DEPARTMENT OF DRAMA AND SPEECH COMMUNICATION (DRAMA PROGRAM)

Review Process

This was the third undergraduate review of the Drama program which is housed within the Department of Drama and Speech Communication, the first one having been conducted in 1984. The second review, in 2002, included Speech Communication. The self study for the review of the Drama program was submitted May 21, 2010; the site visit occurred November 10 and 11, 2010; the review team’s report was received December 13, 2010; the response by the Drama program in consultation with the Dean was submitted March 18, 2011.

Characteristics of the Program

Historical Overview

Until 1973 a degree program in Drama was housed in the Department of English, at which time it became a self-governing unit called the “Drama Group”. The Drama Group was accorded all the rights and responsibilities of a full-fledged Department, but 18 years passed before official departmental status was requested and approved in 1991. At the same time Drama was encouraged to include Speech Communication in the departmental title since a new stream with that title had been initiated in the Department. Since 2006 the Department of Drama and Speech Communication has housed Digital Arts Communication, a stand-alone specialization in the Arts and Business program.

Today the Department of Drama and Speech Communication is unique in Canada in that it comprises three distinctive disciplines: one focussing on pure performance (Drama/Theatre Arts), another on applied performance (Speech Communication), and a third on how to design digital images (Digital Arts Communication). Each unit administers its own budget, decides its own teaching allocation, establishes its own curriculum, and each unit is managed by its own Director. This review only covers the Drama Program of the Department of Drama and Speech Communication.

There are 13 university-based undergraduate Theatre programs in Ontario and an additional 21 across Canada. The majority of these programs operate with between four and 12 faculty members. The Drama program at the University of Waterloo (UW) is in the middle of the pack with six full-time faculty members.

Over the last year, Drama faculty and staff members have conducted an extensive review of the Drama curriculum. UW Drama has a bias towards the theoretical. Of 13 courses required for a four-year Honours Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree in Drama, only three are practical, the others are theoretical. The review will address this “imbalance”. Early discussions with faculty members suggest that the program will aim to produce theatre practitioners and theatre thinkers who are critically aware of the latest developments in contemporary theatre practice and theatre studies within the context of a liberal arts education.

In addition to developing goals for the undergraduate curriculum, for research and creative scholarship, and physical resources, the Department is currently engaged in a significant re-structuring process, which, it is hoped, will ultimately result in a merger between Drama, Digital Arts Communication, Fine Arts, and the emerging Centre for Global Visual Cultures to create a new School of Arts, Media, and Performance Studies.
Program Objectives

The Drama program’s mandate is to provide a fully-rounded education in which both breadth and depth of learning are respected within the parameters of a liberal arts education. All the Department’s work is based on the belief that a balanced praxis-based academic program produces the best education in the discipline of Drama and provides students with professional opportunities that demand nimbleness of mind, creative imagination, discipline, perseverance, empathy, social awareness, and the capacity to think analytically, question established assumptions, and collaborate productively.

Distinctiveness/Benchmarking

In spite of its relatively small size, Drama has an impressive research funding record. Over the past three years, Drama faculty members have secured $2.6 million in research funding as principal or co-principal investigator, and have been co-applicants in successful research grants amounting to about $25 million.

Academic Plans Offered

Drama offers the following plans:
Four-year Honours BA in Drama;
Four-year General BA in Drama;
Three-year General BA in Drama;
Joint Honours BA in Drama;
Honours BA in Drama (Arts and Business [Co-op and Regular]);
Minor in Drama.

Students

Students in the Faculty of Arts choose their major at the beginning of year two. From 2002-03 to 2009-10 inclusive, an annual average of 18 students entered Drama in second year. Between academic years 2002-03 to 2009-10 there has been a noticeable increase in students’ grades at the end of their first year, before they became Drama majors at the beginning of second year. The number of students in the 80 to 84 per cent range has increased while those in the 70 to 79 per cent range have decreased.

The number of students enrolled in the Drama program has shown a slow but steady increase from 55 in 2002-03 to 73 in 2009-10. In Drama, academic classes are capped at between 20 to 25 students and acting classes are restricted to 18 to 20 students. However, because all Faculty of Arts students have to take a single course in either one of Drama, Fine Arts, Music, Digital Arts Communication, or Speech Communication, in order to meet Arts’ “Breadth Requirements”, the Introduction to Theatre courses (Drama 101A and 101B) attract annually on average 120 and 70 students respectively while the Introduction to Performance course (Drama 102) attracts annually 75 students.

