Annual Review and Assessment
of
Theatre Program at A&M Corpus Christi
Submitted by
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The Theatre Program at Texas A&M Corpus Christi is an outstanding program that has garnered acclaim on state, regional and national levels. Both students and faculty have been recognized for their accomplishments in acting, directing and design. The program is held in high esteem by other theatre programs across the state of Texas.

The Theatre Program clearly exemplifies the following *Momentum 2015* imperatives as set down by Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi:

- **Imperative I:** Build and sustain academic excellence and competitive programs
- **Imperative IV:** Establish targeted areas of state, regional and national recognition and distinction.

Especially evident are the unifying Themes of *Momentum 2015* “Excellence, Engagement and Expansion.”

**Excellence:**

Faculty have strong credentials and are recognized by colleagues as outstanding theatre professionals and teacher/artists. The Theatre Program at Texas A&M Corpus Christi has received numerous awards from the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival (KCACTF), the Texas University Interscholastic League (UIL), and Texas Educational Theatre Association (TETA).

The students, faculty, and the theatre program have been recognized for achievements through numerous awards and fellowships. Since 2005 the following KCACTF participating productions have been held for consideration for the Region VI KCACTF Regional Festival – *Big Love*—Kelly Russell, *Anima Mundi*—Kelly Russell, *Bloody Poetry*—Chris Lusk, and *Shakespeare’s R&J*—Dr. Terry Lewis. It should be noted that *Anima Mundi*, *Bloody Poetry*, and *Shakespeare’s R&J* also were invited and performed at the Region VI Regional KCACT Festival in 2007, 2006, and 2005, respectively.

The Texas A&M Theatre faculty at Corpus Christi have received numerous awards. They are as follow:
Dr. Terry Lewis, Theatre Director received the Region VI Directing Fellowship to the National Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival in 2009. This is only one of eight awarded each year from across the United States.

Philip M. Johnson, lighting designer, set designer and technical director received the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival Regional Festival-Excellence in Lighting Design October 2007; Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival Regional Festival Excellence in Scenic Design, October 2006, Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival, Regional Festival-Excellence in Lighting Design October 2005.

Kelly P. Russell, acting/directing, secondary education received the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival Regional Committee Nomination for Outstanding Production for Big Love, October 2008, Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival Regional Directors’ Choice Award for Anima Mundi March 2008; Dallas/Fort Worth Critics’ Forum Award Outstanding Design or Creative Contribution for King Ubu Second Thought Theatre Festival of Independent Theatres, 2005. Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival; Excellence in Directing for Anima Mundi March 2007, Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival Respondent Nominee for 2008 Region VI Festival for Anima Mundi October 2007 Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival Directors’ Choice Nominee for 2008 Region VI Festival for Anima Mundi October 2007.

Rosa M. Lazaro, costume designer received the Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival Excellence in Costume Design for Big Love 2008.

Student accomplishments have also been significant. Texas A&M Corpus Christi theatre students and their acting partners regularly receive recognition as Irene Ryan nominees on state and regional levels. In Spring 2008, Daniel Mirsky and his partner Francesca Edy were selected to attend the National Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival in April in Washington, D.C. Francesca Edy received an internship at the Sundance Theatre Lab for Summer 2008. Additionally, Texas A&M Corpus Christi theatre students have received honors in design and directing with one student being invited to attend the 2008 National Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival as the KCACTF Region VI Society of Stage Directors and Choreographers (SSDC) winner. All of these awards and accomplishments recognize excellence on a level that exceeds those awards that are received by most universities.
Contributing to the success of the Texas A&M Corpus Christi Theatre program is the involvement of the theatre faculty in theatre and professional organizations that support both theatre and educational. Theatre faculty at Texas A&M Corpus Christi are members of and hold elected offices in state and regional committees in these organizations. Both the Theatre and educational organizations are paramount to the success of a theatre program. The Theatre faculty belong to these organizations:

**Theatre and Professional Organizations:**

**Terry Lewis, Ph.D.** - Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival, Region VI Committee (Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, New Mexico, Louisiana)
- Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival, Region VI-Texas Vice-Chair
- Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival, Region VI-Texas Chair
- Texas Educational Theatre Association-Adjudicator’s Organization, Administrative Committee,
- University Interscholastic League
- Association for Theatre in Higher Education

