p>The Department of Drama looks forward to strategic conversations about how we can ensure that we are offering required courses while also providing enhanced options and flexible pathways to graduation that enable students to make timely progress toward their degrees.</p>
<p>11. <i>Address the historical relationship between staff and faculty</i></p>	<p>The Department of Drama commits to making this a focus of conversations around strategic planning at our 2022 year-end retreat and other future meetings.</p>
<p>12. <i>Restore full funding to Theatre Xtra.</i></p>	<p>We have not cut budgets for Theatre Xtra on a per-show basis but have reduced the number of Theatre Xtra shows that are offered from two per semester to two per year. This was done after thorough consideration, and for several important reasons; primary among these was that the students responsible for running the programming consistently reported struggling to receive four viable proposals in a given season. Reducing the number of shows also preserves studio space for delivery of performance courses, ensures that most student experiences take place in the context of mainstage shows on which they receive direct faculty supervision, and mitigates the student burnout (here again it was not uncommon to find a small number of students, often including the artistic producers, doing double duty as board operators and stage crew, often to the detriment of their academic progress). We strongly believe in Theatre Xtra as a vibrant part of our department’s culture and a key piece of our educational offering, but stand by the reduction in shows, even more so given our commitment to discussing thoughtful and rational ways to reduce the scope, scale, and resource commitment of the mainstage season.</p>
<p>13. <i>Directly market to catchment high schools with a focus on traditionally under-represented students.</i></p>	<p>The Department of Drama commits to making this a focus of conversations around strategic planning at our 2022 year-end retreat and other future meetings.</p>

4. Dean's Response

The Dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts responded to the recommendations from the External Review Report:

1. <i>Improve access to senior-level courses.</i>	The Drama department should begin immediately to hold regular intensive meetings to discuss concrete changes to the curriculum, with the intention of bringing forward a package for the October 2022 curriculum deadline. This committee of the whole department should: address the yearly and overall outcomes of each stream; find ways to open up the requirements of each stream with perhaps fewer courses and more options, to allow students to complete them in a timely fashion[.]
2. <i>Cross-list with other departments and create distinct courses for non-majors.</i>	Many of these discussions have already begun, but the faculty must meet, and not in separate groups defined by subject area as has often happened in the past. Curriculum for performance students should involve the technical/design and studies faculty, and vice versa. The external reviewers remark on the unfortunate silos in the department and cross-curricular discussion and collaboration is essential to address this problem.
3. <i>Create requirements or opportunities for tech and performance students to integrate with student-made films from the cinema stream and ensure there is a filmmaking basics course for Drama/Education combined degree students.</i>	Many of these discussions have already begun, but the faculty must meet, and not in separate groups defined by subject area as has often happened in the past. Curriculum for performance students should involve the technical/design and studies faculty, and vice versa. The external reviewers remark on the unfortunate silos in the department and cross-curricular discussion and collaboration is essential to address this problem. This committee of the whole department should: address the yearly and overall outcomes of each stream; find ways to open the requirements of each stream with perhaps fewer courses and more options, to allow students to complete them in a timely fashion; and consider more explicitly the unique needs of Education students in the program.
4. <i>Individuals who make up the Drama Department need to communicate with each other in a more meaningful manner.</i>	The Department should set itself the goal of brainstorming ideas around these topics. Rather than being reactive – responding to crises or dealing with specific instances – the Department should think in a big picture way about an ideal environment and climate in which to do their work. The Dean's Office is willing to facilitate these discussions, if requested, perhaps by bringing in someone with expertise in mediation or planning.
5. <i>Create a more distinct path for Education students – one that takes advantage of performance and directing courses, but also includes writing, tech and design courses and perhaps basic filmmaking as well.</i>	The department should consider more explicitly the unique needs of Education students in the program. I note that some of this is already occurring, as evidenced by a course being offered this fall semester called "Technical Theatre for Teachers." This is an excellent beginning to an important series of conversations in the Department.
6. <i>Reevaluate what kind of Drama degree(s) this cohort of instructors can best create</i>	The Department should set itself the goal of brainstorming ideas around these topics. Rather than being reactive – responding to crises or dealing with specific instances – the Department should think in a big picture

