

# **Academic Program Review Arkansas Tech University**

**Bachelor of Arts in Speech  
with  
Speech Communications Option  
Theatre Option**

## **External Reviewers Report**

**Prepared by**

**Haidee Heaton  
Mary G. Jarzabek  
Stephen King**

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## Academic Program Review

### External Reviewers Report

- I. Review of Program Goals, Objectives and Activities
  - A. The Communication and Theatre learning objectives appropriately address general education goals as well as basic goals relevant to the Speech Communication and Theatre Options within the Department of Speech Communication, Theatre, and Journalism.
    1. Goals and Objectives:
      - a. Each area within the learning objectives for the Speech Communication and Theatre options can be found within the curriculum and production practices. Each learning objective is distinct and speaks to an area of student learning essential to academic study. Most syllabi have specific objectives listed for the students and general course instruction and assignments target these objectives.
      - b. General Program goals focus on “spoken language” and “being able to speak effectively.” This is evidenced in the majority of course syllabi in both Programs. This is highly appropriate, especially for the Theatre Option and is still considered a valuable employment skill in today’s society. However, this single focus may be limiting when applied to the Speech Communication Option. The Department of Speech, Theatre, and Journalism recognizes a broader objective in its stated objective:
        - i. “The study of communication in its original form, speech, or its evolved stages of print and electronic communication can prepare the student for citizenship in a democratic society, for more satisfying relationships, and for occupational success.”
        - ii. Since distance learning and Web-based technologies are rapidly developing, the spoken language must increasingly share emphasis with written and graphic communication.
        - iii. The broad goals of cultural diversity are not evidenced in the Department’s Program Review. This element of modern communication is important to the development of students with a clear understanding of human interaction in a culturally diverse society.
    2. Assessment:
      - a. Assessment of specific courses is adequate and appropriate. Faculty report the use of pre/post testing, course assignments, and course-expectations-and-results questioning within courses such as Rhetorical Criticism and Introduction to Communication. On-site visits revealed faculty have used social media, like Facebook, to contact graduates. This could be a wonderful tool for assessment – a way to enhance assessment for undergraduate achievements.
      - b. On-site visits revealed the individual classes were internally assessed to meet course-specific goals and objectives. This is effective, but there is a need for clearly identifiable “competencies” to be achieved in the two program options. There is also a need for more standardized assessment practices. The Dean of the College of Arts and Humanities stated that the faculty of this Department recognize this issue and are currently looking at ways to address the need for

common assessment practices of the broader goals/objectives for their Speech Communication /Theatre students.

- B. The faculty and students are clearly accomplishing the goals and objectives in both the Speech Communication and Theatre Options. Based on the available data (pp. 35-36 of the self-generated Program Review), students seem to be achieving a desirable level of competence in both communication and theatre. The lowest score is 79%. On-site visits indicate that overall, the faculty and students are accomplishing their goals with the resources that they have available to them at the current time. There is a temporary problem in the Theatre Option due to the recent closure of their functional theatre space. This old facility has been stripped and cleaned and reviewers were informed that restorations are underway.
1. Reading plays through a formalist approach, design theory, acting techniques, healthy, effective vocal production, and Western drama are all areas of study within the current curriculum. Each of these objectives are taught, studied and mastered in their own separate courses. This has allowed faculty to give ample time to each area during the course of a semester.
  2. Acting techniques and the relationship between an actor and audience are also taught in the production of plays for an audience. Since the theatre space has been shut down, students and faculty have not been able to practice the more traditional, practical side of performance. Because there is currently no production season, this goal is not met to the best of its ability.
  3. "Students will demonstrate the skills necessary to construct and maintain the scenic elements involved in dramatic presentations." Although the last assessment of this rated 100%, this objective has been put on hold since the theatre space has been closed. While students are learning basic principles and design techniques in the classroom, faculty are not able to teach the students hands-on construction in scene, costume, makeup, or lighting.
  4. However, some frustration from both faculty and students was noted since they are not able to teach and study the traditional, practical production of theatre in the classroom and in main stage performance. If given the space and resources, theatre faculty affirmed they would happily rise to meet all goals once again.
- C. The Speech and Theatre programs are extremely dedicated to meeting market/industry demands as well as preparing their students for advanced study. There is a high level of focus within this department to offer a well-rounded curriculum and to give their students a broad understanding of the multiple aspects and applications of communication skills. Communication students are learning how to write and speak, listen and engage in critical thinking. A variety of courses (public speaking, interpersonal, small group, argumentation) will assist students to achieve the number one goal of a university education: intellectual stimulation and growth (e.g., to become better citizens). Communication programs like ATU will also assist students as they enter the job market. Most employment research points to evidence that is quite clear: employers are looking for candidates who possess excellent communication skills.

