

**2016-2017 Theatre Arts Annual Assessment Update  
Executive Summary  
Prepared by John Blondell, Ph.D.**

## **Introduction:**

During the 2016-2017 academic year, the Westmont College Theatre Arts Department assessed its Core Knowledge (disciplinary literacy) outcome. The outcome is listed on the departmental website, and reads as follows: “Students demonstrate Core Knowledge in major literature, history, and theory of western theatre practice.” Theatre Arts majors are introduced to the methods, knowledge, and skills relative to competency and achievement in disciplinary Core Knowledge in TA 1 – Great Literature of the Stage; majors show development in disciplinary Core Knowledge through a variety of courses, including – but not limited to – TA 11 (Acting II), TA 36 (Stage Design), TA III (Acting III), and TA 125 (Directing); majors are assessed in TA 120 and 121, the department’s sequence in Theatre History. At this point, all Theatre Arts majors are required to take the Theatre History sequence. The department uses the following benchmark to assess student success relative to Core Knowledge in Westmont’s Theatre Arts major: 80% of Theatre Arts majors will score 80% or higher on the Core Knowledge component of Theatre Arts coursework.

## **Data and Materials:**

Introduction: This report includes the following data and materials in support of the department’s work with its Core Knowledge outcome during the 2016-2017 academic year. For evaluation and comparison, the Theatre Arts Department examined student work in Core Knowledge in three successive academic years from 2014-2017.

- Please see Appendix B for the department’s Core Knowledge Archive, which comprises essential concepts, principles, individuals, theatres, and others necessary for what the department has adopted as disciplinary literacy for Theatre Arts majors.
- Please see Appendix C for data and statistics relative to student work and achievement in Core Knowledge for three successive years, 2014-2017.
- Please see Appendix D, a sample midterm exam from Spring 2017, and Appendix E a sample exam from Spring 2016.

## **Analysis:**

In 2016-2017, thirteen Theatre Arts majors participated in Theatre Arts 120, and 10 students met the benchmark for that year. The following data represents student achievement of the benchmark.

95% or Higher	2 Students
90% or Higher	6 Students
85% or Higher	9 Students
80% or Higher	10 Students

In 2016-2017, 76.9% of Theatre Arts majors met the benchmark for that year.

In 2015-2016, six Theatre arts majors participated in Theatre Arts 121, and four students met the benchmark for that year. The following data represents student achievement of the benchmark.

95% or Higher	2 Students
90% or Higher	2 Students
85% or Higher	4 Students
80% or Higher	4 Students

In 2015-2016, 66% of Theatre Arts majors met the benchmark for that year. However, one student scored a mean of 79.5% for the year, missing the benchmark by .5%. If this student had scored .5% or more higher, 83.3% of majors would have met the benchmark for that year.

In 2014-2015, nine Theatre Arts majors participated in Theatre Arts 120, and nine students met the benchmark for that year. The following data represents student achievement of the benchmark.

95% or Higher	4 Students
90% or Higher	7 Students
85% or Higher	7 Students
80% or Higher	9 Students

In 2014-2015, 100% of Theatre Arts majors met the benchmark for that year.

From 2014-2017, 82% (23 or 28 total students) met the benchmark for Core Knowledge and Disciplinary Literacy in the Theatre Arts major.

### **Findings, Conversation, and Adoptions**

The Theatre Arts Department is satisfied and pleased with student accomplishment in Core Knowledge (disciplinary literacy) for the three previous academic years. Students met and exceeded the benchmark in one year, nearly met it in another, and would have met it in a third if one student had performed slightly better (.5%) in exams. In addition, over the three cumulative academic years that students were tested and evaluated,

departmental students met and exceeded the benchmark. This appears to suggest that appropriate teaching occurs in the courses where Core Knowledge is introduced, developed, mastered, and assessed.

That said, the department did engage in the following questions and conversations:

- Since disciplinary literacy is broadly defined, should we use more and other courses to assess it? In other words, should we use courses in Acting, Design, Stagecraft, etc., to help assess student achievement in Core Knowledge?
- In the last year, TA 120 was redesigned to satisfy Thinking Historically General Education credit, and TA 121 will be redesigned during the 2017-2018 academic year. Consequently, should Core Knowledge documents be updated to reflect these changes?
- The Theatre Arts Department is presently engaged in a curricular re-design, in which another Theatre Arts emphasis will be added to departmental major offerings. This emphasis will be called a “Liberal Arts” Emphasis, and is developed for students who wish to double major, and/or combine Theatre study with an interest in another discipline, and/or pursue a teaching credential in Theatre (recently adopted in the state of California as a single subject credential). Consequently, and at this time, the “Liberal Arts” Emphasis will only require one (1) Theatre History course. Theatre Arts faculty considered the following question: how should the department work with this change relative to the Core Knowledge outcome, since students will no longer be required to take the sequence and will only be required to accomplish one Theatre History course?

Following discussion, the department decided to continue the Core Knowledge assessment solely in the Theatre History sequence, and not involve other departmental courses in Core Knowledge assessment. The department is in agreement that the Theatre History course is the best place to assess the department’s Core Knowledge curriculum because the process is focused and streamlined, results are easily obtained and analyzed, and student achievement is readily apparent.

Since the Theatre History sequence is in a state of flux, the department decided that the Core Knowledge Curriculum will be revised during the 2017-2018 academic year, and the results would be reported in that year’s assessment update.

