Abstract: The following document is the Westmont College Theatre Arts Department’s Five-Year Report of departmental effectiveness. In it, the department describes and explicates much of the thinking that has dominated the department’s work with Program Review over the past several years, and shows and analyzes data relevant to three assessment areas. First, the document describes the department’s experience with its original Assessment Plan, and shows and justifies the reasons for a complete re-writing of the plan in September of 2005. Second, the document describes and shows evidence related to departmental Senior Projects, which has been singled out by the faculty as one of our most important assessment tools. Third, the document provides a survey of reviews of theatre performances over the past several years. By offering evidence in these areas, the department shows its ongoing work with assessment by presenting areas of great change and development, midst a consistent tradition of performances where students enjoy high degrees of success.

Like other departments at Westmont College, the Theatre Arts Department created its self-assessment plan in early January 2004. Since then, the department has changed the plan significantly. This is due to many reasons: knowledge gained from working with the original plan, input from the Program Review Committee and other faculty members, and losing one faculty member who had been a significant force in the creation of the 2004 plan. The new plan more clearly communicates what we want for students studying Theatre Arts at Westmont College; creates a clearer mission and set of goals for the department; is more streamlined, elegant, and effective; distinguishes between the “studio and performance” and “classroom” parts of the program; and accurately reflects the vision of the present faculty members.

In this report, the committee will find the following components:

I. Summary of 2004 Departmental Goals, and summary of Revised Goals, as of January 2006, including timeline for implementation of the new plan
II. Data, Interpretation, and Changes Related to Senior Theatre Arts Projects
III. Benchmarks for and Survey of External Review Sources
IV. Index of Program Review Materials

This report summarizes the reasons to modify the original assessment plan, and focuses on two specific assessment tools. The first is the Theatre Arts Senior Projects that form the capstone course for our majors. We have chosen this particular assessment tool for several reasons:

- the department has spent a considerable amount of time and effort changing the Senior Projects in ways that optimize student success
- the department has spent the most discussion time in interpreting and analyzing the results of the data
• Interpretation and analysis of the data have led to significant changes in the assessment piece

The second tool is external reviews written about departmental productions. Largely, this takes the form of previews and reviews written for and about Westmont theatre and dance performances. Admittedly, this is not the most important assessment tool for the department, since we never have any real control over the timing and content of these reviews. However, we have chosen this tool because reviews

• Present important “pulse taking” moments for the department’s faculty artists by providing descriptive and evaluative information regarding how departmental productions are perceived and enjoyed by outside sources
• Provide insights into the development of our department’s majors in the practical arts of the theatre, such as acting, dance, and scenic and costume design
• Highlight instances of student success in the practical arts of the stage
• Reveal that Westmont’s Theatre Arts Department is an important component of the Santa Barbara theatre community, enjoys a reputation for theatrical excellence and creativity, and develops students who perform with great intensity, precision, versatility, energy, and emotional honesty
I. Summary of 2004 Departmental Goals, and Summary of Revised Goals

In 2004, the Theatre Arts Department stated the following as an overview of its work as a department:

Overview: The Theatre Arts Department at Westmont College seeks to occupy a crucial niche in Christian Liberal Arts education. Coupling innovative approaches to theatre practice with a thorough foundation in traditional perspectives, the department’s classes, projects, and performances teach students how to make original contemporary theatre, and provide the practical and methodological tools necessary for understanding how it relates to both past and present. In keeping with Westmont’s Liberal Arts vision and heritage, the department develops creative, imaginative individuals who are ready for a lifetime of thinking, learning, and creating. The Westmont Theatre Arts Department explores contemporary world theatre by exposing students to the work of artists and teachers who come from a variety of traditions, ethnicities, nationalities, cultures, and aesthetic training. By the end of a four-year period at Westmont College, a Theatre Arts major has gained the perspectives, knowledge, and creative methods necessary to make, interpret, and understand theatre in the contemporary world. With this in mind, the department has the following fundamental goals for its students.