1. The learning objectives are clear and useful for any student intending to either work professionally or move on to graduate study.
  2. Speech Communication students voiced their enthusiasm and satisfaction with their coursework. The six students interviewed agreed that they were exposed to multiple skill building assignments and urged to practically apply academic learning across a wide range of contexts. Students noted that debaters studied theatre and theatre students were exposed to Communication theory. All six agreed that they were exposed to multiple contexts and constructs by their professors so that they might learn to apply what they are learning in many aspects of the Communication field.
  3. Students are being trained in both practical and theoretical areas of theatre, and are getting a fine generalists degree with the ability to take more specific courses in the area of interest.
  4. Students are working in all areas of theatre according to the report and my conversations during the on-site visit with faculty and staff. This is a positive outcome of the department. Those concentrating on the more practical side are working professionally or teaching in their area. Those studying theory more intensively are working on graduate degrees. This is the norm for most institutions and speaks highly of the program's training.
- D. There is adequate student demand for these two Options. With the exception of Introduction to the Theatre, the number of students enrolled in the general education courses (e.g., public speaking) increased from 2008/2009 to 2010/2011. While the number of majors decreased from 2009 to 2010 the numbers rebounded in 2011. The departmental program review does not compare their data to other, similar universities, but there is sufficient evident of student demand and that it is being met by this department. The on-site review reveals that the formula for calculating these totals has changed twice in recent years and that the trends of increasing majors for all departmental options is expected to continue.
1. There is sufficient student demand for this program. Not only does the Theatre Option cover part of the general education curriculum, but it is a growing department at the university. In the numbers cited in the departmental report, headcounts of declared majors have risen in the past two years.
  2. During an on-site visit, it was learned that the Theatre Option serves a good number of majors, but also a large number of non-majors who take courses and actively participate in the program's productions. Student demand for the program is campus wide and not limited to department majors.
  3. On-site reviews also focused on student comments. Majors in this department were well-pleased with faculty efforts to prepare them for graduate school. Speech Communication majors noted that in-class assignments were constantly being related to real-world scenarios in order to prepare them for professional application of their skills
- E. Course enrollments and program graduation/completion rates justify the required resources. The department's graduation rate is well above the baseline (6), but as the departmental report indicates, while the number of graduates has increased, the number of communication/theatre majors has decreased.

1. Recent relocation of this department into an actual building (having had to dwell in temporary buildings for the past few years) is expected to attract even more students into these two program options.
2. Enrollment and graduation rates do justify the required resources. Enrollment graduation rates in Speech have risen in the last year, while last year's numbers for the Theatre Option, have stabilized. With the growing enrollment, graduation rates for both options should continue to increase over time.
3. Expanding enrollment will also justify the hiring of more faculty for this department. Students stated that course offering rotations has sometimes delayed their graduation by a semester or sometimes a year. With more faculty, these rotations could result in expanded offerings (see recommendations at end of this report). As a result, student graduation is kept on track within the department.

## II. Review of Program Curriculum

- A. The Speech and Theatre program curriculum are generally appropriate to meet current and future market/industry needs and/or to prepare students for advanced study.
  1. The Speech Communication curriculum focuses on a variety of communication and theatre related theories and skills—intrapersonal, interpersonal, small group, research, critical thinking and writing. There is still a need for the inclusion of two courses: intercultural communication and a rhetoric course—specifically rhetorical criticism or rhetorical theory). The Departmental Report articulated an effective argument on pp. 38-39, however it could be useful to add information from a national recognized organization such as the National Communication Association (NCA) website to further examine and explain the value of communication and theatre programs.
  2. The Theatre curriculum is appropriate. In fact, the Theatre Option is poised to become its own degree. With the current curriculum offerings, a BA in Theatre is not at all out of the question. This is an option that the departmental faculty should consider.
    - a. By revisiting what courses are required, adding more of the exploratory electives to the core requirements, and adding in a required theatre capstone, a BA is plausible.
    - b. Students graduating with a BA in Theatre would be more marketable in both professional and graduate settings. The students are already receiving outstanding training within their curriculum. The Theatre degree title would reflect the hard work of faculty and students.
- B. Overall, the institutional policies and procedures are appropriate to keep the program curriculum current to meet industry standards. The university and department appears to be very pro-active. There is an effort to continually evaluate the curriculum and make changes when appropriate.
  1. Institutional policies and procedures are in place to help both faculty and students meet curriculum needs from a theoretical standpoint. The curriculum committee at the university is set in place to review and aid departments and seems a valuable resource to the area. Faculty commented that curriculum changes are facilitated by the Courses and Curriculum Committee at Arkansas Tech.

2. Institutional policies and procedures are also in place to help faculty and students meet those needs practically. However, those needs have not been met this academic year. In on-site interviews with the Dean and Department Chair, it was learned that the practical needs will be met in the coming 2012-2013 academic year. This will include renovations to theatrical and journalism facilities.
  3. The Departmental Report indicates research into industry needs at the "Worklink" website. More specific data is desirable in the next self-generated report to cite specific examples of how research has directed curriculum and program objective changes. More information should also be presented on which specific industries and specific jobs these two Program Options are targeting.
- C. Program exit requirements in both Speech and Theatre appear appropriate, especially in preparing students for graduate school. The capstone course required of all Speech majors seems to serve the goal of testing a student's comprehensive understanding of the field. Student interviews indicate that this capstone course prepares each student for tackling the thesis prospectus to be expected in any graduate program. The theatre program does not have a capstone course, but offers students practicum experience.
1. Exit requirements for the Theatre Option are not required. The department might want to revisit that decision and make a capstone part of the core curriculum as opposed to an option. Aside from that, the production practical options in place are a good test of both theory and skill for graduates and can easily transfer into choices for capstone study.
  2. Production capstones are often the norm in theatre study and this would meet industry standards in theatre education.
- D. The two programs do sufficiently evidence good breath/focus and currency, including consistency with good practices, although additional courses (mentioned above) would assist in expanding the programs' breadth. A varied and diverse course offering within this department shows the department's ability to educate students in a broad range of skills.
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  2. Production capstones are often the norm in theatre study and this would meet industry standards in theatre education.
- E. Students in these two programs are introduced to professionals in the field and to a broad range of theoretical and practical applications of their academic learning.
1. Interviews with the theatre faculty revealed that students are exposed to a wide-variety of experiences and professionals.
    - a. Faculty regularly introduce students to professionals in the field and aid in summer and post-graduate work.
    - b. Students do and will continue to receive experimental theatre experiences.
    - c. The only current area lacking is traditional theatre production. As noted above, this is a problem that should be remedied in the coming academic year.

