Theater Arts Vision Committee

First Meeting of the Theater Arts Vision Committee, May 20th, 2010 10:00am-12:00 pm Irving Board of Trustees Room

Present: Chiu, Dibble, Edmiston (Chair), Hyland, King, Krstansky, McKittrick, Schoonmaker, Webber, Williams, Wong

Guests: Dean Adam Jaffe

Charge from Adam Jaffe, Dean of Arts and Sciences

Dean Adam Jaffe met with the committee for the start of the meeting. He expressed his gratitude to all of the members for their willingness to participate in this process. When outlining the goals for the committee, he divided the work into three major categories with one subcategory. The three main categories were the Undergraduate Program, the MFA Acting Program and the Brandeis Theater Company (BTC.) With regards to the undergraduate theater program, Jaffe expressed that he felt there was untapped potential in the undergraduate population, and that he would like to see the committee discuss ways of incorporating these students into the department. Given the recent changes, and future adjustments to the department, he felt that it will also be necessary to consider the role of the MFA Acting program. Finally, Jaffe acknowledged that the BTC will in all likelihood become smaller in budget and staffing than what it currently is, but he stressed the importance of remaining committed to the production of serious, academic theater. The subcategory mentioned by the Dean was that the possibility of enhancing or formalizing professional affiliations with other theater organizations outside of Brandeis.

Introductions and Goals for the Committee

After the Dean’s departure, the members of the committee began with introductions and by speaking briefly to their goals for the committee. Scott Edmiston, as chair of the committee, outlined what he believed would be the process of the committees work over the next few months. The next meeting of the committee, to be held May 26th from 12-3:00pm, will begin with a discussion of topics for the committee to explore. Through this discussion the committee will begin to establish questions to be answered and the various constituencies, both internal and external, who will be consulted. He emphasized the committee’s recommendations would be informed by many ideas from the community, specifically faculty, staff, students, and alumni from the Department of Theatre Arts. He stated that he believed that the committee will be meeting three (3) to four (4) times per month. He explained that the result of these discussions will be a committee report that will be submitted to the Dean. This report will be series of recommendations for Dean Jaffe to consider in the future restructuring of the department.

Everyone gathered agreed that it was important to keep the community informed of the committee’s work. To that end, meeting summaries will be written and posted on the Dean of Arts and Sciences website.

Edmiston asked the committee members to discuss the areas of the theater program at Brandeis that are its current strengths. The following was mentioned:

- Faculty.
- Growth in the student interest in dance and movement theater.
- Interest in Suzuki acting technique.
- Range of teaching methods in the department.
Diversity of student population.

Multiculturalism of programming.

Connection to issues of social justice.

Relationship with UTC, especially in the areas of production/technical support.

BTC production values and designs.

A prevailing attitude of openness toward student ideas.

The use of guest artists and instructors.

Senior thesis productions.

The emergence of more devised and original work.

Student’s ability to connect work from other classes into theater practice.

Members of the department are professionally active and foster those relationships to student’s benefit.

Professionalism in class work and productions.

Artistic integrity.

Innovative and site-specific performances

Integration with other departments, organizations and guest artists.

Mentorship between graduate and undergraduate students.

The potential of the building, especially in the three distinct, connected theater spaces, for creating theater.

The ongoing resilience of the department when faced with challenges.

Edmiston asked the committee members to mention areas of the theater program that need help or require further discussion. The following topics were mentioned:

The Spingold building.

The experience of attending productions at Brandeis.

Curriculum at the undergraduate level.

Courses that would be inclusive to broader student population such as world theater, theater in society, or theater and social justice

Need for community building within the department.
· Need to break down some perceived divisions within the department.
· Relationship with UTC.

Next Meeting

Scott distributed the School of Creative Arts, Department of Theatre Arts and Brandeis Theatre Company mission statements; as well descriptions of theatre programs at other universities. These will be discussed at the next meeting. The agenda will also include:

· Discussion of the department’s history/model on which the program is currently based.
· Further brainstorming of topics the committee should address.
· Brainstorming of questions to pose to various constituencies.
· Identification of these constituencies.

The meeting adjourned at 12:00pm