After entering Drama in second year in 2009-10, 20 students received scholarships amounting to $27,094, while in the previous year 29 students received scholarships amounting to $39,536.

Not many Drama students take advantage of the co-op program. This is because Drama’s program is praxis-based; finances to hire non-essential personnel are not generally available to theatre companies; and co-op terms tend not to overlap with the production intensive period of a theatre season.
Each Drama course is evaluated each time it is taught using the survey instrument of the Faculty of Arts. The evaluation form of 10 questions asks students to rate the course and the instructor on a five point Likert-scale where one is very poor to five is excellent. Drama’s mean course evaluation value, for 15 terms, from fall 2002 to winter 2009 inclusive, is 4.32, ranging from a low of 4.21 in winter 2004, to a high of 4.52 in fall 2004. Drama’s values consistently exceed those of the Faculty of Arts as a whole. Over the same period the Faculty of Arts mean course evaluation average was 4.15, with a low of 4.08 and a high of 4.2.

The bilateral international exchanges organized for the students distinguish UW’s Drama program from others. In 2006, 16 students and two faculty members travelled to the Theaterakademie Vorpommern on the Baltic Coast of Germany to present UW Drama’s production of Timberlake Wertenbaker’s *Our Country’s Good*. This visit was preceded by 15 students and faculty members from Vorpommern who came to UW. In 2009, a similar exchange took place with *Teatro Aquario* in Cosenza, Italy.

The degree completion rate of students in the Drama program has increased from 59 per cent of the 2002-03 cohort to 93 per cent of the 2006-07 class. The average time to complete the degree has decreased over that time period from 4.4 years to 3.8 years.

Students have a say in departmental affairs. Students have two representatives at Department meetings. This self study was reviewed by four students and their comments were incorporated into the report.

Employment data for Drama graduates are difficult to come by. Those graduates keen to follow a career in technical theatre, design or arts management/administration often find work immediately after graduation. A significant number of students still chose to attend Faculties of Education, even though there are declining opportunities for Drama teachers in high schools. For those planning an acting career – two choices are evident – some continue to study at post-degree conservatories or colleges, others relocate, often to Toronto, where they work at the transition from university life to the professional community.

**Faculty**

At the time of this self study the Department of Drama and Speech Communication had six full-time faculty members in Drama, the same number in Speech Communication, and five in Digital Arts Communication. The faculty complement in Drama consists of one Full Professor; three Associate Professors; one Assistant Professor; one Continuing Lecturer; who combine professional theatre work (set and costume designing, directing, acting, playwriting etc.) with ‘conventional’ academic scholarship in a variety of contemporary areas. Two of these six faculty members will reach the “normal” retirement age of 65 in the next four years, although none has indicated an interest in retirement. The program depends heavily on sessional hires. During the 2009-10 academic year, 29 sessionals were hired: 20 to teach and nine for positions such as Visiting Directors, Designers or Production Managers for the performance season. Furthermore, there are four staff positions: an Administrative Assistant; a head of Wardrobe and Costume Design; a Director of Technical Theatre (a 10-month appointment); and a vacant position of Assistant Technical Director. In addition, at least 16 guest artists, designers, and directors have taught in the Drama program over the last seven years.
The normal teaching load for faculty members in Drama is four courses per year. When a faculty member directs a major production, he or she receives the same credit as for a regular course, even though major productions can take up to more than 180 hours of rehearsals and meetings in addition to the hours of preparation and tutoring of individual students before and during the production process.

Over the past three years the Drama group has published 12 articles in peer-reviewed magazines or professional journals; edited or co-edited two books; made 14 professional conference presentations; directed, dramaturged or designed 26 productions in the professional theatre; published two translations of Canadian plays. As principal or co-principal researcher the group has secured $2.6 million in funding and has been co-applicants in successful research grants amounting to about $25 million. Research funds have been received from SSHRC, Canadian Foundation for Innovation (CFI), the Ontario Innovation Trust (OIT), and foundations such as the Zukerman Foundation, Trillium Foundation, Saskatchewan Heritage Foundation, and the Musagetes Foundation. Departmental co-productions, The Adding Machine and Alice (Experiments) in Wonderland, with Bradley University and the University of Florida, funded by CFI and OIT, received the 2007 Internet2 IDEA Award and the 2008 ORION Learning Award of Merit.