2. It must be noted, however, that the Speech majors do not get much exposure to a workplace environment. There is no internship program in place at this time. The Dean and Chair, however, are quite receptive to the examination of this option. Introduction of internship course requirements for both program options would readily answer this need.
- F. Interviews with faculty and leadership in the Department indicate that the two programs are willing and able to promote and support interdisciplinary initiatives.
1. While there is not enough evidence in the Departmental report to indicate ongoing initiatives, there is a marked willingness among this faculty to expand and explore new program options for their students. In one on-site interview, faculty embraced the notion of advising current Speech majors to use electives to explore areas such as political science, history, graphic arts, etc. The electives included in the current curriculum will allow for such initiatives to be readily enacted.
  2. Theatre is intrinsically interdisciplinary. Combined with the Speech Option, this program is currently supporting interdisciplinary work. The entire department in which this major is housed is a wonderful opportunity for interdisciplinary study if the need arises.
  3. Students interviewed noted that faculty are constantly relating to other courses within the department for theoretical, artistic, or skills application. This focus on cross-application of theory and skills indicates a strong likelihood that interdisciplinary initiatives will be forthcoming and successful.
- G. These two programs do provide respect and understanding for cultural diversity. However, there is still room for improvement. This review should first note that majors were diverse in gender, race, and nationality – perhaps an indication of diverse recruiting.
1. In review of the Speech course curriculum and individual syllabi, it appears that the department could spend much time focused on diversity related issues. The additional of more intercultural or diversity related courses would help in this regard. Syllabi reviews found only one course (Introduction to Speech Communication, p. 54) that covered (briefly) intercultural communication theory. While the reviewers note that Arkansas Tech student population is often first-generation college candidates and from primarily small town or rural settings, this issue needs to be addressed.
  2. The Theatre review notes that this program is intrinsically a culturally diverse area of study.
    - a. The in-depth history curriculum allows students to study many different cultures within the theatre history paradigm.
    - b. Theatre production, both experimental and traditional, allows for students and audiences to experience different cultural paradigms with each show produced and/or designed.
    - c. Honors/awards/and scholarship recognition was evidenced, but not current. With the changes within the departmental facilities and faculty, it is believed that this area will improve over the next few semesters.
    - d. Although the theatre students interviewed were not very racially diverse, they are culturally diverse, and they come from different experiences. All of this adds to a rich studying experience.

### III. Review of Academic Support

- A. The program provides excellent quality and quantity of academic advising and mentoring of students. Students were adamant in their praise for availability and openness of their professors – both for advising and for mentoring. Students stated they felt respected, cared-for, and mentored by faculty members. The students in both programs are a passionate group of people, who honestly care about their education and faculty. The faculty and students appear to have a genuine, honest, open, and respectful relationship that has fostered a positive advising and mentoring experience.
- B. Both programs provide for the retention of qualified students from term to term and support student progress toward and achievement of graduation. Again, student interviews note that there is a significant dedication of this faculty to its student cohort.
1. Within the Department, the loss of communication and theatre majors from 2008-2009 to 2009/2010 suggests a problem with retention. It is unclear what impact of the use of a new formula for defining these numbers might have on the overall retention picture. There seems to be little evidence on the percentage of students who finish the program.
  2. The rare complaint from students or mention of negative retention rates touched on two areas: the lack of a working theatre space and the limited offerings of upper-level classes.
    - a. In talking with faculty, administration, and staff, student graduation and retention is a very important issue. Reviewers were impressed that all the employees are very involved in student success. Faculty work to give students every opportunity for communication and theatre learning; including extra-curricular activities such as debate and theatrical productions. Everyone in this department are working towards solutions; notably to the current lack of a theatre space so that students get the education they need to be (and feel) successful during their tenure as undergraduates.
    - b. The curriculum is set so that students are qualified for graduation. The course of study builds on itself so that graduation is an obtainable goal. Students indicate, however, that many upper-level courses are offered on a rotating basis and are not always readily available for graduating seniors. Two seniors addressed this problem and noted that their graduation had to be delayed for a semester while they waited on the appropriate course offerings. It does appear, though, that this issue is being addressed by the Department Chair. There are, as noted before, faculty vacancies that have not been filled due to budget cuts and all efforts are being made to offer courses to facilitate cohort graduation. While the department may be using course substitutions to alleviate the problem, there is still a need for more faculty in this program.

