

## PROGRAM REVIEW REPORT SUMMARY

1. **Reporting Institution:** Eastern Illinois University
2. **Program Reviewed:** Department of Theatre, B.A.
3. **Date:** January 24, 2024
4. **Contact Person:** Nick Shaw, Department Chair  
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### 5. **Overview of the Degree Program**

The Department of Theatre at Eastern Illinois University supports the Mission of Eastern Illinois University and the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. It "prepares its majors for careers in the various fields of the theatrical arts and provides for the non-major and the community, as a whole, the opportunity to experience live theatre performance both as a spectator and as a participant." The Department of Theatre supports the missions of both the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and the University in multiple ways. We provide "cultural activities and programs" that are "aesthetically and intellectually stimulating" for the broader EIU community and by providing the means for students to "learn the methods and results of free and rigorous inquiry in the arts" we enrich the entire university community. The department is at the forefront of programs/disciplines that are "committed to diversity and inclusion and foster opportunities for student-faculty scholarship within a student-centered campus culture."

The Department of Theatre is an accredited member of the National Association of Schools of Theatre (NAST). Membership ensures that national standards of the discipline are implemented and maintained. To be an accredited member of NAST, an institution must demonstrate to peer reviewers that it meets and maintains basic threshold standards.

The Department stands out as one of the few undergraduate-only BA programs within the public universities of Illinois. This uniquely positions the department as an affordable program that is focused solely on training baccalaureate-level students in the discipline of theatre by providing opportunities and attention that programs with post-baccalaureate programs cannot match. The program has one of the only BA musical theatre emphases in the nation, as BFA programs in Musical Theatre are standard in the academy. Our program marries the strong foundational approach of a BA, while giving students training in musical theatre.

Through the university-wide Program Assessment Model the Department of Theatre has identified our student learning objectives as:

- Demonstrate understanding of the historical, theoretical, and practical aspects of theatre as an art form.
- Demonstrated proficiency at analyzing how the structural elements of a script combine to create the world of a play and how it interacts in dialogue with the culture around it and the artistic traditions behind it.
- Demonstrated critical thinking about text and the process of theatre.
- Articulated informed responses to theatre using written and verbal communication skills conducive to lifelong learning.
- Demonstrated practical application of classroom knowledge in the production process through participation in departmental theatre, ACTF, professional internships, and/or study abroad.

Since the last IBHE Review the faculty has been reduced by three positions, although a search is presently underway to add another Unit A position for FA 2024. The department has removed the Theatre Education program and replaced it with the Musical Theatre and Dramatic Writing emphases. Curricula have evolved to match those changes within the program and faculty. There have been adjustments to the approach within our production season to increase the quality of our productions, including bringing in more guest artists and adjustments to budgets/resources to optimize efficiency. In future academic years we hope that the growth of the musical theatre area will promote growth in the department as a whole. The departmental recruitment and retention efforts should push our total number of majors over the 40-student threshold by FA 2026. The department currently sits at 35 majors, with growth over the last three academic years. These numbers show net growth after major losses during the negative impact of both the Illinois Budget Impasse of 2015-2017 and Covid-19 of 2020/21.

## **6. Major Findings and Recommendations**

### **a. Description and assessment of any major changes in the program:**

The department has evolved in two major ways since the last IBHE review in 2016, in staffing and the structure of the degree offered. There were four retirements, one of which was the chair of the department and the other three had been on the faculty since the early 1990s. Two faculty were added, while one is scheduled to be added in the next academic year. The faculty structure changed significantly in these changes, particularly to accommodate the addition of the Musical Theatre emphasis and the removal of Teacher Licensure options. The number of tenure-track/tenured faculty has been reduced from five in 2016 to three in 2024-25, this coupled with the overall reduction of faculty by one over that time has forced the department into relying on guest artists, while also spreading the current faculty thinly. The alteration of the faculty has given the department the advantage of ensuring that the faculty makeup suits the needs of the department as it currently stands. To relieve some of the burden on the faculty the department has relied heavily on guest artists in the production season, bringing in guest playwrights, directors, actors, and designers in recent seasons. The benefit of this approach is that it allows the department to supplement the expertise of the current faculty and expands the production offerings, allowing the department to tell stories from a more varied point of view than if only using the faculty of the department in these roles.

The structure of the department has changed, removing all the Teacher Licensure areas and adding Musical Theatre and Dramatic Writing emphases. The Theatre education areas were unpopular with the current student demographics, graduating only three students from 2010-2017. There were many departmental and curricular resources that were devoted to those areas. Musical Theatre was added in 2021 and Dramatic Writing was added in 2023. The faculty member that oversaw the Theatre Ed. Area was replaced with a Musical Theatre faculty upon their retirement. There were no faculty adjustments to handle the addition of the Dramatic Writing emphasis, relying on existing courses and faculty within the English and Theatre departments. The curriculum was adapted to accommodate the alteration of the offered emphases.

These alterations have increased the quality of the department, in both the curricular and production season areas. The evolution in faculty have also facilitated a changing of the culture for the better. The faculty are all rowing in the same direction and the student experience has improved significantly.

