

Annual Assessment Report

Department: Theatre Arts

Academic Year: 2024

Date of Submission: September 15, 2024

Department Chair: John Blondell and Jonathan Hicks (Co-Chairs)

I. Response to the previous year PRC's recommendations

<p>Item: Any future direct assessments: please include numbers and/or percentages with your results.</p>	<p>Response: Thank you for this recommendation. Please see brief discussion in Executive Summary in Recommendation Item 1 regarding department's participation in Working Artistically ILO.</p>
<p>Item: Please describe exactly what you found in your assessment, your thoughts on the findings, and your future plans based on your findings.</p>	<p>Response: Thank You very much for this recommendation. Please find brief discussion in Executive Summary in Recommendation 2 regarding department's participation in Working Artistically ILO.</p>
<p>Item: We will be very interested in the results of the exploration of your Key Question (planning for the upcoming retirement of one of your department's faculty members).</p>	<p>Response: Thank you very much for this recommendation. Please find brief discussion in Executive Summary in Recommendation 3, regarding planning and preparation for John Blondell's retirement.</p>
<p>Item: We are impressed that you are already considering the new JRD component of the GE and are very interested in the results of any discussions this or programming changes you might undertake.</p>	<p>Response: Thank you very much for this recommendation. Tabled this discussion till hiring replacement for John Blondell.</p>
<p>Notes:</p>	

II A. Program Learning Outcome (PLO) assessment

If your department participated in the ILO assessment you may use this section to report on your student learning in relation to the assessed ILO. The assessment data can be requested from the Dean of Curriculum and Educational Effectiveness.

Program Learning Outcome	Working Artistically ILO (See Executive Summary for explanations, discussion, data, and analysis)
Who is in Charge / Involved?	Theatre Arts Faculty, led by John Blondell
<u>Direct Assessment Methods</u>	“On our Feet” Scene in TA 001 Great Literature of the Stage, see attached discussion in Executive Summary
<u>Indirect Assessment Methods</u>	
Major Findings	See Attached
Closing the Loop Activities	Inter-departmental meetings, data sharing, conversation, project-swapping.

or/and

II B. Key Questions

Key Question	John Blondell retires at the end of 2024-2025 academic year. What will the profile, training, and focus of his replacement be?
Who is in Charge/Involved?	Faculty, led by Jonathan Hicks and Mitchell Thomas
<u>Direct Assessment Methods</u>	N/A
<u>Indirect Assessment Methods</u>	Discussion, internally within the department, and with Senate, Vice-Provost, and Provost.
Major Findings	The department needs to have his replacement approved, begin and complete a search, and integrate his replacement into the ethos, structure, and teaching & research purposes of the department and college. See Executive Summary.
Recommendations	Approve a search so replacement can begin work by Fall of 2025.

III. Follow-ups

Program Learning Outcome or Key Question	What are the critical infrastructure needs in terms of space, equipment, and technology that must be addressed by the department?
---	---

Who was involved in implementation?	Theatre Arts Faculty, led by Jonathan Hicks.
What was decided or addressed?	See attached Executive Summary. By 2030, need to procure \$520,000 to upgrade, maintain, and improve various infrastructure, programmatic, and technical elements to “this level” status.
How were the recommendations implemented?	In Process

IV. Other assessment or Key Questions related projects

Project	How can we align the language that we have about the program (mission, aspirations, PLOs) to where the department is now? How create synergy between these areas to encourage the flourishing of students and faculty?
Who is in Charge / Involved?	
Major Findings	This is a significant, timely, and complex issue. Departmental Mission may change depending on who is likely to be here at least 10-years. Following discussion, the department decided to table the development of a new Mission until a new Full Faculty member is hired.