#### IV. Review of Program Faculty

- A. All program faculties have appropriate academic credentials and/or professional licensure/certification. There is a clear collegial atmosphere in this department. Each faculty member also brings a good amount of practical and professional experience that is unique to their own production experiences that they share in and out of the classroom with students. There is a wonderful mix of both traditional and experimental elements in what the faculty have to offer.
1. Based on the available information, the Speech faculty have the appropriate credentials and professional certifications. All faculties have appropriate graduate degrees; most of the faculty have terminal degrees. Faculty earned degrees from reputable graduate programs, including Indiana University, University of Arkansas, University of Oklahoma, Southern Illinois, Arizona State University, Baylor University, and Northwestern University. It is noted that the current Department Chair has “interim” status. Reviewers note that this position for Dr. Canton should be made permanent.
  2. All members of the Theatre Option faculty have the appropriate degrees, or are actively working toward the appropriate degree for faculty.
- B. The faculty orientation and faculty evaluation processes appear appropriate; for tenure track faculty, the evaluation process is impressive. The requirement of a Faculty Teaching Portfolio is an exemplary tool in evaluating classroom performance and focusing on the University’s primary mission of teaching.
1. Faculty are required to submit an annual teaching portfolio for review by the tenured faculty (this process certainly helps build one’s tenure and promotion portfolio). Classroom visitation can be part of the review (although it is suggested that this component should be made mandatory—not recommended—for all junior faculties). Tenured faculty are required to submit to an annual review, although they choose the semester student evaluations are conducted. Some university systems find it advantageous that tenured faculty be required to have their students complete instructor evaluation forms every semester. It is unclear whether scholarship and service are evaluated and how these areas are assessed.
  2. Faculty orientation and faculty evaluation processes are appropriate and clearly stated for faculty in the *Faculty Handbook*.
    - a. Teaching evaluations are intensive and rich in information for a faculty member.
    - b. Faculty have academic freedom and a good amount of input in their evaluations.
    - c. Orientation is in place to help new faculty succeed.
  3. In speaking with faculty, one reviewer noted there was a question in regard to whom each individual faculty member directly reports. Chain of command seems to be a very grey area. Some faculty members were under the impression that they were to report directly to the President of the University. Some had the understanding that they were to report to their Department Chair. On-site interviews revealed that there is nothing in writing for those faculty members to refer to when in doubt. There should be written clarification for the Department faculty so that there is a clear, unchanging understanding.

- C. The faculty workload seems to be in keeping with best practices. Faculty have a 4/4 teaching load. This is appropriate for a teaching-oriented university. It appears some faculty occasionally teach overloads (the average teaching load for 2011 was 13.1). The Departmental Report should note how many office hours faculty required to keep. 10 hours a week seems to be standard for similar colleges.
1. The 12 hour semester practice is standard and sufficient for faculty workload.
  2. It is also positive to see that the Director of Theatre receives a course reduction. This will help that faculty member a great deal and allow for some genuinely strong work to be done with the program.
  3. Often times, the faculty members directing and/or designing in a given semester are also given release time.
    - a. The argument is that those individuals designing a semester's worth of shows or directing 5-6 nights a week for two months are spending more time with students in an intensive learning situation and spending more hours in prep time for the production of those shows than in a "normal" 3 credit hour course. This has become standard practice at a lot of institutions in the regional area and even nationally.
    - b. This may be an area worth exploring if theatre production becomes a required part of theatre curriculum.

#### V. Review of Program Resources

- A. All information indicates there is an appropriate level of institutional support for program operation. From information found on p. 30 of the Departmental Report: these two programs do receive appropriate institutional support. Since 2008, as the report indicates, the program has received \$15,000 from the College of Arts and Sciences to purchase new equipment. The Departmental Report does not indicate what new equipment has been purchased since 2008.
1. Reviewers note that each College and Department are given a particular budget. It was reported that the College budget provided the Arkansas Tech Debate Team an additional \$2,500 to cover travel expenses for a larger team. This type of institutional support is laudable and indicates the administrative support for these two programs.
  2. It should also be noted that the administration came through on its promise of a permanent building to house this Department.
  3. Expectations are that the administration will also fund the theatrical facilities restoration that is so desperately needed. The institution has already provided the funds to clean-up the facility. There is no reason to expect that the administration will not finish the revitalization of the theatre facility.
- B. Faculty, library, professional development and other program resources are sufficient. For a school of its size, it appears that libraries resources are adequate for students and program. The Center for Teaching and Learning, four pools for funds for an array of activities including scholarly projects, ATU Faculty Research Fund, Development Grants are just some of the

opportunities available for faculty. However, it appears that many members of the Communication/Theatre faculty did not pursue these opportunities. See page 28: Faculty received what appears to be a small percentage of the awarded Faculty Development grants from summer 2010 to Fall 2011. The same can be said for the Professional Development Grant Fund. It is hard to pinpoint the reason in an external review, some other budgetary constraints may be in play. New faculty members may be settling into the new policies of the University and are unfamiliar with the internal grant processes. However, this concern should be addressed quickly.

1. Faculty:
  - a. Currently, there are 4 faculty of varying rank in the Theatre Option. That is a good number and should not be lowered.
  - b. However, reviewers note that a technical director/facilities manager is needed in this area. Most fully developed theatrical programs employ a technical director. This would free up design faculty and allow them to teach their curriculum and design shows. The technical director/facilities manager could work with spaces across campus and keep those areas up to code and up to date.
2. Library:
  - a. On-site observations and website perusal indicate that, library resources seem adequate for student learning.
  - b. The Departmental Report should better indicate what specific library resources facilitate their areas of study.
3. Professional Development/Institutional Support:
  - a. There are some wonderful opportunities for faculty in terms of professional development from the ATU Faculty Research Fund and Faculty Development Grants to the Summer Faculty Fellowships. The University has given many great chances for faculty to take advantage of funds to better themselves as educators.
  - b. Faculty leave is clear and outlined well for faculty.
4. Other Program Resources/Institutional Support:
  - a. Labs, the Blackboard system, and general A/V are sufficient for the program. More course offerings, however, may increase the need for resources and support.
  - b. Theatrical Production resources – while waiting for the renovation of the theatre facility - are not adequate for teaching or student learning.
    - i. There is currently little way for students to get practical knowledge for technical theatre and there is no way for students to practice performance in a live forum. It should be noted that the external reviewers applaud the action of the theatre faculty to focus on radio theatre and Reader's Theatre while the theatre facility is being renovated.
    - ii. Yet, students and faculty must have a way to learn and teach set construction, lighting design/hanging, makeup application, costume construction, and sound engineering in a theatre space.
    - iii. Students must also be able to experience performing for audiences that are not fellow students in a classroom experience. Currently, these resources are not available.