Service to the discipline is strong with faculty members sitting on editorial boards; acting as external reviewers; being artistic directors for performance companies; and organizing symposia and conference

Concerns and Opportunities for Improvement

General Observations

There is no doubt in the minds of the review team members that the Drama program at the University of Waterloo is of a very high quality. The goals of the Department as expressed in the self study are at the same time ambitious yet realistic. While the Drama program introduces several innovative initiatives and bold plans, it is committed to continuing with a “liberal-arts-based approach to theatre studies” and also recognizes possible areas of improvement. While no major changes in the program’s admission requirements are necessary, the proposed restructuring of the curriculum should be delayed until the program is once again adequately staffed.

In terms of its pedagogical philosophy, the Drama program is well established. The review team is pleased to report that the program has not only been successful in maintaining high standards of teaching and research but has also managed to keep up with recent trends in theatre education, especially in its attempt to introduce a “praxis-based approach to teaching undergraduates”.

However, the poor conditions of the current facilities and the lack of suitable spaces to deliver the curriculum have already caused conflict between teaching and production. In order to prevent this from occurring regularly, the situation needs to be improved immediately. The Department should also work hard to overcome the detachment of the three units within it. Although connections between Drama, Speech Communication, and Digital Arts Communication (DAC) may appear to be tenuous at best, there exist a number of possible ties between the disciplines, especially in research, that could bring the three sets of colleagues closer together and result in intriguing synergies.

The final current limitation of the program – the perception that there is no clear progression of skills through the program – is already in the process of being addressed.
The review team identified six areas where there are opportunities for improvement, namely: staffing; facilities; curriculum; inter-departmental relationships; student recruitment; and budget.

**Staffing**

The very first observation that any review of Drama at Waterloo must necessarily make at this point in time is that of the departure of Dr. Gerd Hauck, the Department’s Chair when the self study was written. Even though it was clear from faculty members that the great majority firmly subscribe to the vision articulated in the self study, the loss of the person who, according to everyone’s opinion, was the driving force behind the document, means that the Department will soon have to reassess its position.

There is no doubt in the Committee’s mind that securing a replacement full-time faculty position is essential for the continued well-being of the Department and program and belongs to the mission-critical category.

**Recommendation 1:** It is imperative that the Department immediately advertise for a new tenured or tenure-stream faculty position, if possible at a senior level and with a specialization that would fit the program’s strategic needs. Only if this new hire is a senior scholar should the discussion on developing a graduate program in Theatre and New Media and Digital Gaming be resurrected.

**Recommendation 2:** The Department needs to postpone a full implementation of its curricular reforms until it can be determined what the newly hired faculty member can contribute to the program. In other words, the review team advises against trying to find a perfect match for an abstract program and recommend instead that the new strategic plan take the new appointment’s specific abilities into account. This review should also include investigation of curricular opportunities available through a closer relationship with Speech Communication and Digital Arts Communication.

One of the very few things about which the students complained in their conversation with the review team is that a number of courses which are listed in the Calendar and that, in some cases, even helped to convince the students to enrol at Waterloo are rarely, if ever, offered. The reason for this seems to lie primarily in the struggle of the Department to provide a necessary number of courses to meet all the required needs with the available faculty members.

**Recommendation 3:** The Review Committee agrees that the long-term lectureship in theatre production and management be converted to a tenure-stream position. The decision to convert the position is unlikely to cost much and will give the program much needed stability in the times of transition.

**Recommendation 4:** Finally, the review team is convinced that in order to ensure the students have a broad choice of theatre electives and a well-rounded education, two bridging limited-term positions be approved which will, on the one hand, meet the Department’s most pressing needs and, on the other, enable the program to operate even if any one of the current faculty members decides to retire.
Facilities

It will be no surprise that the review team finds that the teaching, workshop, storage, and office spaces in Drama are woefully inadequate. It will be necessary to solve these space issues if Drama is to move forward with curricular development and growth.

The teaching spaces are in very poor shape and inadequate in number and technology for the Department’s need. The Theatre of the Arts doubles as a classroom space, which makes scheduling of production activities “a nightmare”. Backstage areas also serve as a haphazard storage space, contributing clutter, and making the area unusable for productions. Regarding health and safety issues, heating pipes in Modern Languages [it was determined later that it was not Modern Languages but Hagey Hall that was being referred to], room 108, are covered in exposed asbestos [there is a sprayed on thermal/acoustic insulation that lay people might mistake for asbestos – in fact, it is cellulose-based].