Action	Tabled till hiring of new Fulltime Faculty member.
<p>Collaboration and Communication The issue was handled directly in numerous faculty meetings, but also in the ebb and flow of the department, as new possibilities emerge about the shape of the department with a new faculty member, and also the challenges that face the department at this time in the college's history.</p>	

V. Adjustments to the Multi-year Assessment Plan (optional)

Proposed adjustment	Rationale	Timing
None	N/A	
	N/A	

VI. Appendices

- A. Prompts or instruments used to collect the data
- B. Rubrics used to evaluate the data
- C. Relevant assessment-related documents (optional)

VI. Executive Summary, with Embedded Prompts, Instruments, Rubrics, and Discussions

Executive Summary

2024 Theatre Arts Annual Assessment Report

Brief Overview

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the work of the Theatre Arts Department for the 2023-2024 academic year. The year saw dynamic successes and emerging challenges, which helped define the present work of the department, and identify worrisome clouds on the horizon. Essentially, the department sold out its season – *Jesus Christ Superstar* played to sold out audiences and *Romeo and Juliet* needed to add performances because it too was nearly sold out *before* the run began. The Westmont Fringe played to packed houses. In the 36 years that John Blondell has been at the department, he could not recall a season that played to ostensible sell outs. Though this is not what this assessment report is about (though perhaps it might be), it does suggest an amount, degree, and nature of work being done in the department not reflected here.

II. Program Learning (PLO) Assessment

Introduction

For many years, the department used three (3) PLOs – Core Knowledge, Theatrical Presentation and Performance, and Written Effectiveness. Core Knowledge was assessed in the department’s Theatre History Sequence (TA 120 and 121), taught by John Blondell, where Written Effectiveness was also assessed. Several years ago, the department added a new track – Theatre in the Liberal Arts, which requires only one Theatre History course. This upset a variety of established assessment methods and practices – one of which was where and how to assess Core Knowledge because we only had one course (one of the Theatre Histories) to assess that area. Also, the department started to consider new ways to conceive of Core Knowledge for its students. Consequently, the department abandoned this PLO, with the idea that a new one would take its place. For a variety of reasons (mostly that John Blondell has only been on campus one semester a year since 2019), a new PLO has not been named and assessment methods developed for it – one of a number of tasks that need to be accomplished once a new faculty member is hired to replace John Blondell.

Consequently, the department has no PLO work to describe here. However, the department did participate with the other Arts departments on the 2023-2023 (findings early in the 2023-2024 school year) Working Artistically ILO, and will provide a discussion of its findings here.

Working Artistically ILO

The department worked closely with members of the Theatre, Art, and Music departments, led by group General Education Committee-member Professor Felicia Song and aided by Dean of Educational Effectiveness Dr. Tatiana Nazarenko, who did an exemplary job navigating differences between departments, professors, courses, and instruments. They asked thoughtful questions and cultivated a collegial, stimulating, and useful working environment. The Theatre Arts Department found the work useful and stimulating.

The department used an instrument from TA 001 Great Literature of the Stage, taught by John Blondell. TA 001 satisfies requirements for a Theatre major or minor, and is a general education option for Reading Imaginative Literature and Working Artistically. The course is always full, turns away many students each semester; it attracts Theatre majors and minors, and students using the course for GE credit. Students have a great range of theatre experience in the course – some have participated and seen many plays, others have never participated or seen a play.

As a Working Artistically course, some degree of *making* is required for satisfactory completion of the course. Since there is a wide range of material to cover, Professor Blondell uses a compact, focused instrument, described in the TA 001 syllabus as follows:

On Our Feet: Though many of our sessions will be comprised of lectures and discussions relative to developing what the language of the theatre is and how it can be used, we also have many sessions that are “on our feet,” where we explore key moments like actors and directors would in a rehearsal space. Through these exercises students participate directly in the processes of enactment that characterize the art of the theatre. As part of this requirement, students participate in a 10-minute scene from one of the plays in the course, for which students rehearse four (4) times for one hour, and then present their scene to the class. This is the “making” part of the course, where we learn how plays sound, and how they might be staged, in an exploratory, improvisational atmosphere.

Instrument and Assignment

The instrument used for ILO data and analysis is one used by John Blondell for many years. The assignment is embedded in the course and though there was a degree of extra work related to an accepted rubric eventually agreed upon by the arts departments, there was not an exceptional amount of time – over and above what is normal – to implement this instrument for ILO use, analysis, and reflection.

The Instrument

The assignment is as follows:

Great Lit Scene Template Spring 2023

As a Working Artistically course, the creation and development of a short piece of theatre is a requirement for the course. As part of this requirement, students participate in a 10-minute scene from one of the plays in the course, for which students rehearse three (3) times for one hour, and then present their scene to the class. Then, with the professor, the scene is further explored, developed, and transformed via a variety of different methods. This is the “making” part of the course, where we learn how plays sound, and how they might be staged, in an exploratory, improvisational atmosphere.