- iv. This situation has a negative effect on the Theatre program student learning and does not allow for the faculty to do their jobs to the best of their abilities.

## VI. Review of Program Effectiveness

### A. Indicate areas of program strength.

1. Tenure-track faculty evaluation (teaching portfolio).
2. SPH 4003: Human Communication Theory. A capstone course is important to access the “readiness” of graduating students. Students are required to design a “conference-ready” project. Students could be encouraged more to present papers and performances at state, regional or national conferences.
3. Post ATU student success: students have gone to pursue graduate studies and find employment in a variety of fields from religion to education to business.
4. Qualified full-time faculty. Faculty demonstrate an intense desire to advise and mentor individual students.
  - a. Faculty is a huge asset to these programs. Arguably, the faculty is the biggest strength of this program. Everyone on faculty have the best intentions for student learning, as observed in speaking with each faculty member and administrator. Each member of the faculty brings a wonderful breadth of knowledge to the program and each person has their own strengths to rely on, from practical theatrical production to theoretical work. Students need the different views and teaching styles in order to succeed upon graduation.
  - b. Ms. Brugh’s teaching style is wonderful. She has created a very unique and innovative way with student learning and having viewed her students' work, her methods are succeeding in the classroom. Dr. Eshelman was praised by students for his dynamic and activities-driven teaching style. Each faculty member brings a unique talent and perspective to these two programs.
  - c. The theatre history curriculum is also an intensive, rich study opportunity. Most institutions break down theatre history into two semesters. By having four different courses, students are given a very unique opportunity to study areas in-depth as opposed to “overviews.”
5. Reviewers were particularly impressed with the rhetoric and argumentation track and the impact of the ATU debate on the community (producing leaders for the community). The debate team is competing regularly to hone public speaking, argumentation, and critical thinking skills.
6. The excellent student to teacher ratio within this program provides individual contact between faculty and student.

7. All the reviewers were impressed with the fact that the department is honest about its weaknesses and are ready to face the specific challenges needed to overcome them. The Chair and faculty have developed a list of improvements. For example, the inclusion of a research methods class is the step in the right direction to prepare students for SPH 4003 (p. 44 of the Departmental Report).

8. The number of students enrolled in the public speaking and business and professional speaking course has increased from 2008/2009 to 2010/2011 (the number of students in Introduction to Theatre decreased during this period-but again, it is unclear if the numbers formula change is the direct cause of this decrease).

9. Arkansas Radio Theatre sounds like a great success and it connects the two components, communication and theatre, together.

- a. The radio theatre is a nice area of strength and allows for a different way of practicing theatre. Giving students this other opportunity is another way of enhancing their production experience and preparing for the job market and advanced graduate study.
- b. It also allows students the opportunity to experience a different technical side of theatre practice that they do not normally receive in traditional show production.
- c. One reviewer suggests that other experimental areas be examined while adjustments are being made to the traditional theatre space. It was encouraging to see that the interim director of theatre mentioned he would be working on other, temporary options.

B. Indicate the program areas in need of improvement within the next 12 months; and over the next 2-5 years.

1. Both programs need to increase its number of majors which decreased from 2009 to 2010 (with a slight rebound in 2011). Graduation numbers followed the same pattern. The numbers on pp. 2-3 do not match: "4. Student Demand" reflects the above analysis, while Table A-2.2 indicates a steady decrease in the number of majors from 2008 to 2011. Departmental Reports should more clearly indicate the Credit Hour Production and Weighted Credit Hour Production.

- a. Take steps to recruit more students in the major. For example, Theatre Faculty could look at high school thespian festivals as recruitment options, if those are viable in the area.
- b. Form a plan and goal for those numbers.
- c. 2-5 years, based on the university's report and on-site campus visit:
  - i. Continue upgrading a safe, effective theatre production space.
  - ii. Continue revisiting and revamping goals and funding for recruitment.
  - iii. Take next steps toward NAST accreditation and follow procedures as outlined by NAST.
  - iv. The department could also work to implement both traditional and experimental theatre into the curriculum and production seasons, using both the tradition theatre space and other "found" spaces in order to continue the work in both areas that faculty have to offer students.

2. The Reviewers support the department's attempt to change its name. A decision should be made immediately as to the specific name change. Will the new department be called Communication and Theater or Communication Studies and Theatre Arts? This change needs to be made in the next year.
  3. Theater praxis exams are a concern. A 6.7% success rate on the theatre exam is unacceptable. The suggested changes to the program on p. 44 are a step in the right direction.
    - c. The scores on program assessment for theatre (p. 36) do not match the poor performance on exams – this may be partially solved with more standard assessment procedures.
    - d. Faculty indicated that the curriculum was being examined to provide more courses that would improve learning objectives that could improve Praxis scores for the student cohort. Significant changes in student Praxis scores should occur in 2-5 years.
  4. Begin working toward NAST accreditation. Faculty should take the first steps by becoming a member of NAST and writing the "intent" letter and filling out paperwork for the onsite visit in the next 2-3 years.
  5. A safe, working practical theatre space is priority. Students must have practical experience in order to have a well-balanced and meaningful education in the Theatre Option. This would also serve the university as a whole offering artistic and cultural experiences to all ATU students. The following Theatre program areas could begin with the next 12 months and continue on with improvements in the next 2-5 years:
    - a. Lighting equipment needs up-to-code safety upgrades.
    - b. Set construction areas need to be separate from other areas.
    - c. Paint areas need proper disposal areas and ventilation.
    - d. Costume, construction, and storage areas are needed
    - e. Faculty should work on the proposed "experimental" theatre options until that theatre space is viable.
- C. Indicate areas for program development based on market/industry demands that have not been identified by the institution.
1. There are opportunities for student internships and that could be worked into the current curriculum in the form of production practica or as an independent study. Faculty might want to explore making this a part of the core curriculum. Every student having an internship experience would be invaluable for those wishing to enter the professional world of Speech Communication, Speech Education and Theatre. It would also make for great networking opportunities for future graduates and students of the program.
  2. The theory studies in place in the current curriculum offer the opportunity for performance studies and theory courses. This would be invaluable for those students entering graduate study.
  3. Both programs need to implement a cultural diversity objective and assessment.
  4. Both programs should consider "multi-platform" communication as a necessary focus to prepare their students for the rigors of industry communication needs in a global economy linked by the Internet. This focus could be accomplished right away.

