

Internal Academic Review 2005-2006

Outcomes of the Internal Academic Review of the Department of Drama

*Joint response submitted by the
Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Science and the Head of the Department of Drama*

Under major recommendations one and two the Faculty Office is committed to reversing the rising student-faculty ratio in the department and to expanding staff's ability to undertake the various construction, technical, promotional, and administrative responsibilities that flow from DRAM's impressive number of student productions. Discussions to address such shortcomings will take place as part of the annual budget and staffing strategy and the Faculty Offices recognizes in particular DRAM's acute staff needs.

The Faculty Office also recognizes that DRAM's space allocation, particularly in terms of quality of space, is insufficient for the department's needs. DRAM is involved with the planning of the Tett Centre project and the Faculty hopes to take advantage of the opportunities afforded by the Tett Centre to redress DRAM's office and performance space needs.

Involvement with the Tett planning likewise presents an ideal opportunity for the department to undertake a long-term planning exercise that can address the University's "Engaging the World" strategic plan in ways that facilitate the department's renewal and expansion. As well, DRAM has already seriously embarked on laying the foundations of a graduate program with a recent retreat devoted entirely to outlining course structures and teaching strategies for a possible M.A. offering.

Follow-up on these recommendations and issues will take place during annual budget and staffing strategy meetings between the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Science and the Vice-Principal (Academic)

Attachment:

Review Team Report

Internal Academic Review

Department of Drama
Queen's University

2005 – 2006

Review Team Members:

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Executive Summary

The Department of Drama at Queen's is vibrant in teaching, research, and production. Well-developed courses in both "theory" and "practice" provide students with a balanced training unusual among Canadian universities. Enrollment in Drama courses increases

Review Process and Terms of Reference

The review team met three times as a committee to discuss the process, share thoughts on the department, and consider issues associated with the review.

General Observations on Department Performance

Overall the faculty achieves a great amount with very little to work with in the way of facilities and funding from the university.

Research productivity has been good.

They have developed a strong reputation for undergraduate studies.

Enrolment has continued to climb – among both introductory courses and full time students.

Excellent teaching standards have been maintained in the face of declining faculty-student ratios but this has caused some “compromises” in program delivery.

The Department continues to mount a substantial number of high quality productions with facilities that are best described as ‘poor’ and with little university financial support.

Morale in the Department is high and its faculty are dedicated to maintaining high standards across all their endeavours

Our overall assessment may be represented in the following chart:

Drama Department OTWS

Observations and Recommendations in Specific Areas

The skills and commitment of the faculty in the Drama Department well serve the dual focus of the Department on theory and practice. Many of the faculty members are both practitioners and scholars. They possess significant experience in acting, directing, playwriting, set and light design, which bears positively on their courses. As one member states, the faculty are “in the business” of theatre, they are up-to-date, and “not cut off in an ivory tower”. In the past, the majority of the department was composed mostly of theatre practitioners, yet now a Ph.D. is required for new positions.

There are four full professors out of ten tenured or tenure-track faculty currently working in the faculty. The Drama Department has experienced a lack of new faculty in the past decade, due to budget restrictions. Enrolment has increased significantly, but the budget has not been increased in ten years, and the number of faculty has not increased in seven years.

Recently, the Drama Department has hired theatre practitioners on a contract basis for teaching specific courses due to insufficient numbers of full-time faculty. Although the Department is greatly enriched by the contributions of visiting artists, certain programs within the department rely heavily on these part-time faculty members, who may have lesser commitment to the program, given the lack of guarantee of renewable employment. Additionally, this reliance on contract positions may breach the Employment Equity policy in the Memorandum of Agreement between the University and the Faculty Association, where “systematic discrimination . . . in regard to any employment matter including salaries, merit, rank, appointment, promotion, tenure of continuing appointment” should be eliminated.

Due also to faculty shortages, the Drama Department employs undergraduate students as TAs for first year courses. There are certainly pedagogical benefits to such an arrangement, but this increases the workload of fourth year students, which may detract from their focus on their own studies. Also, feedback from first-year students suggests some dissatisfaction with their undergraduate TAs. A graduate program within the department would eliminate the need to employ undergraduate TAs.

