

Annual Departmental Assessment Report
Department or Program: Theatre Arts
Academic Year of Report: AY 2016-17
Department Contact Person for Assessment: Harry Wonham

Section 1: Learning Objectives Assessed for this Report

The Department of Theatre Arts has begun a four-year process of assessment focused on each of its four Learning Outcomes. The AY 2016-17 report summarizes the department's assessment of Learning Outcome 1, which states that students in specified TA courses should:

Demonstrate knowledge, research, and analysis of theatre history, dramatic literature and critical theory across time and cultures, employing effective written and oral communication.

Section 2: Assessment Activities

Courses examined during this assessment of Learning Outcome 1:

Winter 2017

- TA 368: History of Theatre II (Barre)
- TA 472/572: Native Drama (May)

Spring 2017

- TA 369: History of Theatre III (Barre)
- TA 471/571: Theatre & Climate Change (May)
- TA 472/572: Contemporary Irish Theatre (Barre)
- TA 490: Play Direction (Najjar)

Assessment Methods:

Department faculty in the designated courses collected the following information on student attainment of Learning Outcome 1:

1. Comments on Student Course Evaluations
2. Targeted sample of graded projects from three randomly selected students per course
3. Data collected from a student questionnaire (conducted between Weeks 5-7) pertaining to Learning Outcome 1

During Week 10 of Spring term, the entire TA faculty convened to discuss the

information collected on student attainment of Learning Outcome 1. The conversation began with a review of procedures for collecting information, including 1) student evaluations, 2) targeted samples of graded work, and 3) results of the questionnaire designed for Learning Outcome 1. The DH presented spreadsheets with collated data on questionnaire outcomes. The most significant takeaways appeared to be: first, overall scores are high, suggesting that students believe they are meeting the goals outlined in Learning Objective 1; second, students gave lower ratings for their improvement in “written communication” as compared with other learning goals in five of the six courses surveyed. Faculty noted that the course in which written communication scored higher than other goals is a particularly writing intensive course, requiring critical writing assignments every week. The group agreed that, while impressive, this is not an appropriate pedagogical tactic in every Theatre Arts course. One faculty member expressed concerns about timing of the questionnaire, noting that many courses reserve the major writing component for the final weeks of the term, which are necessarily overlooked by the questionnaire. The group discussed several strategies for improving the content and administration of the questionnaires that will be developed for measuring Learning Outcomes 2, 3, and 4.

Faculty next discussed Course Evaluation comments, which were predominately very positive in their assessment of student attainment of Learning Outcome 1. One faculty member raised the question of whether students use the terms “culture” and “history” in the same way faculty intend them in the language of Learning Outcome 1. Another faculty member questioned whether students can be fully aware that their skills in such areas as written and oral communication may be improving over time.

Teachers of the courses designated for assessment described the targeted samples of graded student work, which were passed around the table for consideration by colleagues. Because of the size of the file (approximately 100 pp.), the DH explained that he did not copy the targeted samples of student work, which will remain available in the department office for ongoing use during the assessment process.

The discussion then turned to plans for assessing Learning Outcome 2, which is quite different from LO1. A plan of action was established for generating a new questionnaire during Fall of AY 2017-18, so that it can be administered in designated courses during Winter and Spring.

Section 3: Actions Taken Based on Assessment Analysis

As a result of our discussion of the data used to assess Learning Outcome 1, members of the department are interested in expanding the role of written communication in Theatre Arts courses generally. We also discussed the benefit of administering the student questionnaire as late as possible in Winter and Spring terms, in order to capture as much feedback as possible on student attainment.

Section 4: Other Efforts to Improve the Student Educational Experience

The Department of Theatre Arts is pursuing a number of curricular improvements, including the development of a new summer program and review of our “Futures” seminar for TA majors in their junior year. We are also exploring ways to enhance our advising programs for TA majors and minors, and we are attempting to expand opportunities for students to participate in University Theatre productions.

Section 5: Plans for Next Year

During AY 2017-18, the department plans to assess student attainment of Learning Outcome 2, which states that students in designated TA courses should:

Demonstrate the comprehension of form and content in theatre through production-related practice, applying skill sets of design, technology, management, and performance.

We will repeat the process of review followed during AY 2016-17 by collecting the following information on student attainment of Learning Outcome 2 from designated courses:

1. Comments on Student Course Evaluations
2. Targeted sample of graded projects from three randomly selected students per course
3. Data collected from a student questionnaire pertaining to Learning Outcome 2