## VII. Review of Instruction by Distance Technology

- A. The department is making every effort to offer program distance technology courses offered and deliver these courses in accordance with best practices. There are limited offerings in this department at the present time, but on-site interviews indicate a willingness to expand these course offerings.
- B. The institution is complying with standard privacy safeguards and appropriate technology.
- C. Technology support services appear appropriate for students enrolled in and faculty teaching courses/programs utilizing technology – especially in the on-line course offerings. The learning module seems comprehensive and easy to use. The faculty report satisfaction with the module and its ease of use.
- D. The institution has newly created a program called “E-Tech” to provide a broader array of on-line offerings for Arkansas Tech students. There are no current course load complaints. However, the University and this department should be ready for excessive enrollment as these courses become more popular. The institution and this Department should examine the issue now before any specific course allows too many students to register and create an unwieldy student/faculty ratio.
- E. Policies on intellectual property seem to be in accordance with best practices. It appears, however, that little attention has been given to this issue. Other universities have waited for a problem to crop up (one campus in Louisiana is accused by its faculty of “seizing” online lectures and the concern is that the course could be taught without the professor that generated the course material). Arkansas Tech should examine what intellectual property issues have arisen on other campuses. Then policies can be put into place to prevent significant problems before they occur.

## VIII. Review of Program Research and Service

- A. The intended research and creative outcomes for each program are generally appropriate, assessed, and some inference of utilization of results can be inferred.
  - 1. Intended outcomes are appropriate for the Speech and Theatre Options. Each area of study is included in curriculum options and practice. Program goals and objectives cover a wide range of areas in both areas of study.
  - 2. Currently, all areas of intended outcomes are listed as “active” in the area of assessment.
  - 3. Once students begin the exit interviews in the spring of 2012, those results can be used to enhance the intended outcomes for both of the degree options.
  - 4. Future departmental self-generated reports should include a clearer “results utilized” commentary.
- B. The intended outreach/service/entrepreneurial outcomes for each program’s initiatives were addressed by faculty during on-site interviews. However they do not seem to be appropriately assessed and results utilization is anecdotal. This assessment and verification

of using the results should be a part of future Departmental Report. The External Reviewers do note that:

1. There is no doubt that the debate team, Arkansas Radio, theatre performances impact the university in important ways.
2. Radio Theatre provides outreach and service to the community through its performances and through working with Arkansas Information Reading Service. There was no data on any particular assessment with this process in the Departmental Report, nor was there data at the on-site visit. However, by developing “a stronger online presence,” assessment of this program could easily work into the online use of Radio Theatre. Online surveys could be utilized.

#### IX. Local Reviewer Comments

A. How is the program meeting market/industry demands and/or preparing students for advanced study?

1. King: Most employers are looking for students to possess excellent writing and speaking skills as well as listening effectiveness. Interpersonal and small group skills are needed as well. The program offers students an array of important courses (public speaking, argumentation, research and writing, group communication, interpersonal communication, interviewing).
2. Jarzabek: The diverse offerings in Speech and Theatre fully prepare students for advanced study. Comm theory courses are dynamic and use practical application exercises as student assignments. Student comments indicate that they have a firm grasp of the challenging array of theories and perspectives in communication. It appears, though, that employment should be the focus of more of the course work in the Speech Option. The department is open to the idea of building an Internship course into the curriculum. That should be accomplished right away. I would also recommend stronger emphasis within the Speech department on advising students to use their electives to take interdisciplinary courses. For example, a Speech major going into the field of teaching might choose some education courses to develop actual classroom presentation skills (not always the same as a PowerPoint presentation in a college class). There is already a great deal of interaction among the Department majors: Speech, Theatre, and Journalism. Students are encouraged to try other types of Communication coursework. This focus should be expanded into other departments in the University appropriate to the individual student’s goals & talents.
3. Heaton: Once again, the curriculum is strong in both historical/theoretical and practical/design/performance. Some wonderful groundwork has been established by the senior faculty and with the addition of the new interim director of theatre, the more “experimental” areas can come into play as well. With students getting experience in all areas, they are marketable and are being

prepared for graduate study. I think that it would be advantageous for students if the department considered a BA Theatre degree.

- a. The faculty work very closely with students in order to assure their success. The faculty is supportive of student needs both in their education and growth as young adults. This builds both the mind and spirit and is essential to any student in the performing/communication arts.
- b. For the Communications Option, I feel it is a very positive change moving from "Speech" to "Communication." It makes the program much more marketable and viable for the future by shifting to the newer, more common language in today's educational world.
- c. Students in the Theatre Option feel supported and confident upon graduation. They feel ready to work in the industry and are uplifted by the work past graduates have found. It should be noted that they expressed this was their feeling "Before September (2011)."