1. Students display innovation, originality, and creativity in their theatre work, and possess a deep and broad understanding of the traditional heritage of world performing traditions

2. Students possess knowledge of diverse methods, approaches, and practices of the art of the stage

3. Students have the ability to create their own original theatre work, and possess the appropriate theoretical and historical contexts necessary to understand its place in the cultural dynamics of the past and present

In addition to these departmental goals, the department identified four of the college’s goals as significant foci for the work of the department. These college-wide goals included Critical Interdisciplinary Thinking; Diversity; Written and Oral Communication; and Christian Orientation.

The department commenced work with this plan, but before the beginning of the 2005-2006 school year it lost – due to resignation – a faculty member who had been a significant member of the department for the prior three years, and was a significant voice in the creation of the 2004 plans. At the same time, a new faculty member entered the department in the fall of 2004. Consequently, by the time the department reconsidered its 2004 plan in the fall of 2005, the faculty had changed significantly, and the vision of the department changed with it. In the 2004 report, the desire to create “innovative” theatre was of primary importance for the department, and the language of innovative practice was shot through the 2004 plan. For example, “Students display
innovation, originality, and creativity in their theatre work... students have the ability to create their own original theatre work... the department makes performances that achieve a high degree of uniqueness and originality.” This was commented upon by the Program Review Committee when it asked, “...is all innovation equally “good”? Are there standards that can be used to judge not only whether a student is demonstrating creativity, but also whether the creative act has been done well? Would there ever be a time when you would inform a student that although he or she had demonstrated creativity, the original work has been done poorly?”

These were very good questions, and dominated many departmental discussions. Upon deeper reflection about the plan, the department concluded the following about the 2004 plan:

- The language of the 2004 plan does not accurately reflect what we want for Westmont students studying Theatre Arts at Westmont
- The language of the 2004 document does not effectively communicate the present departmental mission and goals.
- The 2004 plan is unwieldy, redundant, and overly ambitious
- The goals of the 2004 plan were not clear, measurable, nor expressed in student outcomes

Consequently, the department wholly revamped our 2004 plan.

Summary of Present Departmental Goals, January 2006, With Timeline for Implementation

The departmental goals of our present plan are as follows:

1. Westmont College Theatre Arts students will cultivate their own individual creative spirits, and display the necessary imagination, technical expertise, and courageous self-discipline necessary for effective, dynamic work on the stage.  
   (Presently Implemented)

2. Westmont College Theatre Arts students will display a deep and broad understanding of the history, literature, and theory of the European theatre tradition, and contemporary American theatre practice that has derived from it.  
   (Implemented 2006-2007)

The college-wide goals of our present plan as are follows:

1. Westmont College Theatre Arts students will cultivate tools for effective written communication, and will display abilities to describe, evaluate, differentiate, synthesize, analyze, and interpret, toward a deep understanding of the received historical, theoretical, and practical development of theatre and drama.  
   (Implemented 2006-2007)
2. Westmont College Theatre Arts students cultivate tools for effective oral communication, and display flexibility, nuance, power, clarity, and the thoughtful understanding necessary to communicate fictional characters through language.  
(Implemented 2007-2008)

3. Westmont college students understand their place in a diverse world, and through the department’s Globe Series and its Theatre in Central and Eastern Europe Mayterm, students display cross-cultural communication skills, flexibility, empathy, and awareness of people from other cultures.  
(Implemented May 2007)

4. Christian Orientation Standard to be reconceived.  
(Spring, 2008)
II. Data Analysis, Interpretation, and Changes in Theatre Arts Senior Projects

The department decided to focus on changes in the department’s Theatre Arts Senior Projects for this report, since the faculty have spent a great deal of time and effort increasing the Projects’ effectiveness as assessment tools. This “story” of the Senior Projects communicates how this portion of our program has changed over time, shows some of the department’s best thinking regarding what we want for our students, and provides a clear picture of at least one important way that assessment is done in our department.

Senior projects have been a culminating course for Theatre Arts majors at Westmont since the major was formed in the mid-1980’s. They have been exclusively performative in nature, and involve a student in directing a play or choreographing a dance, creating a one-person show, acting in a major role in a departmental production, among other possibilities. In the 2005-2006 school year, the department decided to use these projects as important assessment tools, but realized that there was little in place to evaluate student success once the project was completed. Up to an including the fall of 2004, students chose their own project, rehearsed it, presented it, and were given a grade – invariably an “A” if the project was completed.