**Philip M. Johnson** - United States Institute for Theatre Technology
- Texas Educational Theatre Association

**Rosa M. Lazaro** - United States Institute for Theatre Technology
- Texas Educational Theatre Association
- Member of Phi Kappa Phi, National Honor’s Society

**Kelly P. Russell** - Texas Educational Theatre Association- Adjudicator’s Organization
- Selected as the sole adjudicator for the University Interscholastic League Conference 1-A One-Act Play Contest May 2007
- Texas Educational Theatre Association, Board of Directors, President, 2009-present
- Texas Educational Theatre Association, Board of Directors, President-Elect, 2007-2008
- Texas Educational Theatre Association, Board of Directors, Programming Chair, 2004-2005
- Texas Educational Theatre Association, Adjudicator’s Organization, Member, Standards and Practices Committee, 2004-present
- University Interscholastic League, Advisory Committee Member, 2006-present
- The Horton Foote Society, Secretary/Treasurer, 2002-2004
- University Interscholastic League, One-Act Play Contest Adjudicator, 2003-present
- *Caller-Times* South Texas Distinguished Scholars Program Scholarship Committee 2004-2006
- Texas Speech Communication Association-The Horton Foote Society
Engagement and Expansion:

Retention and recruitment have increased the Theatre Program from 28 majors in Fall 2003 to 101 in Fall 2007 and from 31 majors in Spring 2004 to 92 in Spring 2008. According to the university assessment the theatre program at Texas A&M Corpus Christi has grown 300% since 2004. The Spring 2009 graduating class had a total of 18 graduates.

Involvement in Texas Educational Theatre Association, Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival, UIL One Act Play Contest and the University Interscholastic League Designfest have increased the profile of the Theatre program. This has increased recruitment and retention. The state, regional and national involvement through Kennedy Center American Theater Festival has been particularly helpful.

During interviews with Texas A&M Corpus Christi Theatre majors students were extremely positive in their feelings about the education that they were receiving from the Texas A&M Corpus Christi Theatre program. Extremely positive responses from students were also reflected on assessment documents developed by the Theatre Program. Students speak of recommending Texas A&M Corpus Christi to friends. Concerns were that they felt that some class sizes were too large; they felt that some of their professors were on the edge of burnout and they wanted more individual instruction from theatre faculty members.

The Theatre program at A&M Corpus Christi seems poised for considerable growth and increased excellence in all areas. In order to “nourish” this program of excellence the program needs additional faculty and staff and additional increase in enrollment to meet and improve retention.

If these needs were prioritized they would be as follow:

1.) Acting/Directing faculty
2.) Technical Director
3.) Design/Technical Theatre faculty
4.) Costume Shop Supervision
5.) Full-Time Secretary

The addition of another Acting/Directing faculty member will allow the department to reduce the size of acting and directing classes. This will allow more one on one instruction with each professor. As evident from the conversations with Texas A&M Corpus Christi Theatre students’ class size and the ability to have more individual instruction with a professor is a major concern.

The need for a Technical Director is based on the importance of safety in the production building process. At present the Scenic/Lighting Designer serves as the Technical Director. He also carries a 4/4 load and designs sets and lights for A&M Corpus Christi productions. This arrangement makes it very difficult for sets to be constructed, lights to be hung, and safety procedures to be monitored and followed. This is a very demanding work load. While the current Technical Director is exceptionally safety conscious, he cannot be in all places at all times.
While student workers serve as assistants in the scene shop, this is not the best solution. There must be a consistent, focused vision for the building of sets and lights and an adherence to safety at all times. The lack of a Technical Director will eventually lead to burnout, serious safety violations and accidents due to exhaustion.

Another Design/Technical Theatre faculty member is needed. Since the current faculty member serves as both Scenic and Lighting designer having only one faculty member teaching all scenic and lighting design classes limits the number of classes that may be taught in a given sequence and that in turn limits recruitment and enrollment. Another consideration is the workload as it relates to production design. At present one designer is designing set and lights for all productions unless a student designer is assigned. While student designers are important components of the educational milieu these student designers must be supervised. The only individual at present available to supervise these student scenic and lighting designers is the current set and light designer. This of course does nothing to alleviate his current workload. The addition of another Design/Technical Theatre faculty will allow the workload to be distributed in a more equitable fashion that facilitates learning.

