**Theater Department**

**Compiled by Emily Esch**

***Description of strengths***

Our department is one of the few undergraduate theater departments in the state to actually train students in all the areas of theater.  We have theater faculty in each discipline which allows our students to learn a variety of theater skills so that when they leave CSBSJU they have the potential to start up their own theater.  They have basic skills which will help them find a job but are not over trained so they can adapt to any theater and shop that hires them.  Our majors and the students who work in our department and on our productions gain experiential learning on each production they work on.  They learn time management, come up with creative solutions to problems they encounter while in a live performance situation and learn how to collaborate with many different personalities.  Our department is a true model for the liberal arts, for each production students learn about new cultures, history and blend all of their experiences into the process which culminates in a live theatrical performance.  Our productions are run by students.

We are intentionally not a BFA program – not preparing majors for graduate schools. Can work more specifically with students who want to be theater professionals.

Exceptional facilities. Graduate level.

We are allowed to do what productions we want, unlike many places where they have to ask for approval. We think about putting on productions that can be integrated into curriculums other than they own.

Theater is sometimes called “the most liberal of the arts”

*Skills, dispositions, and knowledge:*

Our students are constantly thinking about the human experience from different viewpoints with every play they read and production they work on. These experiences shape their views and open their minds to unlimited possibilities.  They learn skills that will help them work in any situation such as time management, the art of collaboration, adaptability and creative problem solving.

Theater people are very good at time management – must be to produce theater.

Everybody does research – do a play about physicists, have to learn about physicists.

Emphasis on the context – political, social, historical, etc. When making costumes, not just learning to sew, but why things were made the way they were, how it effects people’s movements, what things were made of and why. Active learning. Understanding the historical context of plays helps students learn that the way it is now is not the way it always is.

Everything involves experiential learning. Students run their own productions, not micromanaged. Learn leadership and team building. We are intentional about teaching these skills. Expect that mistakes will happen and teach student to learn from these. Most people think we rent costumes, don’t realize that students make them. Learn basic life skills, handling budgets, building things, making costumes.

Have a big effect even on non-majors. The sense of community in being part of a production. A sanctuary for some, an expansion of community for others.

We want to develop people’s intuitions. Expand people’s notion of creativity and sense of their own creativity. Help contribute to their own culture.

Get to know our students in a way that many faculty do not. This allows us to tailor education to the individual students.

Have had three students go through the entrepreneurship program. Lots of people using theater as way to help people.

We have good networking for our students. Lots of connections.

Lots of law programs looking for theater majors. Excellent way to improve communications skills, formulate ideas. Want people who are creative thinkers can meet a deadline.

***What do you wish you could do better, or do more of?***

Would love to teach with other people faculty. Lots of ways that theater can interface with other departments. Need a common curriculum that makes these kinds of collaborations possible. Students don’t do this on their own. Seem to have less interpersonal skills than they used to.

 I wish that we had more opportunities to work with guest artists.  I think that this expands our students viewpoints and experiences and gives them a wider pool from which to explore and examine theater.  It also takes them out of their comfort zone and opens their minds to new and different experiences.  It also allows them to see how collaboration can work between people who have not had a long working relationship and how this can be a rewarding or a difficult experience.  It prepares them for the reality of the workplace and expands their minds.

***Are there ways in which you would like to see your department/program contribute to liberal education that so far it has not been able to?***

I wish that we had more cross listed classes or could work on a course with a different discipline, say a course that deals with Science and theater where we could study the play Galileo and talk about him as a scientist.

Need to be on the pre-law list of advisors.

Want to make more connections with other departments.

It is hard to get departments to cooperate in the ways that they used to. There’s a feeling that theater is not valued by the faculty, that it’s not academic enough. Have been questioned about how theater can “make people think” or instill critical thinking skills. Clear misunderstandings of what we do.

Theater has been around for 2500 years ago with theater festival in Athens. Need to foster deeper understanding of what theater is – not just “Oliver Twist” – but a tradition that has been part of humanity for a long time.

**Adam Houghton is on sabbatical, but he sent the following replies:**

1) What are the strengths of your department/program? What do you already do well? Remember that these responses will be shared with the community at large, so please use this opportunity to brag a little bit. What do you want people outside your department/program to know about your successes and strengths?

HOUGHTON>> Results of our recent Program Review indicate that our department is very effective at building a community among students in our classes and productions. One reason we are so effective at community building is our regular collaboration with students. Theater practice relies on collaboration between playwrights, directors, designers and actors.

2) What do you wish you could do better, or do more of? What would it take (resources, support, etc.) for you to reach those goals?

HOUGHTON>> Since we practice and develop collaboration in our classes and productions, we wish we could collaborate more with colleagues outside of our department. We are interested in inter-disciplinary work. For example, imagine a course team taught by a theater professor and a computer science professor in which students create virtual worlds using learning in dramatic structure and theatrical design methods combined with programming skills and computer technology. The virtual world product could fulfill educational, communication or entertainment purposes. Such team-taught courses are a challenge that could use support for faculty load.

3) Leaving aside discipline specific knowledge, in what ways does your department/program best contribute to providing our students with a liberal education for their lives beyond college, as informed and engaged citizens, productive employees, ethical beings, etc.?

HOUGHTON>> Students who participate in out departmental courses and productions gain knowledge and skills that LIBERALIZE their education like no other subject. At its core, theater is an art form that inspires empathy for others. Theater students analyze texts to understand the characters' relationships and circumstances, and then the students spend significant time developing novel ways to communicate the characters' story to an audience. Though the characters are fictional inventions the empathetic effect in theater students carries over into their daily lives. They view their professional, political, social, and religious lives differently.

4) Are there ways in which you would like to see your department/program contribute to liberal education that so far it has not been able to?

HOUGHTON>> We believe our students' work is valuable not only to the students in our courses and productions, but to the students who view the work. We would like to see the good effects of the department multiply by increasing the number of students who come into contact with the department's work. We have made efforts to make the work more readily available, we have worked to link our work with other departments. These efforts have positive results because we have an increase in students involved, however we would like to see greater increases.