### **b. Description of major findings and recommendations, including evidence of learning outcomes and identification of opportunities for program improvement:**

The program began instituting an assessment process using the SLOs mentioned in Section 5. We have yet to receive enough data to identify any areas of improvement, but plan to review the data in AY24-25 and make curricular adjustments as needed. The department underwent an accreditation process through NAST in 2020-2021, including a self-study and a visit from an accreditation team. Areas of concern were related to adapting current safety practices to model those that had evolved in the field, the proper sorting of students in areas of interest within the major, the scope of the Musical Theatre area, and how the School of the Arts fit into the college/department structure. The majority of these concerns were addressed with further explanation and documentation. The department and the Doudna Fine Arts Center have altered safety policies to comply with their recommendations, mostly involving additional training and hard-hat use policies. Additional equipment has been purchased to facilitate safer use of the proscenium theatre space (The Theatre). The department has added an interview/audition process to facilitate the proper sorting of students into emphasis. This process is not used to remove student from the program, instead students enter the program as generalists and are not permitted to move into one of the other emphases if their work in that area is not at an acceptable level. Additional curricular revisions ensure acceptable differentiation of each of the emphases combined with the new emphasis sorting satisfied NAST concerns.

Future growth of the department is key to sustaining our current trajectory, with a target of 60 majors being the long-term goal. This number of majors would allow for an increase of scope within the production season, both in terms of roles that can be cast in a show and offstage positions for students. Our current major count caps the scope of our productions below the size that the facilities and budgets might allow. This is also true in our courses, as an increase of twenty majors would allow our courses to be fuller without major adjustments to offerings. The musical theatre area is primed for growth as many of our new students are drawn to that area. The current recruitment and retention plan has put the department on a trajectory that would get us to that departmental size in the near future, barring any major setbacks brought on by outside factors.

**c. Description of actions taken since the last review, including instructional resources and practices, and curricular:**

The major changes were the removal of teacher licensure areas and the addition of musical theatre and dramatic writing emphases. These were more than just curricular changes as the department has committed considerable resources to the growth and development of these areas. The department committed to producing a musical every season and established collaborative agreements with CLAS and the Department of Music for additional annual support for these productions. This includes cost a sharing model with CLAS Dean's office and the use of a faculty member from Music for our Music Director of the production. This has allowed the department to add an additional weekend of performances for the annual musical and an increase of scope. The area of dramatic writing has been strengthened by relationships with the Department of English and by adding a New Works Festival every other season. The New Works Festival provides opportunity for EIU students to present plays that they have written to a public audience with full production values. The department has also revamped the annual Theatre Symposium, transforming it into a forum to workshop newly written works that can be improved before being considered for the New Works Festival. The department has also presented two world premieres within the last few seasons, including a production that was commissioned for the department in 2021.

The department has also increased its use of guest artists. Prior to 2020 the department would commonly bring in one guest artist annually or biennially, this has increased to three or four guests each production season. Also, in previous years only directors and actors were used, that has been expanded to include lighting, scenic, and costume designers, as well as playwrights. Some of this was out of necessity due to our shrinking faculty but has become a hallmark of our department and has allowed it to produce a varied production season each year, presenting productions that would be impossible if only current theatre faculty were used. These outside artists also bring an invaluable set of skills, experiences, and connections that our students can use to increase their opportunities upon completion of their degree at EIU.

**d. Description of actions to be taken as a result of this review, including instructional resources and practices, and curricular:**

The department needs to explore potential theatre teacher licensure options, particularly those that would not add any additional faculty. Teaming up with an online masters/certification program to allow our students to receive a BA from EIU Theatre and be prepared to teach secondary education courses in theatre would be ideal, possibly in a 4+1 model. A population of current EIU students have expressed interest in this possibility, which was discovered during the research for this report.

Additionally, a review of the musical theatre curriculum is necessary now that the emphasis has completed its second two-year cycle and that there is a sizable cohort of students in the emphasis. Structural changes aren't likely, just small additions or subtractions to that curriculum now that it has had a chance to run for a few years may be necessary.

## Comments from the College Dean

The NAST-accredited Theatre (formerly Theatre Arts) BA has undergone several changes since the last full report. Paramount among these would arguably be the creation of a long-desired Musical Theatre emphasis, which recruiting data suggested would be a significant growth area. Done in collaboration with the Department of Music for the vocal instruction and music theory portion, it has already had a significant positive impact on recruitment/retention. Another desired add-on was a Dramatic Writing emphasis, which collaborates with the Department of English and has likewise garnered more diverse interest in the BA. The Department efficiently incorporated both curricular- and equipment-related suggestions given by the recent NAST visitors, ensuring the program remains current with best practices in the field. An assessment cycle is in progress and is anticipated to generate useful data for further revision. Major count was kept largely stable throughout the Illinois budget impasse and COVID crises, which speaks well of the faculty's flexibility and concern for the student. Even if it is still too early to assess a long-term impact of the Musical Theatre and Dramatic Writing emphases, we anticipate continued and sustained growth in enrollment.

We recommend a decision of **Program in good standing**.

## VPAA Decision

- Program in Good Standing
- Program flagged for priority review
- Program enrollment suspended

## VPAA Explanation:

### **50.0501 B.A. in Theatre**

The summary above describes the multiple efforts of the B.A. in Theatre program in adapting to student and university needs. The program has been remarkably resourceful in structuring its programming and curricular efforts around cost-sharing agreements with other departments. The theatrical programming for students and for public performance benefits greatly from the now-instituted regular practice of recruiting several guest artists per year. The program exemplifies the rewards of preparing to meet accreditation standards (NAST 2020-21), and is attuned to discovering valuable information from students themselves. In short, the program is contemplating the delivery of a new theatre licensure option that would partner with an online master's program. The program has set a goal of 60 majors (from its current 35 majors), with few curricular changes, and by leaning into the great potential of the new Musical Theatre focus.