

Assessment Findings and Curricular Improvements
Department of Drama
Master's of Fine Arts Program in Acting, Directing, Playwriting
Master's Degree in Theory & Criticism
Master's of Art in Theatre Education

AY 2010-11

Assessment Findings

	Fail		Pass		High Pass		TOTAL
	#	%	#	%	#	%	
MA program	0	0.00%	5	100.00%	0	0.00%	5
MFA program	0	0.00%	2	100.00%	2	0.00%	4

All of the graduate students successfully completed the comprehensive exams in the fall of 2010 and the spring of 2011.

Curricular Improvements

Because the curriculum for the three M.F.A. programs benefited from an intense evaluation five years ago, the faculty does not foresee major changes to their curricula or assessment mechanisms. The exams for the M.A. students will not change. The must write two scholarly essays, and the questions for each are based in the interests of the students and readings from their courses. However, Dr. Rosalind Flynn developed a new rubric to evaluate the essays written by the MATE students for their comprehensive exams. The faculty adopted the rubric for the MATE students in the fall of 2010 to test whether or not they better assess the students' work. We do not use the MATE rubrics to evaluate the essays produced by the students in the department's other graduate programs. I have included a copy of the new rubrics as a PDF file among these reports.

The new MATE rubrics are more detailed then the rubrics that we currently use for the other graduate programs. This has helped those MATE students who have not had the same academic and scholarly training. Dr. Flynn provides all of the MATE students with copies of the rubric and requires the students to hand in their essays with the rubric attached to them. We continue to use Dr. Flynn's rubrics for the MATE students. After two semesters and one summer of testing, the Associate Chair has discovered one difficulty. The rubric does not use the same format and traits that the department includes in the other rubrics. This is not an issue when evaluating an essay, but it is a serious problem when trying to report the results along with other rubrics. The Associate Chair has created a template that allows him to translate the scores that appear in the MATE rubric so that the different sheets match the traits and scores in the other rubrics. This translation does not come easily, and the Associate Chair is working on a solution that will make this process less cumbersome. In the mean time, the process works well enough to report on the results of the MATE comprehensive exams so that they appear along with the other results. The goal is to return to

uniform rubrics, and now the department has enough data to compare the effectiveness of each format and make an informed decision.

The comprehensive exams are one of the department's most important assessment mechanisms. They have been in place long before the present Associate Chair joined the department in the fall of 2002. With the input of the administration, the Associate Chair and Chair developed new and uniform rubrics for the graduate comprehensive exams in 2009. These rubrics were approved by the administration. They have helped guide the faculty when assessing the essays and other materials included in the comprehensive exams, and they have impacted classroom instruction across the curricula. After administering the exams in the spring of 2010, the Associate Chair and Chair were not satisfied with their layout and adjusted the rubrics by switching the columns labeled "Exceeds Expectations" and "Below Expectations." Whereas "Exceeds Expectations" used to occupy the far left column and "Below Expectations" was placed at the far right column, "Below Expectations" now appears in the first column as an evaluator reads the sheet from left to right. The hope is that this change will require an evaluator to read through the rubric from left to right and consider the description within each category listed on the sheet before assigning a value to that part of the student's performance in a given essay.

The Associate Chair and Chair are also not satisfied with the current scoring system. In the past, the three faculty members who grade each student's work made written comments on each essay and arrived at a letter grade individually. They then gave those letter grades to the Associate Chair who used them to determine one grade for each student's essays and an overall grade for the exams. The point system included in the present rubric suggests that the Associate Chair may simply determine a student's overall grade by calculating the average score for each essay and/or casebook. This is not possible until the entire department discusses the relationship among the descriptions for the different criteria, their numerical score, and grade that the score indicates the student has earned. The faculty as a whole must determine what the numbers mean in relation to the overall grade: High Pass, Pass, or Fail. What number constitutes each? The Associate Chair has placed this as an item on the agenda of the department's next faculty meeting and hopes that the discussion will help explain how the scores in each rubric should function.