After discussion, the faculty concluded that students needed more guidance, more structure, and more benchmarks that would optimize student success in the project. Consequently, the department added several components to Senior Projects undertaken in the spring of 2005. For these projects, students selected a committee of three faculty members who would ultimately critique the work, and selected a “chair” of the committee who would mentor the student through the process and completion of the project. Students were instructed that they would be evaluated on two criteria – process and theatrical effectiveness. Three seniors completed projects in the spring of 2005. Here is a sample of faculty remarks for two of the students’ projects:

Student # 1

Process

This was quite good [Student # 1]. I liked your careful description of the process. You took the process seriously, took the interview seriously, and this seriousness of approach pays dividends in all your work. I like the detailed work you did in the process – using The Second Sex, writing poetry, finding other poetry, developing movements, and so forth. I like your description of the challenges, including the wall during Midsummer, and even more critically, the insight that dancers and actors work differently.
Theatrical Effectiveness

I think this was effective also, [Student # 1]. I think there was a great deal of interesting movement, and it was quite impressive to hold the stage for such a long chunk of time, considering this is really a first work. I do think, however, that you should have listened to your own reservations about the costuming. From my perspective, the costuming worked against this piece, for a variety of reasons. Most important, the theatrical clarity could have been helped by costuming the dancers more as characters. This was a piece dependent on archetypes – the Westmont Woman, the Business Type, the Trophy Girlfriend, and so on. I think that the similarity of costume worked against the clarity of this idea, and made the piece muddier than your staging and choreography realized. Next time, listen to your reservations and intuitions more!!

Student # 2

Process

I think that once you got going you started to get into some interesting, provocative issues, with a nice depth of thinking. However, it took you a great deal of time to get going [Student # 2], and the opening moments of the interview came off as flippant and informal. I liked your description of the process, which was evident, and enjoyed hearing about the development of the script, the way you came up with the shots, and how you worked with your actors. It does appear that there were some problems with this process, not all of them related to the development of the film, but rather related to how this particular piece fit into the broader context of the Fringe Festival.

Theatrical Effectiveness

I think this was quite good, [Student #2], and I think that what you eventually pulled off was remarkable. It was a huge undertaking, and the piece seemed to work well, eliciting great response from the audience. I do think that the ending was rushed, however, lacking in the power that it could have had because it was so quick. I also think that some of the acting scratched the surface of what some of the roles could have been. However, this is a bit nit picking. This was a huge undertaking, and you pulled it off in a very nice fashion.

Following the Spring 2005 projects, the faculty continued to discuss the effectiveness of the Senior Projects as an assessment tool. Concomitantly, the department revised its entire Program Review Policy, and instituted a new primary goal for the department, which reads, “Westmont College Theatre Arts students will cultivate their own individual creative spirits, and display the necessary imagination, technical expertise, and courageous self-discipline necessary for effective, dynamic work on the stage.”

As the department considered how to evaluate projects for 2005, we began wondering what student success would “look like” for this goal. Using the revised goal as a guide, the faculty concluded that another element was needed for Senior Project Criteria. As the
department pondered what we want for our students, it became evident that, since we want to help students develop their “own individual creative spirits” (as we term it in the Departmental Goal #1) we needed to add criteria that spoke to this goal. Consequently, we added an element called “intention,” where students clearly articulate in written form their purposes, intentions, and desires for the project. In essence, we decided to ask students what they want to do, and how they want their creativity to be expressed; in other words, we asked students how they wanted to be evaluated in the project. The department introduced these criteria in the fall of 2005 when one Senior Project was attempted. The following passage is excerpted from the student’s intention document for his 2005 Senior Project

My first intention in choosing this play is to present a story of love, love-lost, tragedy, and hope. I want to present a play that has real emotions in it, which people, college age and other, can grasp onto and understand. I want to tell this specific story of sweet, tragic love, and yet tell a human story that goes beyond Nina, Treplev, and the Seagull...I want to create a platform for other students to participate in another type of theatre that is more realistic in concept, that would allow some students to sharpen, to hone, to work on some of their other acting skills....I want to create a more classically imagined production that would continue to expand the horizons of the students (both actors and spectators) of what theatre can look like.

