

PROPOSAL for a new “Technical Theatre/Design” track in Performing Arts: Theatre

Overview:

- The current Performing Arts: Theatre track remains **unchanged** except for its name, which will now be **“Performing Arts: Theatre - Performance and Theatre Studies”**
- A **new** track in **technical theatre and design** will be based on currently existing courses—**i.e., no new courses are needed at this time except for a .25 “lab” section in technical theatre** (see below)
- Students following either track will have the **same** number of required graduation credits as current theatre students do—**i.e. no expansion of the size of the major**. The proposal has no impact on other departments.
- This proposed two-track theatre curriculum preserves the interdisciplinarity at the core of our department’s approach to the performing arts and retains the overall symmetry with the music and dance tracks in the Performing Arts major

The UEPC is being asked to approve this curricular change so that it can go into the 2010-11 course catalog. The Department believes that this is essentially a reorganization of already existing courses to better serve the needs of students who wish to follow a “technical theatre” rather than “performance” or “theatre studies” approach to the field.

Rationale: In his 2008 External Program Review, Dr. Stephen Weeks (Lewis and Clark College, Portland OR) raised concerns over the lack of elective options in the Saint Mary’s theatre curriculum, and specifically over the limited opportunities for students to study technical theatre. He noted that “the Theatre Arts are plural because they encompass an array of sub-disciplines and practices,” and pointed out that our existing theatre program seems to privilege “performance” at the expense of other avenues into the discipline:

Since both acting and theatre history/dramatic literature/criticism are represented by four courses, it stands out that design and technical theatre are represented by half that number. In today’s visually oriented, technically-oriented culture, design and technical theatre need equal status with other areas of theatre practice.

Weeks concluded, “We are finding at Lewis & Clark that the design/technical theatre area gives many talented students the entry point to theatre they need, and that a sequenced design curriculum adds tremendous value to our major. I have no quarrel whatsoever with the courses in design/technical theatre you offer; I am only arguing for depth and parity.” Our own observations support Dr. Weeks’: many students first drawn to theatre by onstage experiences, eventually discover that their real interests lie on the technical theatre side - which includes not only set, costume, lights, sound and properties design, but also production and stage management.

Since our 2005 program review, the Theatre Program has experienced not only overall growth in the number of theatre majors and minors, but a noticeable increase in the presence of students focused on technical theatre. Among our most successful theatre majors of the last decade have been those who pursued graduate studies or professional work as theatre designers and stage managers. During their undergraduate studies we supported these “tech” students with ad hoc course substitutions, individual mentoring and internships. We now feel that neither the growing number of “tech theatre” students, the theatre program or the institution is well served with a continued reliance on ad hoc curricular solutions. We believe that implementing this new track will provide a compelling recruitment tool, will capitalize on existing resources, and will better serve students whose talents are in the visual, technical and managerial sides of theatre.

Curriculum for “TECHNICAL THEATRE/ DESIGN” Track: The following Technical Theatre/Design track could be implemented immediately using existing courses. A .25 Technical Theatre Lab section would be added each semester, paralleling the .25 Performance Lab (Perfa 37) section offered for students in the “Performance and Theatre Studies” track.

The proposed curriculum:

Performing Arts INTEGRATIVE [3 courses]:

- 1 Perceiving the Performing Arts (required of all majors in Performing Arts)
- 115 Music in Performance (required of all majors in Performing Arts)
- 125 Dance in Performance (required of all majors in Performing Arts)

Theatre: ACTING [1 course]:

- 33 Acting I: Principles of Performance [emphasis on theory with some applied acting]

Theatre: HISTORY/CRITICISM/ANALYSIS [4 courses]:

- 36: Theatre Masterpieces [.5 x 2] (readings in dramatic literature)
- 30 Foundations I: Theatre History (Ancient and classical)
- 130 Foundations II: Theatre History (Modern/contemporary)
- 136 Theatre: Special Studies (writing for the major/research intensive)

Theatre: TECHNICAL/DESIGN [equivalent to 4.5 courses]:

- 37 Tech LAB [.25 x 4] and 38 Stagecraft [.5]
- 132 Performing Arts in Production [take once for 1.0 and once for .5]
- 138 and 139 and 140 - Lighting, Design AND Stage Management [.5 each, for a total of 1.5]

Theatre: INDIVIDUALIZED STUDY [2]:

197 Upper division individualize study , or internship in tech theatre/design theatre or approved UD elective [1.0]

198 Senior project: capstone experience [1.0]

total number of courses required of students in this track is 14. 5.

Total number of courses required of students in existing “Performance and Theatre Studies” track is 14.5.

