



## 2017-2018 Annual Assessment Report Update Executive Summary September 17, 2018

### I. Introduction

Following a Theatre Arts senior project presented in May 2018, a Westmont English Department professor exclaimed to a Theatre Arts Department colleague – “your department trains your students *so well!*” Though it is unorthodox to begin an assessment update with this kind of subjective, anecdotal reflection, the department has decided to start here, with a remark of one Westmont faculty member, who noticed the teaching and training the Theatre Arts Department does related to the development of the college’s undergraduate theatre majors. Please accept this assessment report update that describes some of the work that Westmont faculty and students engaged in during the 2017-2018 academic year, which can account for just the sort of offhand remark mentioned above.

During the 2017-2018 academic year, the Theatre Arts Department assessed its first Program Learning Outcome, which is posted on the department website and reads: “Students display appropriate skill in creation, development, and presentation of theatrical performances.” Methods, approaches, skills, and competencies are introduced and developed in a variety of courses, exercises, and projects. In addition, during the 2017-2018 school year, the department continued work on its new Liberal Arts Theatre concentration; designed, developed, and succeeded in the development of four (4) new performance-related courses; and continued its work with classroom projects, main stage faculty directed plays and dances, and the Fringe, all of which are distinctive and integral programmatic aspects of the department, and its teaching in theater, drama, and dance.

### Competencies Introduced

Students are introduced to methods and competencies in theatrical performances in courses such as TA 010 (Acting I) and TA 036 (Design). Projects include verbal and nonverbal acting projects, scene study from major realistic plays, model making, and a final design project, among others.

### Competencies Developed

Students develop methods and competencies in theatrical performances in courses such as TA 11 (Acting II), TA 015: Lighting and Sound, and TA 125 (Directing). Projects include an original piece of devised theatre in Acting II, directing a scene from a major play in Directing, and lighting pieces dances and plays for the Fringe.

In addition, the department's annual Fringe Festival is an integral and unique addition and expansion of the department's curricular offerings. Envisioned as an incubator for new, original work, it is in and during the Fringe that students develop, conceive, display, present, and express a wide range of dance, theater, and performance art in a short-form, multi-site and venue festival.

### **Competencies Cultivated and Furthered**

Students further their competencies in Main Stage, faculty-directed plays, performances, and design opportunities.

Students display mastery in the creation, development, and presentation of theatrical performances in a Capstone Senior Project, which concludes and culminates a student's senior year. All senior Theatre Arts majors are required to complete TA 193 (Senior Performance Project), in a specific area of focus for the student in the discipline (i.e. acting, directing, design, playwriting, historical research, etc.).

### **Creation, development, and presentation of theatrical performances (PLO 1) assessed:**

Departmental assessment for PLO 1 occurs as part of the Senior Project student requirement.

## **II. Data and Materials**

This report includes the following data and materials in support of the department's work with its first PLO during the 2017-2018 academic year. Please find the following as appendices to this summary.

Appendix 1 – Syllabus and Rubric for TA 193 Senior Project

Appendix 2.1 – Samples of Senior Project Intention and Self-Reflection Essays

Appendix 2.2 – Samples of three (3) years or Senior Project Mentor responses

Appendix 3 – Fringe Application

Appendix 4 – End-of-Fringe student satisfaction survey (samples)

Appendix 5 – Links to three years of Fringe student satisfaction survey. Please follow the following links, login information, and passcodes, to access the complete surveys.