B. What program modifications are needed?

1. Jarzabek: Please also see the "Specific Recommendations" at the end of this report.

- a. It appears that a focus on multi-platform communication skill building should be the first modification for this Department. No student will be able to avoid web-based communication upon graduating into the real world.
- b. Internships should be added as a core requirement for the students in all options of this Department.
- c. The Department should create their new identity with the proposed name change as soon as possible.
- d. Dean and Chair should work to secure new faculty.
- e. There should be more on-line offerings in all areas of this Department.
- f. Learning objectives and assessment needs some standardized approach. For example: a rubric delineating organizational skills could be developed and then applied in the assessment of research papers in the upper-level courses.
- g. There should be a syllabi template for the entire department. The resulting syllabi would take on a more uniform look and reinforce goals and objectives throughout the curricula. This would also encourage updating current syllabi and ensuring that all have vital elements such as grading practices and ADA statements.

2. Heaton:

- a. I was happy to note that the Dean discussed a timeline for renovations to the Techionery Lab Theatre and supported the Theatre Option by saying that they did need a space for public performance. A viable, safe theatre space is very important for every theatre program and I would say that getting the production season up and running is one of the most major needed modifications to this area. This is why I have noted through this report that those theatre practica be

- part of a core, required curriculum. Students need practical theatre experience and I am happy that those I spoke with shared my views.
- b. Unfortunately, I witnessed a lot of frustration by faculty, students, and administration regarding the closing of the Techionery space earlier this academic year (Sept. 2011). Ultimately, this hurts the program, the outcomes, and the education of the students. In fact, this situation became the main focus of my visit when I would ask questions regarding other areas. I think the entire faculty need to openly discuss their individual ideas with the department head and form a game plan of how they will move forward in a positive manner for the coming academic year that will put everyone on the same page and make communication lines clearer and more effective.
  - c. In talking with students, I noted that they are an enthusiastic, passionate group much like the faculty that educate them. They love theatre, they love the education they are receiving. However, that passion and enthusiasm has been overshadowed by what they said they felt is an uncomfortable and discouraging environment. Students seem confused and lost right now. While I know that faculty fully support and want the best for the students, I don't know that in the current environment the students understand this. That is why I suggest the above from the faculty and department head. If the students see a united, strong, open front they might be able to heal themselves.
  - d. I would suggest looking at the possibility of a Technical Director/Facilities Manager. This positions could be defined in many different ways, but the majority of faculty I spoke with continued to note throughout the day that they are in need of someone who could just focus on that aspect of operations so that other faculty were freed up to do their jobs as designers, directors, educators.
3. King:
- a. I would suggest an increased focus on intercultural/diversity issues, including the addition of an intercultural communication course. If the university has a Diversity Advisor Committee, then the department should coordinate some departmental activities with that committee.
  - b. To enhance the rhetoric/argumentation "track," the department should offer additional rhetoric courses (rhetorical theory, rhetorical criticism).
  - c. To enhance interdisciplinary scholarship and teaching, faculty should initially create special topics courses that combine two or more disciplines (e.g., rhetoric and philosophy or theatre and music). Team-teaching would be part of this change.
  - d. It is unclear whether the department has specialized tracks, especially in communication. Individual tracks (with specific courses) might be a way to provide students a better sense of the department's strengths.
  - e. It is unclear how the department is trying to market itself. Perhaps, the Chair and faculty should reconceptualize its strengths and identity. Creating a clear departmental identity could lead to more effective marketing.

## X. Report Summary

- A. Include reviewer comments on the overall need for program graduates/completers in the local area, region and/or nation over the next 5 years.
1. This program has done well educating students and putting them in the workforce after graduation. Graduates have moved on to teaching, professional theatre and work, and graduate schools. With a commitment to recruitment over the next 5 years, the program is poised to grow and thrive.
  2. It cannot be stressed enough how important the performing and communication arts are to the local area/region/nation. Art has the ability to fill a void in the human spirit and bring meaning to ideas and questions. The “overall need for program graduates/completers” comes down to basic skills that all individuals need in today’s society. People in this area of study learn to master the following skills: meeting deadlines, organization, time management, collaboration, collegiality, communication (both on the individual level and in groups), creative problem solving, critical thinking, conceptualizing, confidence, ethical working practices, and independent thinking/doing. The students of the Theatre Option and Speech Communication Option are primed for such qualities as they enter the professional and higher education worlds.
- B. Include reviewer comments on overall program quality, state program review process, etc.
1. Heaton:
    - a. Overall program quality: The Theatre and Speech Communications Options are good, quality programs at ATU. The classroom facilities are well-structured and centralized. Faculty and staff are committed and qualified. The curriculums are strong and cover a good amount of areas necessary in the students’ educations. Although the Theatre Option is going through a time of transition, the area has many opportunities for positive changes that will ultimately aid the faculty in doing their jobs and make the students strong, marketable graduates.
    - b. State program review process: This process is much like the review my college department went through a few years ago. For our college, the review was a helpful tool that allowed our department to make some good, strong changes and additions. I have been assured that this is the review process is in place to aid departments and I am happy to know that. I think it is a beneficial thing for all higher education areas to step back and examine their work, even having outsiders come in with a set of “uncolored” eyes to view the program in an objective manner. This review process has been simple and clear to me.
    - c. Finally, I must say once again how impressed I was at the commitment to student learning by the faculty, staff, and administration. Although there are some rather major obstacles to overcome in the near future, the Theatre and Communication Options are truly viable, strong degree programs that have served the college well.
    - d. I thank everyone for their honesty and graciousness during my on-site visit. It made my job as a reviewer easier and gave me a clear understanding of life at the ATU campus.