The department decided to defer the question about what to do with the Core Knowledge outcome relative to the new Liberal Arts Theatre major until the new major is adopted, students enroll in it, and the department obtains data, evidence, and statistics in order to have a meaningful conversation about the subject. The department intends to submit material for the adoption of the major during the 2017-2018 academic year, and the department will consider the question in its 2019-2020 assessment update.

### **Building Out the Major**

During the 2016-2017 Academic Year, the Theatre Arts Department engaged in a long series of meetings and discussions relative to the success of its program, ways to build and increase the majors in the program, and plans to increase the opportunities for student success in the program. The department engaged in discussion about the possibility of adding several new tracks in Theatre Arts, which at one time included an Acting and Directing Track, a Design and Technology Track, and a History and Theory Track. After a period of discussion and discernment, including discussions with the Registrar and the Provost, the department decided not to add numerous tracks. It did, however, decide to add a “Liberal Arts” emphasis, and increase course offerings in Acting and Performance and Theatre Design and Technology in order to enhance, improve, and elevate student work. Please find the thinking, rationale, and completed work in these tasks below.

#### I. Liberal Arts Emphasis in Theatre Arts: Rationale and Description.

The Liberal Arts emphasis is designed specifically for students who wish to double major in Theatre Arts and another discipline, and/or students who wish to have more elective options to tailor their focus within their vocational aspirations, and/or students pursuing a single subject credential in tandem with a Liberal Studies major. Please see Appendix F to see the proposed curriculum for the Liberal Arts concentration in Theatre Arts.

The new Liberal Arts concentration in Theatre Arts will:

- Increase the overall number of students the department serves, and increase the numbers of overall majors. Department’s majors have grown significantly over the last two years (25 majors at this writing), and the new liberal arts concentration will increase those numbers even more.
- Provide opportunities for students who wish to blend study in Theatre Arts with electives taken from another discipline in order to satisfy and achieve particular educational aspirations and/or vocational goals.
- Provide opportunities for students who wish to pursue a single subject credential in Theatre, now credentialed in the state of California, in tandem with a Liberal Studies major.
- Diversify the student pool in terms of gender, ethnicity, and disciplinary interests.

#### II. New Courses in Acting and Directing (PLO 1)

During the 2016-2017 academic year, Theatre Arts faculty developed and approved two new performance courses that will offer significant options for majors and minors in the Theatre Arts curriculum, and contribute toward Westmont’s General Education program. The first course, *Acting the Song*, will meet a significant need in the department by offering our many students interested in musical theatre a substantial 4-unit course that will ground their work in theory, practice, and performance. The second course, *Contemporary Theatre and Film Performance*, will offer an upper division course to majors interested in both directing and acting, which will include components of film work that we have not previously offered at Westmont.

These new courses will:

- Increase the number of students served by the department, and support the interdisciplinary focus of students interested in musical theatre
- Cultivate the pool of students with interests in both Music and Theatre, offering curricular options for their Major, Minor, and GE programs
- Develop our students' knowledge of and access to contemporary plays as both actors and directors
- Expose our students to performance work on camera, and provide tools to work across the mediums of both Theatre and Film.

### III. New Courses in Design and Technology (PLO 1)

During the 2016-2017 academic year, Theatre Arts faculty re-envisioned the design and technology program, centered around two reimagined stagecraft courses. The courses will meet significant needs for majors and minors in the department, and contribute towards Westmont's General Education program. *Lighting Design* will offer students a 4-unit course (increased from the 2-unit presently offered) in one of the foundational theatrical design fields; it will provide students the ability to light any dance, theatrical event, or performance piece with creative and technical confidence. *Scenic Technology* will offer our students a 4-unit course (increased from the 2-unit presently offered); it will provide the methods, techniques, and practices necessary in order to increase student competence in stage technologies including stage organization, construction, and rigging

These reimagined courses will:

- Increase the number of students served by the department, and support the interdisciplinary focus of students interested in design.
- Cultivate the pool of students with interests in both art and theatre, and offer curricular options for their GE, minor, and major programs,
- Develop our students' knowledge of and ability to produce theatrical productions as both designers and technicians. (Program Learning Outcome 1 in the Creation and Presentation of Theatrical Performances.)
- Provide our students' with the resources to fully produce two of the five fields of theatrical design/technology (lighting & scenery).
- Lay a foundation for developing curriculum that enhances the other three fields of theatrical design/technology (costumes, sound & management).

### **The Final Word**

The 2016-2017 Westmont Festival Theatre produced and/or presented 37 separate productions, including five visiting productions, an international Shakespeare festival, faculty-directed plays and dance concerts, a Theatre and Music co-production, Senior Projects, and the Westmont Fringe, which presented 27 original pieces of theater, dance,

film, and performance art. Over 125 students participated directly in the events, presentations, and projects of the season.

At this writing (September 5, 2017), Theatre Arts Department classes are bursting at the seams: 52 students (overenrolled by 12) in Great Literature of the Stage; 12 students in Directing; 18 students (full) in Acting I; and 10 students in Stagecraft. Over 30 individuals auditioned for the fall production of Bertolt Brecht's *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui*.

All of which are evidence of a lively, dynamic, and thriving program, and which led Charles Donelan, the Executive Arts Editor of the Santa Barbara Independent to remark: "If there's a more sophisticated, exuberant, and consistently groundbreaking theater program in another small liberal arts college in America, I'd like to see it."