The following represents how faculty responded to the effectiveness of the performance, directly commenting upon the original intention of the student:

**Faculty One Response**

I believe you accomplished your first intention in the telling and honoring of this story. The audience seemed to really enjoy the piece, and specifically the student audience resonated with the age, obstacles, and emotions of the characters portrayed. You could have gone further with the realistic style as it related to the emotions of the characters. I wanted more love, more loss, and for the audience to love and hate each of the characters a bit more. You took on a lot with this piece, and I admired your dedication and passion to the project. I think that the piece suffered as a result of your decision to both act and direct, but given that obstacle, I was very impressed with the quality of the performance. The style and theme of the show contributed to the depth and breadth of our departmental season. Good work!

**Faculty Two Response**

I think [The Student] did a terrific job with his scene. I think that he had a clear purpose, and created a process that carried that purpose out. It is clear that he wanted to create a tight ensemble, which he was very successful at, considering brief post-show discussions I had with the actors. I think the acting was clear, direct, and that the show felt “complete,” in a way that student shows don’t always capture. He wanted to explore a realistic acting style, which was successful, and he wanted to explore certain themes of love and loss, which I believe he was partially successful at. I do think that some crucial directing decisions hampered the execution of the production. Maintaining a blackout...
style lighting scheme inhibited the performance to really get cooking in emotional, rhythmic, visual, and dramatic terms.

After the completion of this project, much departmental discussion, and input from the Program Review Committee, the department decided that the evaluation criteria – intention, process, and theatrical effectiveness – needed clearer benchmarks that students could use to develop their Projects, and that faculty could use to evaluate them. In addition, the faculty expanded its notion of what constitutes a Senior Project. Till now, projects were exclusively performance related, but the department wondered about students who were more interested in the history, literature, or theory of the stage, or perhaps playwriting.

Consequently, the nature of the Senior Project has changed substantially. Students have a range of choices at their disposal, developed in consultation with departmental faculty. Students can perform, direct, choreograph, write a play, or write a final substantive research paper. Whichever they choose, students will continue to be evaluated on the fundamental criteria of the project, which mirror three important components of our major Departmental Goal. In other words, the benchmarks chosen relate not only to intention, process, and theatrical effectiveness of the Senior Projects, but they also relate directly to “imagination, technical expertise, and courageous self-discipline” that we want our students to exhibit during their time at Westmont. For the Senior Projects, we have decided upon the following benchmarks:

Intention
- Student will provide a clearly articulated statement of purpose for their project, including choice of material, range of theatrical and/or dramatic influences, and a personal statement regarding why this project at this time will culminate their experience at Westmont

Process
- Student will develop and organize ideas for theatrical performance with faculty mentors and fellow student collaborators, including, but not limited to, visual ideas, ideas for action, relationship to audience, and conceptual approach. Student will keep a journal of the development of these ideas, and chronicle the evolution of the piece in written form, in consultation with faculty mentor
- Student will organize rehearsal and performance schedule; be prompt, punctual, and organized; will manage student collaborators; will enlist necessary support personnel; and will stay in contact with faculty mentor regarding any problems that may arise through the process

Execution and Theatrical Effectiveness
- Public Performance occurs as scheduled
- Major intentions of student, as provided in Intention document and in the student’s journal, are communicated and made evident through the performance
- Student is evaluated in terms of achieving the goals they set for themselves, as well as theatrical principles including, but not limited to expressive clarity, structural integrity, performative energy, and aesthetic wholeness
- Student has interview with faculty panel that provides both oral and written evaluation of the project
- Student provides faculty with self-assessment of the project

The department is very pleased with the work that has been done thus far on this assessment tool. We have changed the nature of the project substantially, have provided students with clearer guidelines and benchmarks for success, and have created criteria for faculty evaluation that are consonant with the goals of the department. Prior to the spring of 2005, students had very little input in their projects from faculty members, and faculty gave very little feedback to students following the completion of the project. By introducing these new policies, we found that student work improved: students described their projects in clear language, using the terminology of the field; rehearsals were better organized; and student work in the rehearsals was more focused and detail-oriented. In addition, faculty attending rehearsals indicated that students actors were better prepared, understood what they were doing with more depth, and could describe their involvement with emotional force and clarity. The department understands that this is a constantly evolving tool, and will shift, evolve, and change over the next several years, and we will continue to fine-tune the process as we go along.
III. Survey of External Review Sources