A Costume Shop Supervisor is essential to a strong theatre program. At present the theatre faculty member who supervises the costume shop is also the costume designer for all the Texas A&M Corpus Christi Theatre productions or she supervises the student designers. This faculty member also teaches a 4/4 load. This is a situation that impacts safety as well as courts burnout. The costume shop is as dangerous in its own right as a scene shop. Hazardous chemicals are used regularly, equipment and machinery are used which, if left unattended or used incorrectly may cause fires or serious accidents and a costume shop supervisor must monitor and run student work crews just as a technical director must run a scene shop. There must be a consistent, focused vision that keeps the costume shop running smoothly in an organized fashion. The addition of these positions as with all the others will increase retention and improve recruitment.

Finally a full time secretary will allow the program to grow, by assisting in the efficient running of the program, and allowing faculty to develop a more detail recruitment plan. The full time secretary would also assist in record keeping and the processing of departmental paperwork.

The addition of these positions is an important component of maintaining and increasing the excellence in the Texas A&M Corpus Christi Theatre Program. The additions of these positions will also assist in the expansion and engagement of new students and increase retention of current students.

Increase in Funding

Funding must increase to assist in expansion. Inadequate funding and irregular funding make it difficult to plan a season that will provide the educational opportunities necessary to continue student development. The following suggestions will assist in the development of a stronger theatre program at the Texas A&M Corpus Christi Theatre Program.
An increase in funding from institutional allocations will allow the theatre program to produce a strong theatre season and also run an academic department. The needs for a theatre program are very different than those of other programs. Not only are there costs associated with running an academic unit (paper, pens, copy machines etc.) but the theatre program is in the business of running a small production company. The cost of wood, steel, fabric and the repair of lighting equipment, sound equipment, sewing machines, power tools etc. must be factored into expenditures.

More monies need to be made available for scholarships. A strong program enhanced by the availability of scholarship money has significant appeal for the talented student. In these trying economic times it is often the offer of a scholarship which can encourage a student to attend a particular university. If scholarship money is not made more readily available from the institution students will make the decision to attend other universities.

Additionally monies made available for student travel are exceptionally important. In order for students to succeed in the competitive world of theatre they must be able to network effectively. Attendance at theatre conferences, auditions, conventions and workshops is integral to the network necessary to the theatre professional once they leave the academic setting. Increase funds available for student travel would go far in assisting students in these endeavors. It may also increase alumni giving at some future date.

At present, the theatre faculty run summer theatre camps, clinics, and speech tournament gratis. They take no pay because they want all monies raised to be applied to scholarships. In the recent past faculty were told that the university would match funds raised. However, the maximum amount matched was $5,000 rather than the $10,000 that was raised. At present, there are no matching funds available from the university. Since these clinics are aimed at recruiting high school students to attend Texas A&M Corpus Christi this is a time honored method of developing the theatre program. If university money were made available to run these camps and to pay faculty so that all monies could go to scholarships this would allow the program to offer larger scholarships to prospective students and attract top notch talent to the program.

In order to secure the increased growth of the program as well as address program needs the theatre facilities, storage, and support areas must be increased. The following suggestions will allow the physical and safety needs of the program to be met.

- Expansion of the scene shop so that all building is able to take place inside the actual scene shop. Additionally a paint booth and hazardous material storage closet are necessary to insure safety.

- Additional storage areas so that all storage may be in climate controlled building to minimize climate related losses
• Expansion of the costume shop to create a room that will accommodate a dye vat, fitting rooms, laundry, and the appropriate storage areas

• Additional storage for costume pieces in order to provide more room in the costume shop for building

• Increase size of the make up/dressing room to accommodate specialized training as well as specialized needs for particular shows.