With regard to teaching, room 108 is too small to allow for freedom of movement in an acting class. It is also poorly equipped technically for the new curriculum planned by the Department and too small to allow for sufficient audience numbers when it is used as a black box theatre. Room 6 (Arts Lecture Hall) is also a space dedicated to the Department of Drama and Speech Communication. However, it is doing triple duty, serving as a lecture hall, studio for the teaching of technical classes and, occasionally, as a rehearsal space. Not only is it inadequate for all of these functions: it is located in a dingy basement space that is not conducive to learning. In addition, the workshop area for the building and painting of scenery is too small to serve as an adequate teaching space and limits the scope of set design and construction.

Recommendation 5: It is imperative that the teaching spaces of the Drama program be consolidated in a new building, taking measures to provide faculty offices as well as studios and classrooms that are appropriately equipped:

a. Practical performance studios should be spacious, with two-storey ceilings, sprung floors and storage space for classroom props and furniture.

b. The building should contain five studio/classroom spaces to permit the Theatre of the Arts to be dedicated to production.

c. Each classroom should be equipped with the needed technology to support the new curriculum in Theatre and New Media.

d. One of these spaces should be a Black Box Theatre with high-tech equipment to support creative activity/research in Theatre and New Media.

Recommendation 6: The design/technical spaces connected to the Theatre of the Arts should be expanded and consolidated in an area close to the theatre. It should include separate carpentry and paint shops for production, a costume shop, and sufficient space for the proper storage of set pieces, furniture, props, and costumes.

Curriculum

The proposed new curriculum is impressive and will create a niche for the Department of Drama and Speech Communication, making it highly competitive with students interested in Theatre and New
Media. However, its implementation will require simultaneous development of appropriate, advanced technology in the teaching and performing spaces to support pedagogy and production.

There are also some issues that need to be addressed immediately. The sequencing of courses and the need to rotate course loads have already been mentioned. In addition, students also expressed concern regarding the expectations in each class, which they felt are unclear in many cases.

Recommendation 7: The Drama program should develop a syllabus template that calls for the articulation of each professor’s goals and intended learning outcomes for each course, assignments, due dates, and a grade breakdown. The goals and learning outcomes need to conform to the University’s Undergraduate Degree level Expectations. In addition, it is recommended that Curriculum Maps be created once the new curriculum is in place in order to ensure that goals and outcomes for each course line up with the Department’s educational overall goals and outcomes.

Recommendation 8: Until the new curriculum is developed and implemented, the Department should undertake a review of current course offerings and delist courses that are not expected to be offered at least once in a three-year period.

Intra-Departmental Relationships

The need to revisit the relationship of the programs within the Department is more pressing than ever. Though the disagreements between Speech Communication and Drama appear to have been overcome, this should not be used as an excuse to avoid addressing the lack of functional cooperation between the three units.

This limitation is particularly apparent through the eyes of the students. While faculty members actually share enough research interests that they could be easily seen as working together, the curricula of the three units remain strangely separated. Inasmuch as this is perfectly natural given that the three disciplines are traditionally seen as quite distinct and have only been joined together in a marriage of administrative convenience, the focus of the Drama faculty members on digital and mediated productions, and on using technology even when approaching classical texts, is so close to what DAC does that any missed opportunity for potential collaboration will be an opportunity sorely regretted.

The review team sees the two recent hires in Speech Communication with specialization or expertise in performance studies as a wonderful opportunity to bring the two areas much closer together and capitalize on shared interests.

Recommendation 9: In order to capitalize fully on these recent developments, the relationship between DAC, Speech Communication, and Drama needs clarification, even in the short term, that is, before the new tenure-stream or tenured appointment. The ultimate goal should be to integrate the three programs as closely as possible rather than maintain three satellite operations.

Recommendation 10: The Department needs to continue to support faculty members in Speech Communication in their desire to contribute to Drama both on the level of curriculum and in their research/creative activity.
Recommendation 11: The three units are strongly encouraged to explore inter-disciplinary work in classes and research/creative activity especially on the level of digital creation, use of new technologies, and study of performance techniques in non-traditional environments and contexts such as site-specific and digital performance.

Recruitment

In discussion with students, it became apparent that the Department lacks a clear, detailed recruitment plan. Students stated that they had very little direct contact with the Department of Drama and Speech Communication during the recruitment and application process.

Recommendation 12: The Drama Department should work with the Office of Marketing and Undergraduate Recruitment to develop a Recruitment Strategy, including materials that clearly outline the liberal arts nature of the Drama program and the kinds of opportunities available to students during their undergraduate careers.

Budget

The Department of Drama and Speech Communication, unlike many other academic units, is very fortunate in having not only expenses but also its own revenue. The production arm of the Drama program offers a yearly season of plays and had a separate budgetary provision assigned to it for the first time by the Dean last year. More importantly, however, the Department has control over the box office returns and can use them to support its regular operations. At the same time, there is some room for improvement in how the budget is allocated within the Department.