Nearly every semester, Westmont productions are reviewed as any local professional production is. Students are held up to critical scrutiny, are available for local awards and – in some cases – international awards and honors. The following represents a survey of production reviews, focusing on student work, that have taken over the last five years or so, primarily in acting, but also in dance and design. The department uses the reviews to gauge the success of the program related to the other educational institutions in the area; refine the department’s performance program; and identify areas for improvement. The following benchmarks are used to evaluate student success in this area:

- Westmont student productions are consistently reviewed by reviewers from the area print press
- Westmont students are singled out for excellence in the productions, be it in acting, dance, design, or other practical arts of the stage
- Westmont students are recognized for acting ability, related to, but not limited to, energy, exuberance, and enthusiasm of performance; emotional genuineness and authenticity; technical proficiency related to precision, timing, and clarity of performance; abilities with language;
- Westmont productions will be recognized for all-around excellence, be considered for area awards and regional, national, or international recognition
- Westmont productions are recognized for originality, creativity, and innovation in conception and execution

King Richard II, Fall 2005

*King Richard II*, a co-production of Westmont College and Santa Barbara’s Lit Moon Theatre Company recognized as the 2nd Best Production in Santa Barbara County by the Santa Barbara News-Press

*King Richard II* invited to perform at the prestigious Gdansk Shakespearean Festival in August 2005, performing alongside some of the most significant professional theatre companies in Europe, including the Moscow Art Theatre, the Maly Theatre of St. Petersburg, and the Modjeska Theatre of Poland

“The rest of the cast [using both professional and Westmont student actors] is for the most part equally distinguished, lending urgency to these subtle messages from the past.”  
-Charles Donelan, Santa Barbara Independent

A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Spring 2005

“Their [Tim LeDoux, Carlo Moss, Erin Brehm, and Beth Segura] scene is played with deep conviction and anger, making the sudden detours into absurdity that much more funny. The timing and physicality of the actors here around a small sofa pays off, line
after line. Zak Landrum amazes in his debut performance. He not only delivers the lines with confidence, but visibly relishes them… Ms. Forden’s Puck, dressed in mosslike shreds, brings to her character enough naughtiness to justify her behavior, but reigns in any tendency to clown it up.”

-Ted Mills, Santa Barbara News-Press

“Luckily, Westmont has a few very fine actors, and the evening is memorable visually. Erin Brehm’s Helena kept coming up with new depths.

-D. J. Palladino, Santa Barbara Independent

**Reckless, Fall 2004**

“Audiences leaving opening night of Craig Lucas’ *Reckless* at Westmont College knew that they had seen at least two stars: lead actor Erin Brehm in her role as the housewife Rachel, and the set, designed by Michael Pearce…None of this would matter if Erin Brehm hadn’t commanded the stage like she does here. She doesn’t pull off the gravity of a middle-aged woman, but she’s convincing as someone on their way to becoming just that. Her youth makes her idealism more realistic than delusional, and we truly come to care about her character, even when the play’s circumstances buffeted her with silliness.”

-Ted Mills, Santa Barbara Independent

**Frankenstein, Spring 2004**

“Smallest by far of the three college theater programs in town, Westmont routinely takes on immense aesthetic risks… Westmont is a private Christian liberal arts college but the underlying raw emotion of man of its theater productions is not so much shocking or prurient, as is startlingly germane… By the time I saw Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* in rehearsal, it had evolved into a charged shrine to her words on a highly original set. The Westmont actors got there, interestingly, by plumbing the author’s life for added inspiration. By late rehearsals, the chills were there as well.”