Rehearse three times for one hour in preparation of the performance.

I. First Rehearsal

- *Read the scene together and discuss the action of the scene. What happens? What are the crucial events? What are the implications of the action?*
- *Read the scene again*
- *Brainstorm about ways that you can stage this scene. What kind of props, scenic elements, levels, objects will you incorporate in the scene?*
- *Read the scene again.*

- *Discuss how the scene transformed during your one hour of work, and ask some questions about your unfolding perceptions of the scene. What do you want to try next time?*

II. Second Rehearsal

- *Decide on a design decision for the scene. What do you want the space to look like?*
- *Decide on some easily definable costume decision – everyone in black, black/white, chartreuse shirts, etc. Some simple, doable decision.*
- *Decide on at least three turning points in the scene and rehearse the scene in relation to what happens at those turning points. How can you make those turning points special or highlighted? Do the scene.*
- *Decide on at least one moment in the scene that some sort of dynamic turn, change, or explosion happens. Rehearse the scene with that in mind*
- *Discuss how the scene transformed during your one hour of work.*

III. Third Rehearsal

- *Do the scene. Ask questions about how the design decisions and atmospheres could be more effective.*
- *Ask the question: could we incorporate music in some way? Where? How?*
- *Do the scene. Remind yourselves about turning events and action, turning points, and dynamic explosion. Do the scene.*
- *Discuss moments that people have trouble, or seem to have problems. Discuss those problem scenes. Do the scene again.*

IV. Perform the scene in class on the date indicated. Collaborate with the professor on further development of the scene.

The Rubric

The departments arrived at the following rubric to gather data and information for a variety of different assignments and instruments across departments.

	HIGHLY DEVELOPED (4)	DEVELOPED (3)	EMERGING (2)	INITIAL (1)
ARTISTIC	The production demonstrates strong competency of skills and methods appropriate to the discipline.	The production demonstrates satisfactory competency of skills and methods appropriate to the discipline.	The production demonstrates passable competency of skills and methods appropriate to the discipline.	The production demonstrates nascent competency of skills and methods appropriate to the discipline.
INTERPRETIVE	Excellent understanding and contextualization of the material and concept.	Good understanding and contextualization of the material and concept.	Sufficient understanding and contextualization of the materials and concept.	Weak understanding and contextualization of the material and concept.

Student evaluations, relative to the rubric, are as follows:

TA 001 Working Artistically Data

Name	Number	Artistic	Interpretive
Student 1		4	4
Student 2		2	4
Student 3		4	4
Student 4		3	3
Student 5		2	2
Student 6		4	4
Student 7		4	4
Student 8		3	4
Student 9		4	4
Student 10		4	4
Student 11		4	4
Student 12		3	2
Student 13		3	3
Student 14		2	3
Student 15		3	2
Student 16		4	4
Student 17		4	4

Student 18	4	4
Student 19	4	4
Student 20	4	4
Student 21	2	2
Student 22	4	4
Student 23	3	3
Student 24	4	4
Student 25	4	4
Student 26	3	4
Student 27	3	4

Analysis and Discussion

21 of 27 students displayed Highly Developed or Developed scores for the project, or 77% percent of the course. Upon reflection and discussion, the department is satisfied with the assignment, instrument, and achievements of students in the course. There are a variety of reasons why students may not have achieved 3's on either artistic or interpretive categories. In some cases, poor attendance resulted in the students' lack of requisite understandings, models, or examples upon which to base their work. More substantively, however, this assignment plays out over the course of the semester, in relation to the various plays that students read, see, and are explored in class, and is associated with a chronological unfolding of achievement and expertise. The assignment is not performed, all at once, at the end of the course where students might have used the techniques and methods gathered over time. Consequently, students who perform scenes later in the course tend to do better than students who do so earlier, though this is not always the case. In other words, students learn over the course of the semester! This is – rather than a concern – a validation that the teaching, assignments, assessment instruments, and student learning are satisfactory for a Working Artistically course in the college's General Education program.