Recommendation 13: The internal budget-allocation process needs formalization. The creation of a systemic solution to the budgeting process within the Department is required that ensures the fairness and transparency of all financial decisions. Ideally, a separate budget line should be created for equipment in costumes, lighting, shop, etc.

The other potential danger to the Department’s financial and academic well-being is the University’s recent move to curtail the number of undergraduate courses with 10 or fewer students except in special circumstances (see the Vice President, Academic and Provost memoranda of March 9, 2009 and November 12, 2010). The flexibility that Policy 40 provides to Chairs is particularly important in the context of the Drama Department given the number of faculty members and because the nature of the learning process in Drama requires a high degree of individualized instruction.

Recommendation 14: The Dean of Arts and Chair of Drama and Speech Communication continue to recognize that small class sizes, particularly in Drama’s senior undergraduate courses, are integral to the students’ academic growth and development. Given the need for individualized instruction in Drama, it is recommended that any large enrolment service courses that the Department might develop be counted in their favour and used to offset the smaller classes.

Concern and Opportunities for Improvement

The reviewers offered a total of 14 recommendations, which can be broadly grouped into three primary areas: a) space, b) curriculum and personnel, and c) miscellaneous.
Space (Recommendations 5, 6, 10, and 11)

A new building and/or improved facilities to support Drama courses and productions would create an environment in which many of the review team’s recommendations could be met. As the reviewers succinctly stated in their report, “It will be no surprise that the Committee finds that the teaching, workshop, storage, and office spaces in Drama are woefully inadequate. It will be necessary to solve these space issues if Drama is to move forward with curricular development and growth.” This statement, with which faculty and staff members in the program strongly concur, importantly links space and physical resources with curriculum. In other words, a new building and/or improved facilities are central to the curricular mission of the program. State of the art facilities could allow for the physical co-existence of Drama, Digital Arts Communication, Speech Communication, and Fine Arts, encouraging an increase in research, creative work, and curricular and pedagogical collaboration, and sharing of resources necessary to all units. Related to attracting and retaining top students, faculty, and staff; maintaining minimum health and safety standards; and keeping abreast of technological developments related to theatrical productions and performances, a new building, or at a minimum, drastically improved facilities, are required.

Curriculum and Personnel (Recommendations 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8 and 9)

In 2009-10, Drama faculty and staff members engaged in substantive discussion of the curriculum. The Department agrees with the recommendations which encourage attention to curricular redevelopment, offerings and delivery. Curricular revision, in conjunction with a new space, would provide improved capacities for instruction; and would support integration of the three units in the department (Drama, Speech Communication, and Digital Arts Communication). Discussions about curriculum have included attention to learning outcomes, and in this context, the program has begun pursuing recommendation seven. Regarding recommendation nine, discussions among faculty and staff members in the fall of 2010 and winter of 2011 confirmed that each of the three units in the Department will continue to build on their unique strengths as well as work collaboratively.

In regard to recommendation one, there is a faculty search in process. Faculty and staff members in the program are also in agreement regarding the timely conversion of the long-standing lectureship in theatre production and management to a tenure-stream position. The program supports the recommendation of hiring two limited term lecturers, which would strengthen course offerings and broaden the expertise available for productions, a significant component of students’ learning. Faculty and staff members note that the assistant theatre director staff position remains unfilled, which places on them additional teaching and production burdens.

Miscellaneous (Recommendations 12, 13, and 14)

In regard to recommendation 13, faculty and staff members in the program support articulating and formalizing the budget-allocation process within the Department and with the Dean’s Office, so that necessary resources for production remain available to the Drama program.
Recommendations 12 and 14 are less actionable than other suggestions in the report. Faculty and staff members in the Drama program will remain attentive to student recruitment efforts. At the same time, recruitment to the Faculty of Arts, while acknowledging students’ disciplinary interest in Drama, does not lead to direct entry into the Drama program. The faculty and staff members also remain committed to small class sizes, with a parallel sensitivity to the constraints on class size currently experienced by all Departments in the Faculty of Arts.

Overall the program largely concurs with especially recommendations one through 11, and wants to reiterate the importance of new and/or radically improved facilities; as well as its commitment to curricular revision. It would be impossible to understate the central significance of the need for better facilities. In many ways, nearly all of the recommendations are to some degree tied to this suggestion. Faculty and staff members look forward to continuing to build on the strengths of the Drama program in the ways articulated above.