-D. J. Palladino, Santa Barbara News-Press

“As Victor, Joshua ‘Casey’ Wells grabs hold of the audience and never lets go. Already a bit unstable, Victor is easily brought down by the Creature’s advance, and Wells is there, inside that existential abyss, all the way down. He holds nothing back… The four/five Shelley’s (Rose Elaine Elfman, Cambria Forden, Amber Francis Palmer and Kate Louise Paulsen) all do a fantastic job at performing her rather unwieldy text – they even manage to give it a burnish of the modern in its delivery.”

-Ted Mills, Santa Barbara News-Press

**The Skin of our Teeth, Spring 2002**

It’s Westmont again for daring theatre. Does Westmont know this about itself? When you think about the conventionally held ideas of a Christian institution at this late date – that is, ranging from defensive to defensively fundamental – it always seems strange that this school harbors work more ‘out there’ than the two other active theater programs put
together… they – and this program – are brave and passionate… The actors have kudos coming, too. Julie Salyer has the best comic instincts I’ve seen in a long time hereabouts; her initial restraint gave way through the evening and she became a center of attention without upstaging anyone. Benjamin Holsteen and Misty Coy provided force for the semi-farce and ultimately gave all the experimentalism a grounding in physical truth.

-D. J. Palladino, Santa Barbara Independent

**Much Ado About Nothing, Spring 2000**

Actors Meghan O’Malley and Johnnie Oberg brew up some amazing chemistry in these roles, demonstrating glorious command of the script. Other inspired performances come from Greg Romanowski as Don Pedro and Misty Coy as Ursula.

-Starshine Roshell, Santa Barbara News-press

**The Critic, Fall 1999**

Best Production of the Year in Goleta Valley Voice and Santa Barbara News-Press

Independent Theatre Award for Acting, Joshua Swanson

Independent Theatre Award for Costume Design, Shpetim Zero

Damon M. Robertson’s command of the surgically scathing language of Mr. Sneer was one of the most enjoyable and fluent performances; Joshua Swanson’s camp menace and frenetic superiority rendered an endearingly egomaniacal Puff; Johnnie Oberg was hilarious and neurotic in double casting as Sir Fretful and the hero of Puff’s play, Don Ferolo Whiskerandos; and Katie Mitchell as the heroine Tilburnia took your breath away with her stunning voice and impeccable tragic-comic timing.

-Tom Jacobs, Santa Barbara News-Press

**Conclusion:** The above is a representative survey of departmental productions for the past several years. They reveal to us that the department is unique in Santa Barbara, perhaps unique in Christian liberal arts, and our students can take the stage with confidence on any stage in the world. The above depict values in performance that are important to us – emotional and physical intensity; flexibility, clarity, and precision with language; abilities in comedy and serious drama; and energy, exuberance, and joy in performing. From these reviews we see that the program provides a consistently high level of theatrical artistry in our student actors, and that our program’s adventurous character is a defining feature of Theatre Arts at Westmont.
## IV. Index – Program Review

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Conclusion

In conclusion, the department feels it is in a period of pedagogical growth, as it continues to enjoy success in the performance portion of our program. The process we have undertaken with our Senior Project has been an eye-opening experience. The amount and quality of faculty discussion and input have been inspiring, and it has led to some significant, quantifiable changes on the part of an important part of our major. We look forward to looking at the results after the next wave of seniors completes their project in the spring of 2006. We continue to be pleased with the way that our program and department is perceived by outside sources. We work hard in creating projects for our students that are exciting, and we work doubly hard in making sure that our students enjoy success in the projects they participate in. The praise for our students exemplifies the hard work put in by our faculty, and shows – in descriptive and particular ways – that our student performers change the audiences who come to see their work, and provide a great deal of aesthetic enjoyment and pleasure for the audiences of our program.

Discussion of the tools and strategy of assessment is more prevalent than any time in the past two decades of the Theatre Arts Department at Westmont College. Discussion happens both informally, as we scurry off for class, but more important, program review is a discussion point in nearly every faculty meeting. In our next report, we intend to return to the development of Senior Projects as an assessment tool, and will analyze student outcomes in relation to the new goals and benchmarks provided by the faculty. Though the department has not decided on other tools that may be focused on, most likely possibilities include an investigation of outcomes related to our students understanding of Departmental Goal #2 – deep and broad knowledge of the history, literature, and theory of the European theatre tradition, and contemporary American theatre practice that has derived from it.