• Expand the Center for the Arts Building to include a Green room for the actors

• Assess the need for fly space and wing space in the proscenium theatre and the black box theatre

While some of these suggestions may seem more cosmetic than essential it is important to recognize the significance of these changes to a theatre program. For example, the current make up/dressing room is small in size with the washer and dryer also housed in the space. When a cast of 15 people attempt to dress, do basic makeup, and specialized makeup while clothing is washing and drying in the same space the dressing room becomes overly hot, humid and a difficult space in which to apply makeup and costumes. Add to this the use of hairspray and a variety of scents from the makeup, costumes and laundry and it becomes an impossible space in which to prepare for a performance. Since there is no Green Room where the actors and run crew may go to wait before a show or to warm up the difficulties increase. Appropriate size and ventilation are critical to a makeup/dressing room. A Green Room is not a luxury but a necessity.

The money allotted for materials by the Library does not adequately serve the needs of the Theatre program; the following concerns should be addressed:

• Increase funding for media and books for Theatre program

• Explore the possibility of additional periodicals that are necessary for students to advance in their career goals.

• Explore the possibility of alternate sources of funding within the library and university to acquire program specific materials necessary to the curriculum
The current curriculum is strong and serves the needs of the program at this time, taking into account the need for more faculty. The syllabi are current and reflect the scope of the classes offered. The syllabi are specific to each course and easy to understand. Assessment of theatre courses by faculty is ongoing and effective.

Interviews with current students and reflection on the current assessment documents the following conclusions have been drawn:

- The students are very satisfied by the quality of education that they are receiving in the Theatre program.
- Students feel faculty are knowledgeable, caring and accessible.
- Students feel that the curriculum suits their needs.
- Students would like to have smaller classes in order to promote a more positive learning environment.
- Students believe that the addition of more faculty would allow them to have more one on one time with their professors and promote a stronger learning environment.
- Students would like to have more classes available more frequently.
- Students are concerned that burnout by their professors may lead to faculty attrition.
- Students believe they are being well trained to enter their chosen careers.

The current advisement system for the Theatre Program seems to work well. Both theatre faculty and an academic advisor work with the students to assure compliance with degree plans and a clear path to graduation.

The Theatre program while well known and lauded on state, regional and national levels seems to be less well known locally and perhaps to A&M alumni.

- Change in approach to marketing and public relation strategies to raise profile of the theatre program.
• Evaluate marketing and public relations job responsibilities and assess effectiveness

• Evaluate effectiveness of donor development and assess strategies for fundraising

• More aggressive marketing in/to the Corpus Christi community

• More aggressive marketing in/to the surrounding communities

• More aggressive marketing to A&M Alumni

A change in the approach to the marketing and public relations strategies in order to raise the profile of the theatre program could be accomplished by a closer working relationship between the university marketing division and the theatre program or by a shift in the methods used to market the theatre program and its productions. Perhaps a position could be developed that would be focused on marketing and public relations that would be housed within the College of Arts & Sciences. I would not recommend that the current theatre faculty be asked to assume additional job duties in the area of marketing and public relations.

It is possible that there may other methods that could be used to assist in donor development and fundraising. One suggestion has been to attempt to increase the donor base by producing a Children’s show during the summer. This might prove helpful in raising community awareness and support for the theatre program. Also suggested was a stronger collaboration between the Theatre program and the Music program. This seems to already have taken place. Perhaps this will raise awareness in other areas of the university and the community.

The Theatre Program at Texas A&M Corpus Christi is vibrant and strong. The program at present exemplifies the Momentum 2015 ideas of “Excellence, Engagement and Expansion”. It has grown significantly since 2004 and shows much potential for continued growth. In order to foster the excellence of this program attention should be paid to the need for more faculty and staff to stave off burnout and to do the daily business of running an academic program and a small production company. Additional faculty and staff will nourish student accomplishment and satisfaction and increase retention.

An increase in funding must be a top priority. Whether this is accomplished by a reassessment of the University’s strategic plan with regard to donor development or a reassessment of institutional allocations or a combination of both it must be done or the program will founder.
Theatre facilities, storage areas and any support buildings must be looked at anew. The new offices are lovely. While the two theatres are inviting performances spaces, there are challenges that need to be addressed. The same is true of the support spaces and the storage areas.

Finally, there is much discussion about the possibility of the Theatre Program becoming the Theatre Department. As the number of students increase and the number of faculty and staff increases this is a necessity to enhance visibility and continue to foster excellence.

Most importantly, a long term strategic plan must be developed by the university in conjunction with the theatre program which addresses the needs as delineated in this document. Once developed, the plan must be followed in order to assure maximum success.