<p><i>to ensure the department aligns with the University's strategic imperative that they offer "destination" degrees.</i></p>	<p>way about an ideal environment and climate in which to do their work. The Dean's Office is willing to facilitate these discussions, if requested, perhaps by bringing in someone with expertise in mediation or planning.</p>
<p>7. <i>Investing in an external Strategic Planning facilitator to determine what a "BFA for 2022" means.</i></p>	<p>The Department should set itself the goal of brainstorming ideas around these topics. Rather than being reactive – responding to crises or dealing with specific instances – the Department should think in a big picture way about an ideal environment and climate in which to do their work. The Dean's Office is willing to facilitate these discussions, if requested, perhaps by bringing in someone with expertise in mediation or planning.</p>
<p>8. <i>Increase community engagement.</i></p>	<p>The Department should set itself the goal of brainstorming ideas around these topics. Rather than being reactive – responding to crises or dealing with specific instances – the Department should think in a big picture way about an ideal environment and climate in which to do their work. The Dean's Office is willing to facilitate these discussions, if requested, perhaps by bringing in someone with expertise in mediation or planning.</p>
<p>9. <i>Reduce the number of mainstage shows, and/or consider not "fully mounting" all shows.</i></p>	<p>The reviewers suggest in several places in their report that the Department reduce its Mainstage season from four to three plays. The Departmental response rejects that suggestion in favour of finding other ways to approach the problem, which is one of both financial and human resources. Parallel to their discussion about curriculum, recommended above, the Department should also begin a Strategic Planning Process with the intention of creating a new model for implementation with the 2024/2025 season. The model should be in place by May of 2023, to allow for adequate time to put it into action.</p> <p>The new model should consider all the ideas proposed in the Department's Response, including tying shows to courses and designating some shows for reduced budgets and a different, scaled-down approach. The Department expresses a desire to hire external artists to work as the director or designer and must therefore determine how this is to be managed within a re-envisioned season. Is one show designated as the "guest artist" show? Is that guest artist also contracted to conduct workshops or perhaps teach a course as a sessional instructor? It is not financially sustainable to expect that external directors and designers can be hired for multiple shows and seems to be contradictory to the Department's statement that students learn from their professors both in the classroom and in production. If designers and directors are to be found from within the faculty, a new model that allows that to be sustainable and creatively rewarding must be found.</p>
<p>10. <i>Address issues of course-plan rigidity across all streams.</i></p>	<p>The whole department should: address the yearly and overall outcomes of each stream; find ways to open the requirements of each stream with perhaps fewer courses and more options, to allow students to complete them in a timely fashion; and consider more explicitly the unique needs of Education students in the program.</p>

11. <i>Address the historical relationship between staff and faculty</i>	The Department should set itself the goal of brainstorming ideas around these topics. Rather than being reactive – responding to crises or dealing with specific instances – the Department should think in a big picture way about an ideal environment and climate in which to do their work. The Dean’s Office is willing to facilitate these discussions, if requested, perhaps by bringing in someone with expertise in mediation or planning.
12. <i>Restore full funding to Theatre Xtra.</i>	The Department should set itself the goal of brainstorming ideas around these topics. Rather than being reactive – responding to crises or dealing with specific instances – the Department should think in a big picture way about an ideal environment and climate in which to do their work. The Dean’s Office is willing to facilitate these discussions, if requested, perhaps by bringing in someone with expertise in mediation or planning.
13. <i>Directly market to catchment high schools with a focus on traditionally under-represented students.</i>	The Department should set itself the goal of brainstorming ideas around these topics. Rather than being reactive – responding to crises or dealing with specific instances – the Department should think in a big picture way about an ideal environment and climate in which to do their work. The Dean’s Office is willing to facilitate these discussions, if requested, perhaps by bringing in someone with expertise in mediation or planning.

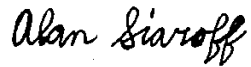
While the External Reviewer’s Report contained 13 recommendations for improving and/or maintaining the Drama program, the Drama area, Dean Scott, and the Academic Quality Assurance Committee each felt that the recommendations were too broad in scope and were better presented as multiple parts of a smaller whole. The committee modified and consolidated the 13 recommendations into the following 7.

1. The Drama Program will hold a department wide retreat to develop a mission statement and strategic plan
2. The Drama Program including technical staff will hold regular (weekly/biweekly) meetings to discuss program progress
3. The Drama Program will complete a comprehensive curriculum review and revision that will include discussion and/or action on the following:
 - a. Review of the existing BFA Performance stream system including comprehensive review of yearly and overall outcomes of each stream; finding ways to open the requirements of each stream with fewer courses and more options and clearly defined final outcomes for each stream, along with a plan to consistently deliver course offerings
 - b. Review of the number of degrees offered via the drama program
 - c. Create a clear pathway for students in the Education program, exploring avenues to offer courses that meet in-demand skills
 - d. Assess inclusion of filmmaking/and art direction in the technical and education BFA Drama streams
4. The Drama Program will assess the current mainstage performance model and create a plan for a more sustainable future including:
 - a. Discussion around alternative performance models, and “recycled” performances
 - b. Create a working agreement with the Faculty of Fine Arts on the use of resources namely props, costumes and production materials
 - c. Discussion around linking live performances to faculty teaching loads/research and awarding course credit for performance involvement, consider making performance involvement a course offering. This discussion should consider modifications to the rest of the curriculum to meet program requirements.
 - d. Increase public engagement and diversity of location for performances

- e. Developing a plan to engage with outside artists/directors and working with local theatre companies to provide student experience
5. The Drama Program will explore collaboration with the Faculty of Education including course offerings that are mutually beneficial
6. The Drama Program will host a focus group discussion with Drama Program alumni to identify challenges and strengths within the program
7. The Drama Program will create a communication plan for students with input from Advising

The Academic Quality Assurance Committee is satisfied that the Department of Drama academic quality assurance review has followed the U of L's academic quality assurance process appropriately and acknowledges the successful completion of the review.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alan Siaroff". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Dr. Alan Siaroff
Chair, Academic Quality Assurance Committee
Professor, Department of Political Science

CC: Erasmus Okine, PhD., PAS, FICN
Provost & Vice-President (Academic)