2018 Fringe survey link

[https://www.surveymonkey.com/analyze/bC7cYFXQkDDb9N1oSZBU\\_2BqE7ux6o4hTZ8COQtbyEpsvOj0wgwsnZ3VY5tkjsGIMs](https://www.surveymonkey.com/analyze/bC7cYFXQkDDb9N1oSZBU_2BqE7ux6o4hTZ8COQtbyEpsvOj0wgwsnZ3VY5tkjsGIMs)

2017 Fringe survey link

[https://www.surveymonkey.com/analyze/pIX04baAD\\_2Fhy6LUq4uGkkdez\\_2FYDJBMveVlhsI2S6ti1Y\\_2F\\_2Bu2j5fSuX0ZdxbYkS6I](https://www.surveymonkey.com/analyze/pIX04baAD_2Fhy6LUq4uGkkdez_2FYDJBMveVlhsI2S6ti1Y_2F_2Bu2j5fSuX0ZdxbYkS6I)

2016 Fringe survey link

[https://www.surveymonkey.com/analyze/qHJbrdBRVII9zfy5KE\\_2BW26440XJLW1YG9oi1owll07XKaRQDoIegdIeRI\\_2FqLI6h1](https://www.surveymonkey.com/analyze/qHJbrdBRVII9zfy5KE_2BW26440XJLW1YG9oi1owll07XKaRQDoIegdIeRI_2FqLI6h1)

Login: Theatre18 Passcode: Theatrewest18

Appendix 6 – Samples from End of Semester student evaluations (Three years)

### **III. PLO 1 Comments, Discussion, Adoptions, and Remarks**

1. Senior Project Assessment Methods and Adjustments: In the last three years, all Theatre Arts majors have completed a Senior Project and completed an end of semester evaluation with faculty. In those years, students displayed high degrees of success. In 2014-2015 assessment cycle (the last time the department assessed this aspect of its program), the department made changes to help student success relative to thinking and artistry. At that time, the department clarified evaluation criteria; developed language for the Design and Technical aspect of the PLO; and clarified language with respect to courses that introduce and develop methods, techniques, and competencies as part of the PLO. Over the past several years, the department has used rubrics and methods developed from those changes, with few substantive alterations to its practices. That said, over the past several years the department have made some changes to its policies and practices, including:

- Introduced and developed four (4) new classes in the creation and development of theatrical performance, including two in acting and two in design and technology.
- Developed a student Fringe leadership structure, which includes two artistic directors, a production manager, a technical director, various assistants, and production liaisons for the producing, oversight, and administration of the Fringe Festival.
- Heightened and weighted the written component of Fringe applications, and Senior Project written assignments.

Over the last three years, student achievement and accomplishment have been displayed through:

Remarkable range and diversity in terms of material, style, and collaborative models, including new, original work; devised work; and established plays.

Projects include Acting, Directing, Design, in a range of spaces and locales, including on the Westmont campus and in downtown Santa Barbara.

Two commissioned new works, by MFA playwrights from UC San Diego and Brown University.

Closing the Loop:

Through discussion, the department seeks to implement the following improvements: Locate and implement ways to help students decide, schedule, and organize their project in a more timely fashion.

Develop clearer deadlines, with special attention to the deadlines and thoroughness of students' Intention papers, which kick off the project and forms the conceptual, aesthetic, and organizational purposes of the project.

Added language to the Senior Project syllabus relative to critical thinking and problem solving. This language reads: "In particular, students should address moments when they were required to problem solve or work through challenges and difficulties that arose during the process, and also how that educational experience may have helped them on future projects."

2. Fringe Festival. Each year, the Theatre Arts Department produces its Fringe Festival, which provides opportunities for the creation of original theatre, dance, film, and performance art for students. Conceived as an incubator for student work, the Fringe creates numerous opportunities to develop expressive skills with respect to theatrical performance. The festival is used to evaluate student work in many areas at once. Each year, student participants complete a Fringe survey, which evaluates their experience.

Recent successes over the past three years include:

On average, 26 new pieces of theater, dance, and performance art developed for each Fringe Festival.

On average, over 80 students participate in the Fringe every year.

The inter-institutional new play development program that we call The Hive has just completed its 5<sup>th</sup> year. In that time, 38 new 10-minute plays have been developed in collaboration between Westmont students and MFA playwrights at Brown, UC San Diego, and UT Austin. Each of the new plays have been directed by Westmont undergraduate directors, and featured as part of every Fringe.