2. Jarzabek:

- a. The Program quality is good and is poised to be even better. Strong faculty, innovative leadership, and institutional commitment of resources seem to be the keys to their success. The students are profoundly impacted by the high level of personal interaction with this dedicated faculty. The teaching and learning efforts are high in faculty and student cohort. Students are well-prepared for entry into graduate school. Instituting an internship course would take this dynamic to the next level and strengthen the employment opportunity for those students not advancing to graduate study.
- b. The State Program Review process seems comprehensive. The combination of internal and external reviews is an effective means of self-analysis and shows a willingness to reach out for assistance in determining best practices for the program.
- c. The program has remained focused and dedicated during extremely trying times. The faculty have persevered in the face of significant budgetary challenges and the students have responded by taking their studies seriously and working for success. This department is upbeat and open to new ideas in the face of significant challenges. That is the true formula for success!

3. King:

- a. I am particularly impressed with the department's general education courses—the three courses connect students to learning outcomes associated with a liberal arts education (e.g., critical thinking). The university might consider adding interpersonal communication as a general education option for students who are high communication apprehensive (however, there should be a “public speaking” assignment in the interpersonal communication course).
- b. The department does a wonderful job linking course assignments and goals to various forms of communication competence (see page 5 of report).
- c. The faculty are qualified to teach courses in their respective areas, the department/institution provides faculty with resources (faculty development), students appear to be very satisfied with their coursework, and genuine efforts are being made to remedy deficiencies.
- d. The university's main academic mission is teaching—review of faculty teaching is impressive and should be maintained.

## Conclusions: Specific Recommendations based on Review Comments:

- A. I, A, 1 - These areas need to remain as separate and should not be combined. Reviewers were impressed to see that they are separated out in such a manner.
- B. I, A, 1, b – While keeping the spoken language goal in the Communication Program, consideration should be given to the development of a Multi-Platform approach to the Speech Communication Option. Students should be encouraged to develop Web communication skills including Web design and use of Social Network Media. Interaction within the Speech, Theatre, and Journalism Department between the Journalism and Speech Communication faculty is encouraging and will provide a strong basis for student skill development in the rapidly developing communication technologies.
- C. I, A, 1, b, iii – Courses in intercultural communication should be added to the Department curriculum. Gender and cultural diversity should be highlighted in the specific courses, assignments, and outcomes for this Department.
- D. I, A, 2 a – Conducting undergraduate assessment through Facebook with quick questionnaires might yield significant data for assessing goals and objectives in these two program options. For example, three years ago, one of the external reviewers received responses from 30 individuals within a work-day's time and was able to make curriculum changes (based on graduate surveys) that lead to stronger academic and employment skills for the students.
- E. I, A, 2, b - Looking over the assessment of the Theatre Option objectives, reviewers note that “students will demonstrate an understanding of standard acting techniques,” and “students will demonstrate the skills necessary to construct and maintain the scenic elements involved in dramatic presentations” are both at 100%. Reviewer Heaton recommends building on those objectives in order to challenge both the faculty and students. Now that they have mastered those areas, the objectives could be more specific in era, style, or element. The other goals are still at a percentage that allows for growth.
- F. I, A, 2, b – Faculty are advised to identify the basic competencies appropriate for these two academic Options. Standard assessment practices should then be implemented such as pre/post testing, exit interviews of graduating seniors, and specific test questioning within the appropriate course exams. While Arkansas Tech is accredited by NAST and not SACS, standard assessment practices are appropriate to both organizations. Examples of newly developed assessment practices should be included in the Department's next self-generated program review.
- G. I, B, 4 – The administration of Arkansas Tech should make sure that funding is procured for the restoration of the Department's theatre facilities. Staging of actual theatrical productions is a vital component to the skill development needed for all theatre majors and these practical skills are an asset to any student of this department that wants to express their vocal, physical, and artistic skills.
- H. I, E, 3 – It is likely that more faculty will be needed in this department in the near future. Additional faculty will be needed for expanded course offerings and with the inevitable growth of these two Program Options. The administration should work on opening up more “faculty lines” for this department. It is recommended,

based on observation and specific student comments, that any faculty search should favorably consider gender, racial, and/or cultural diversity in the next faculty positions that open up. This recommendation also answers concerns of course offering rotation mentioned in section III, B, 2, b of this report.

- I. II, A, 2 - It is advisable that those courses in the Theatre curriculum labeled as “practical” i.e. the laboratory and production design and performance classes, become part of the required curriculum. By making those practical courses part of the required curriculum, theatre production, in both experimental and traditional settings, would be possible. A working, safe theatre space would have to be a part of this core curriculum.
- J. II, B, 3 – Student interviews during the site visit indicates that the faculty need to expand their explanations to majors about application of their academic skills into workplace potential. The three seniors interviewed stated that they had excellent academic mentoring, but did not fully understand what specific employment they might seek after graduation. A slight change of focus during academic advising might easily solve this issue.
- K. II, E, 2, - With the Courses and Curriculum Committee ready to aid in the updated of program curriculum, it should be relatively easy to implement an internship course which would be required in, at least, the Speech program, if not both program options. Student interviews indicate that the department majors are anxious to fledge in a real-world work environment. They also indicate that their uncertainty about employment after graduation would be greatly reduced if they got more practical experience in applying their academic lessons and personal talents/preference.
- L. VII, D – The Department should expand its on-line course offerings. The faculty could work in concert with the University’s “E-Tech” program and, perhaps, attract more students and/or student credit hours.