Implementation: Most required courses for the proposed Technical Theatre/ Design track are identical to those required for the Performance and Theatre Studies track, including courses in theatre history/ criticism, integrative courses in music and dance, introductory acting theory, and stagecraft and theatre production. No new courses are proposed.

- Our Performance Lab series (Perfa 37), requiring four .25 courses taken over the course of four years, would be adjusted to include a Tech Lab section each semester, to be staffed by a guest theatre artist or current faculty. Since most of our guest designers are already hired under teaching contracts, this step would simply formalize the informal mentoring they now provide – allowing greater accountability and regularizing student assessment.
- After completing Acting I: Principles of Performance (Perfa 33) and Stagecraft (Perfa 38) – both required of ALL theatre majors - our Technical Theatre/Design track students would take three .5 courses [Stage Lighting Design (Perfa 138), Design for the Stage (Pefa 139), and Stage Management (Perfa 140)]. While “Performance and Theatre Studies” track students select one of these upper division tech theatre/design courses as part of the major, “Technical Theatre and Design Track” students would be required to take all three.
- In lieu of Acting III: Advanced Acting (Perfa 137), “Tech Theatre/Design” students would design a 197 professional internship (a practice already in place in our program, which has active ties to Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Shotgun Players, Cal Shakespeare Theatre, and Campo Santo, among others); OR would select an upper division elective appropriate to their area of emphasis from existing course offerings at the college. For example, art history or figure drawing would benefit a student specializing in design; interpersonal communication would be appropriate for a student interested in production management.

To implement these proposed changes, we emphasize that we would need to hire no new faculty or pilot new courses.

Available resources:

- **Technical Director (full-time combined faculty/staff position):** Michael Cook, resident designer and technical director, is a tremendous asset to our program – a respected technical theatre teacher and professional scenic artist who connects equally well with non-majors and those with a serious interest in specialized skills like set construction, stage electrics and sound design.
- **Production Coordinator (part-time faculty position):** We have seen a groundswell of interest in technical theatre with the hiring of Linda Baumgardner, who graduated from Saint Mary's in 2005 and holds an MFA in Production Management from Cal Arts. In addition to serving the entire department as Production Coordinator, Linda teaches Lighting Design for Dance and mentors the student stage management team working each semester on the mainstage production.
- **Guest theatre artists:** Each semester the theatre program hires professional artists (set designers, lighting designers, sound designers, props artisans, and costume designers) as part of the mainstage production team. This proposal takes advantage of the presence of these guest professionals in our department, by creating individualized mentorships for students working with them. For example, a student interested in lighting design would – over a four year period - be able to work with four to eight guest lighting design professionals in LeFevre Theatre.
- **Appropriate electives in other departments/programs:** For design students (ART 30/Beginning Drawing, any Art History course, Perfa 141/Design for Dance); For theatre management students (COMM 2/Communication and Social Understanding, COMM 112/Interpersonal Communication, PERFA 11/Music Fundamental, PSYCH 1/Intro to Personal-Social Psychology, SOC 2/Intro to Sociology, SOC 4/Social Problems)

Institutional benefits: Adding a second track, "Design and Technical Theatre," to the current theatre major would maximize current resources and build on the proven success of our existing theatre course offerings. It would address key concerns raised in our 2008-2009 program review and bring Saint Mary's into greater alignment with theatre programs at our "comparison" liberal arts colleges.

- **Strengthens recruitment** - A technical theatre and design track broadens the program's appeal for prospective students, for whom backstage work is often a powerful component of the HS theatre experience
- **Addresses student retention** – Allows theatre students some choice in shaping their plan of study, and provides alternate avenues into the discipline

- **Supports student-centered creative initiatives** and expanded performance opportunities: Technical theatre/stage managements students provide technical support for Performing Arts concerts and senior projects, school club performances such as Pulses and the Vagina Monologues, January Term Children's Show, and even guest speakers at the College.
- **Reflects "best practices"** at comparable private liberal arts colleges - including College of Santa Fe, Lewis and Clark, Chapman, and Santa Clara.

Revised Catalog language for UEPC approval:

Theatre Track in Performance and Theatre Studies

1, 30, 33, 36 (.5 x 2), any combination of performance sections of 37 (.25 or .5) for a total of 1.0 units, 38 (.5), 115, 125, 130, 132, 133, 135, 136, 137 (.5); one of 138 (.5), 139 (.5), 140 (.5); and 198

Theatre Track in Technical Theatre and Design

1, 30, 33, 36 (.5 x 2), four technical theatre sections of 37 [.25 x 4] (a total of 1.0 units), 38 (.5), 115, 125, 130, 132 (once for 1.0, once for .5), 136, 138 (.5), 139 (.5), 140 (.5); 197 (internship), and 198