There are four staff members in the Drama Department, all holding contract positions. Like the faculty, staff are stretched to their limits with the vast increase in student enrollment. Staff are nevertheless committed to the department and occasionally forgo vacation time to maintain the functioning of the program. The staff are an important and integral part of the program yet “the reality of their responsibilities and workload is not reflected in their position descriptions or their contracts”(external report). It is recommended that at least two more staff members be hired to meet the increasing needs

of the Department. As well, the hiring of a full-time technician and a secretary would relieve the pressure on the existing staff

Scholarly and Creative Activity

The level of scholarly and creative activity within the Department of Drama is remarkable considering the intense workloads and time constraints faced by all members of the Department. Such activity creates important opportunities: linkages between learning and experience enhance the authenticity of the program; allow students to see the value of critical thinking as well as theatrical production; provide faculty with breadth and exposure within university and community (locally, nationally, and globally); and

First and foremost is the issue of professor/student ratios. Although this is a problem that is increasingly seen as systemic in many departments across Queen's University, the uniqueness of the problem in the case of the Department of Drama should be noted. The first-year introductory course, (mandatory for a major and medial in the subject), DRAM 100, now consistently has over two hundred students. While this number may not seem overly large for a first-year class, the course was originally designed to offer students a great amount of both theory and practical instruction with smaller groups of students interacting together and with their professors. Due to a lack of personnel as well as the increase in enrollment, the department has been forced to place all the students in one room for lectures, while using fourteen senior undergraduates as lab instructors. This new reality has created an environment that has reduced important individual contact with department professors. As a result, students following a Minor degree in Drama might be discouraged by the numbers while potential Majors are forced to wait until second or third year for their abilities to begin truly to blossom and develop, when they are exposed to the kind of sma

not endorse the idea (not addressed in the Self Study) of moving the Drama department to a renovated Tett Centre; this would require considerable study as it would have complex effects for many dimensions of the program. Our main concern here is that the Drama faculty, staff, and students be fully involved in the decision-making process about facilities.

Program Futures and Recommendations

The IAR Committee envisions three broad possibilities for the future of the Drama Department at Queen's:

The department's current level of effectiveness in teaching, research, and artistic activity is simply not sustainable without new resources and new lines. As student numbers grow, the department is being forced to rely on more part-time teaching labour, which will mean less coherence and collegiality, and fewer resources for students. Student, staff, and faculty satisfaction will decrease. Upper-year courses will grow or be offered less frequently, and students will graduate less skilled. Faculty will be even more stressed, with insufficient time for research and creative work, and more strident student demands; attrition may result. The department will not be in a position to continue or expand its various outreach to the broader university and community: production numbers will be reduced, students from other disciplines will be excluded from courses, and no new collaborative interdisciplinary projects will be possible. This would be a grotesque waste, because with a fairly minimal investment, the university could facilitate the development of what is a very strong department in terms of morale, research, teaching, and contributions to arts.

a) Undergraduate Focus

With some investment in faculty (2 additional lines, replacement of retirees, and one new staff) and physical infrastructure (either renovation/expansion of current facilities, or relocation), the Drama Department could continue to serve undergraduates at Queen's, and to make dynamic contributions to the university and broader community. Its admirable balance between theatre history and criticism on the one hand, and production on the other, could be fleshed out beyond its somewhat skeletal state at the moment. There is definitely room for growth in the collaborative programme with Film Studies, "Screen and Stage," and for more projects in conjunction with Education. With sufficient resources, the department could offer courses to non-majors, and thus serve a very valuable role in the university more broadly.

b) Graduate Program Addition

This scenario is built on the previous: that is, a graduate program could really only be added with renewal first at the undergraduate level, since both require an increase in faculty, and the reputation to draw good graduate students would be most effectively built on the foundation of a dynamic undergraduate program. Reduction of the teaching load to 2:2 could permit faculty to pursue research without needing an eighth day of the week, and would bring the teaching load in Drama to the Arts & Science norm. With these changes in place, the department might consider developing a Master's degree, after deciding what the focus or relationship would be between "theory" and "practice." Alternately, the Department might collaborate with others to participate in a Cultural Studies, Musical Theatre, or Text and Performance program. This collaborative avenue might be the best way to generate the advantage of graduate student presence (intellectual energy, T.A. labour, funding) without overly stretching the faculty or sapping the dynamic undergraduate program. It might be the seed for a future independent graduate program.

Prioritized Recommendations

Tactical/Short-term:

1. Reverse rising faculty-student ratio: University to make funds available to support the hiring of two additional faculty. This action may improve class size, course offerings, and faculty research time, allowing maintenance of the department's standards .
2. Undertake a critical and visionary review of physical space requirements. It may be advisable to attempt to keep the faculty office spaces together and possibly move some program support facility areas to nearby buildings (eg. Costume and /or set design to Caruthers Hall). This initiative must come from within the department.
3. Invest to improve existing space and ensure compliance with health and safety standards: the University has a responsibility in this area.
4. Increase the support staff compliment by two additional staff members (1 technical, 1 office support) in an effort to relieve some of the program demands currently placed

reclassify the existing staff positions and make them more permanent in order to address the reality of the associated work responsibilities and their importance to the program.

Strategic/Longer-term: