

# **THDA Assessment Plan**

Winter, 2014

Presented to Kendrick Brown, Associate Dean of the Faculty

Primary Author: Beth Cleary, Chair, THDA; Consensus Members in THDA:

Dan Keyser; Harry Waters Jr; Wynn Fricke; Tom Barrett; Lynn Farrington

## **1. Department Student Learning Statement**

THDA asks the reader of this document to consider the variety of ways that THDA faculty and artistic staff interact with and teach students: those who major and minor; non-major students who take classes to fulfill Fine Arts and other requirements; and students who work onstage or backstage in productions. THDA considers its Mission Statement, developed in 2010-11, to be a dynamic representation of our work with students – and we therefore propose it as our department’s Student Learning Statement. Please read “b),” below, with “a)” in mind.

- a) THDA faculty and artistic staff work with students continuously in a variety of ways:
  - the capstone experience for senior majors;
  - 4-credit academic courses and related labs;
  - 1- and 2-credit dance technique courses;
  - 1-credit *practicum* experiences in technical theatre and production support;
  - 1-credit mainstage production collaborations, which synthesize learning from all settings;
  - Student employment positions in the scene, costume and box office departments.
- b) THDA developed a Mission Statement in 2010-11, which collects our guiding principles in working with students in all of the above-named pedagogical exchanges.

---

## **THDA Mission Statement**

Students participating in Theatre and Dance Department classes and productions encounter the rich histories, variegated literatures, contested spaces and fine skills of performance, in both local and global contexts. The curricula in Theater, Performance Studies and Dance offer students at all levels of participation – from major or minor or in one course fulfilling the Fine Arts requirement – the opportunity to learn performance theories and practices, and to acquire the intellectual and embodied vocabularies of performance onstage, in design labs, dance studios and classrooms.

The Theatre and Dance Department offers a major in Theatre, and a Combined Major in Theatre and Dance; both of these majors have requirements at all levels of inquiry, from beginning through advanced, and steer students toward an emphasis in the senior capstone year (acting,

choreography, design, etc.) Students also can take an official minor in Theatre or Dance. In all of its formal curricular programs, the Department emphasizes:

- acquisition of skills in a student's chosen emphasis within the major: acting; historical/theoretical research in performance; dance performance; choreography; directing; design (scenic, lighting or costume); technical direction; stage management; playwrighting.
- ongoing practice in the theories and methods of collaboration.
- application of the arts of collaboration to wider campus and community practices of civic engagement.
- instruction and progressive curricular expertise in four (4) kinds of crucial research: a) practice-based; b) analytical; c) archival; d) devised.
- instruction and progressive curricular expertise in the histories of theater, dance and performance.
- instruction and progressive curricular expertise in the inter-disciplinary fields and methods of performance studies.
- the development of three (3) crucial forms of communication: a) written; b) oral; c) artistic.
- the ability, upon graduation, to craft a theoretical framework for making and experiencing performance.
- Exposure to professional theater and dance artists, whose participation in the program as guests and collaborators propels students' dreams of living and working sustainably as artists and theorists of performance beyond college.

---

## **II. Department Learning Goals and Outcomes**

These are listed below as particular extensions of the *emphases* in the Mission Statement, and applying to students in all our learning environments (see I.a, above); however, in developing these, we can measure the depth of our successes through our work with *majors*, and so we have them most in mind with these goals and outcomes.

### a) Acquisition of Skills

**GOAL:** THDA wants each student to become an advanced craftsperson in her/his area of major emphasis. This means the student is a successful applicant to graduate programs, or finds employment in her/his area of major expertise within the first two years after graduation, should s/he pursue such employment.

**OUTCOME:** We have developed guidelines for the Senior Capstone in THDA, which provide detailed guidance for students doing advanced work in all areas. The students are mentored closely through this process, and each capstone is considered a culmination and synthesis of the student's previous training in her/his area. The Senior Capstone guidelines and grading rubrics can be found in the THDA Community Handbook. Students' successful completion of this capstone is the Department's certification that the student has achieved the learning outcomes of the major, and especially has acquired advanced, employable skills.

MMS ASSESSMENT STRATEGY: Year-long “Senior Research Collective,” which provides a structure for all THDA capstone projects.

b) Collaboration

GOAL: Students will become proficient in forming functional, provisional communities in classrooms and production settings. Good collaborators listen well, are aware of their impact on others, and demote personal desires for the good of the group or production. This is a crucial skill in performance-making, and it must be learned. The Senior Capstone in THDA has a grading area in “citizenship,” which explicitly includes collaboration.

OUTCOME: Students learn the crucial skills of flexibility, listening and witnessing, upholding anti-hierarchical and collective values when necessary, and, conversely, accepting structures where hierarchies are in place to facilitate learning, production deadlines or safety.

MMS ASSESSMENT STRATEGY: capstone grading in “citizenship;” also, progress in project-based courses where collaboration is a central skill: Acting (all course levels and varieties); Directing; Technical Theatre; Dance Composition.

c) Civic Engagement

GOAL: THDA students respect and seek to apply their expertise in performance analysis and performance-making in a variety of community settings within and outside Macalester.

OUTCOME: Students become ambassadors of the progressive education afforded them in THDA, and seek to promote change in communities through performance. They also *within* performance-making communities remain advocates for research, critique, responsible representation, and social justice.

MMS ASSESSMENT STRATEGY: this is a harder one to “assess,” because students and graduates proceed in individual ways in the vigor of their civic engagements; however, we have a few instruments in place: course writing assignments that ask students to assess public performances; creativity and thoroughness of students’ publicity efforts for their collaborative and public work.

d) Practitioners of practice-based, analytical, archival, devised research

GOAL: Students develop the intellectual reflex and capacity to support all artistic choices through research, and they are capable of discerning and producing quality scholarly research for our field. They also can produce and advocate for embodied research as an inherent practice in our field.

OUTCOME: Students and graduate practitioners of the craft advocate for and undertake research in their advanced and professional work, thereby modelling the creation of complex artistic work. They also understand the importance of *timing* for research, and know how to

schedule it in the arc of their artistic work so that it feeds, and does not encumber, the artistic process.

MMS ASSESSMENT STRATEGY: the capstone is the best assessment rubric for students' research capacities.

e) Performance historians

GOAL: Students have an advanced understanding of the historical, materialist contexts for all performance-making, and they know how to research these histories. They also understand that performance produces many kinds of archives – spatial, embodied, sonic, among others – and they have means for doing research in archives conventional and unconventional.

OUTCOME: Students and graduates understand sociopolitical, economic, racial, gendered, sex'd, embodied and multiply-abled histories as the source material of artistic, performance-making endeavor, and have an impressive array of archival methods for researching, documenting and applying those histories in their work.

MMS ASSESSMENT STRATEGY: again, the capstone is the best assessment.

f) Field of Performance Studies

GOAL: Students study and produce interdisciplinary scholarship in performance, deploying the methods and vocabularies of performance studies in THDA and other coursework and in their professional work after graduation.

OUTCOME: THDA students understand their work in performance-making to be informed and propelled forward by progressive scholarship that integrates and innovates theories in areas that have bearing on performance and representation. Also, THDA students understand that theatre studies, dance studies and performance studies have separate but interrelated histories, and that each articulates crucial areas for advanced students to advocate: in coursework and in collaborative work beyond college.

MMS ASSESSMENT STRATEGY: capstone.

g) Written, oral and artistic communication

GOAL: THDA students should write well, and use terminology correctly and persuasively in their analytic and creative writing and in their speech. Their articulation as artists through embodiment, design languages and technical skills is also crucial, and is related to their skills as writers.

LEARNING OUTCOME: Students will improve in all their articulations during their coursework and production work in THDA.

MMS ASSESSMENT STRATEGY: capstone.

h) Development of theoretical framework

GOAL: Students will apply critical thinking to all activities of reception and production in performance. Students will continue to develop their intellectual inquiry as artists and audiences throughout their lives.

LEARNING OUTCOME: Students will feel empowered by the range of ways they can approach a text, performance, and/or design and recognize this range as crucial for leadership and collaboration in these forms.

MMS ASSESSMENT STRATEGY: we can see and evaluate the increasing sophistication of this “framework” capacity in upper level courses, especially: Directing; Reading the Dancing Body; Advanced Design (scenic and lighting); Advanced Dance Composition. The capstone is the ultimate assessment area for this.

i) Interaction with Professional Artists

GOAL: Extend students’ THDA-based learning in performance and production to the ways that performance is made in professional settings.

LEARNING OUTCOME: *Further research, especially in the area of arts in education, is needed to fully articulate the learning outcome in this area.*

MMS ASSESSMENT STRATEGY: *See Learning Outcome, above. We will develop this area in the next several years, as we seek to integrate more internship opportunities into students’ major plans.*

### **III. Departmental Assessment Strategies**

Please see above, “MMS Assessment Strategy,” for each Learning Outcome.

#### **IV. Four-Year Implementation Timeline for Learning Outcome Self-Assessment**

THDA has been, and will continue to be, in flux in terms of its permanent senior faculty; however, we can preliminarily plot the following assignments over the next four years (allowing for new hires, sabbaticals and retirements):

#### **2014:**

Acquisition of Skills: Beth Cleary

Collaboration: Harry Waters Jr

**2015:**

Civic Engagement: Harry Waters Jr

Varieties of Research: New Hire in Theatre/Performance Studies

**2016:**

History/

Performance Studies New Hire

Communication (x3) Harry Waters Jr

**2017:**

Theoretical Framework Beth Cleary

Professional Interactions Harry Waters Jr