Closing the Loop

To conclude work on the ILO, departments met for a final meeting to provide feedback, share data, and discuss findings. Departments and faculty were grateful, satisfied, and impressed with the work, insights, and leadership of Drs. Song and Nazarenko. The department continues to use this tool, and the insights and information gathered from the assessment process of this ILO, to continue work in the Working Artistically category of the Westmont GE. The spring of 2024, however, saw the final time that John Blondell will teach TA 001 Great Literature of the Stage on the Westmont campus. With the closing of that chapter, and the hiring of a new faculty member, new ways to teach and assess student learning will no doubt be explored and developed. In fact, to close the loop is actually to open it up again, in which new methods, orientations, teaching principles, and artistic methods will lead to new knowledge and learning for our students.

IIB. Key Question

John Blondell retires at the end of 2024-2025 academic year. What will the profile, training, and focus of his replacement be?

A year ago, at the time of writing the 2023 Annual Assessment Report, John Blondell's retirement was slated for the end of the 2025-2026 academic year. That schedule has been moved up, and he will retire at the end of the 2024-2025 school year. This is a crucial time for the department, as Professor Blondell has taught at the college for 37 years. He teaches, directs plays, and handles a significant part of the assessment load. The department has created profiles for his replacement, applied for the position through college protocols, and entertained conversations with college decision-makers, including the Senate, Vice-Provosts, and the Provost.

At this writing, uncertainties abound regarding the approval, nature, and timing of a potential search, though the timing of the position's approval is integral. The validity, viability, and success of the department rest on the thoughtful and timely approval of the position and the commensurate search and hire. All aspects of the department's future – its programs, mission, activities, and assessments – will be driven by a new team, which will bring the next chapter of Westmont theatre to the college and the broader community at large. It is a time of great pitch and moment, with a hope for renewal, reinvigoration, and new life.

III. Follow Up

What are the critical infrastructure needs in terms of space, equipment, and technology that need to be addressed by 2030.

The Westmont College Theatre Department has critical capital equipment needs that challenge the successful realization of our departmental mission and the projects we develop to express it. The burden to keep our capital equipment maintained and up to date is real and weighty. Currently, have a \$200,000 transition project to LED underway, in compliance with the Energy Independence & Security Act of 2007. On January 1 of 2018, the State of California banned the manufacture of incandescent light bulbs that do not meet energy efficiency standards, which includes all lamps (light bulbs) used in much of the lighting equipment at the college. Local theaters in Santa Barbara have already purchased new LED fixtures to prepare for the transition to a more energy efficient approach to theatrical lighting.

The first phase of the process was completed in May 2019, when Jonathan Hicks purchased enough incandescent light bulbs to last approximately 10 years. Consequently, the department can use its lamp inventory till 2029-2030. The Theatre Arts Department plans to implement the other three phases, and meet energy efficiency, by 2030. In addition, we need to refurbish, renew, and upgrade the seating in our 158-seat audience. The current seat fabric and structural hardware is failing. The removal of old seating, installation of new seating, and repair of the floor is estimated at over \$100,000. Furthermore, we seek to purchase a department vehicle for equipment transportation and need to improve circulation in our scene shop, where no air circulation equipment exists. In 2019, we completed the build-out of our Audio/Visual needs, but since have not been able to secure funds to address our ongoing capital equipment needs.

Finally, a retaining wall that supports the back of Porter Theatre shows significant signs of deterioration. We expect it will need to be repaired and/or replaced in the near future. It is currently an unknown expense: we are currently seeking quotes to assess the cost of the project. These practical needs are met with equal urgency and importance, as well as clarity and upgrades to the general operating budget, which has seen a 12% cut since the 2023/2024 academic year.

In order for the department to remain successful, viable, and important to current and future students, the college and department need to communicate and collaborate on plans, projects, and fundraising to secure funds for the above projects. In addition, the department needs to invest in student recruitment and retention, and requires funds to augment the annual department operating budget. In addition, the department and college need to accomplish the following:

1. Increase student scholarship from \$2,000 annually for 10 students to \$6,000 annually for 20 students. (\$120,000).
2. Fund an endowed program entitled the Globe Series for students to engage with international festivals, conferences and inviting guest artists to teach and design in our program (\$100,000).

3.Acquire CIP funds (Capital Improvement Projects) for deferred maintenance (seats, audio/video, lights, stage repairs, fabrics, facility structure including retaining wall, floors, HVAC, etc., \$200,000).

Thank You for the opportunity to reflect on and respond to the recent work of the Theatre Arts Department during the 2023-2024 academic year, and the opportunities, challenges, and possibilities that the department faces at this point in its history.