A strong proportion of high evaluative surveys from recent festival, including overall artistic experience, technical support, and educational value.

## Recent Challenges and Concerns

### Closing the Loop:

In 2017, there was some student dissatisfaction with regard to how the Fringe handled controversial, challenging, or sensitive subject matter. As a way to address the issue, the department staged a two venue festival, which included an on campus venue, where performances occurred in the early evening and afternoon, and was directed for a family friendly audience an experience; and an off-campus venue, where plays and performance with challenging or mature themes could be programmed and presented. The downtown venue turned out to be a remarkable success, and student satisfaction with the handling of controversial content skyrocketed.

The downtown venue has resulted in a concomitant impact on the design and technical aspects of the Fringe. The department is in conversation with how to address the needs, concerns, and challenges of the technical aspects of a wide, and wide ranging, theatrical festival.

## IV. Major Question

**Curricular Developments.** In 2017-2018, the department added the following courses to its curriculum: TA 051 Acting the Song, TA 153 Contemporary Theatre and Film Performance; TA 037 Scenic Technology; and TA 038 Lighting Design. These courses will significantly expand and develop student competencies in Acting, Directing, Design, Technology, and Performance, which will impact and improve student success in the department's first Program Learning Outcome.

**New Liberal Arts Emphasis.** For the past two years, the department. For the past two years, the department has considered, planned, and developed a new concentration in the major, which will allow for students to more easily double major in Theatre Arts, and/or fuse a passion for theatre with other elective or vocational interests. During the fall of 2017, the department finalized a proposal for the additional of a new concentration, which accompanied some changes to its present major. A draft proposal was submitted to the Academic Senate, where the changes were discussed and reviewed. The department waited for the return of Mitchell Thomas, who was on sabbatical in the spring of 2018, in order to finalize a proposal, which will be submitted to the Senate, and ultimately the faculty, for review and action. This will occur during the 2018-2019 school year.

## V. Distinctive Contributions from 2017-2018 Season

The Westmont Theatre Arts Department's 2017-2018 season included dozens of performances presented during a year marked by wildfire, rain, flood, debris flow, and a total of five interruptions to the school year. It made for a challenging year for all,

Westmont audiences and artists nonetheless enjoyed a season of tremendous range, vitality, and artistic value, including:

*The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*, by Bertolt Brecht and directed by Mitchell Thomas, which the Santa Barbara Independent called “startling” and “profound,” and for which senior Elena White received an Independent Theatre Award for her performance as the titular character.

Twelve scenes from Brecht plays, produced by the Directing class, and presented outdoors while the Thomas Fire was in its second day, filling the area full of smoke and debris.

Five great guests, including Lit Moon Theatre Company and its production of *Richard III*, Yulya Duchovny and her beautiful and poignant toy theatre performance of *Into the Rice Fields*, special guest Stacy Jewel and her harrowing one person show about human trafficking, artist in residence Diane Exavier and her original play *End to Avoid Damage*, and choreographer-dancer Ruth Barnes and her beautiful autobiographical solo *Here, There, and Everywhere*.

Eleven new plays – a Westmont record – by Westmont writers, performed for the Westmont Fringe that included over 30 individual pieces, played in our theatres and out, and culminated our season in April.

Seven marvelous senior projects, which included acting, directing, producing, writing, design, and directing by Troy Chimuma, Christian Cranert, Leslie Duggin, Josh Martinez-Davis, Anna Telfer, Elena White, and Madi Widener.

Performances presented at Westmont venues, but also The New Vic, The Piano Kitchen, and the Alhecama Theatre.

*Die Fledermaus*, by Johann Strauss II and staged by John Blondell, which the Santa Barbara Independent called “excellent” and “imaginative,” and for which Professor John Blondell received an Independent Theatre Award for Directing the show.

Students invited to attend MFA programs at U Mass Amherst, Cal Arts, the New School, DePaul, The Art Institute of Chicago, and Cal State Long Beach.