The purpose of the Academic Program Review (APR) at Eastern Oregon University is to provide a formal process for program stakeholders to review and analyze the past five years of performance data across a variety of criteria to provide information about accomplishments, strengths, and challenges, and to challenge academic programs to develop strategic goals and action plans. Together with the Dean of the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, the Theatre faculty engaged in its five-year review during the 2020-2021 academic year. Following is a summary of the program’s analysis and strategic goals/actions planned for the next five years.

Brief Narrative

The Eastern Oregon University Theatre program is one of the major units that contribute to the mission of EOU being a cultural hub of the region, as well as being integral to programs in the liberal arts. The arts in general are important to recruiting and retaining students, faculty and staff at EOU, and specifically graduating well-rounded individuals. The Theatre Program offers a student-centered community of artists whose major focus is creativity and collaboration, with opportunities for majors, non-majors, staff and community members to engage and participate through a dynamic production season and online and on campus coursework. Currently, the program offers a general BA/BS in Theatre on campus and a minor in Theatre available both online and on campus.

The McKenzie and Schwarz Theaters have both recently completed Phase I renovations, which involved updated LED lighting, digital sound, AV and projection equipment that will bring the theatre program facilities in line with current, up to date technology that meets the highest industry standards. A recessed turntable in the stage floor of the Schwarz Theater adds a dynamic theatrical opportunity for production in the space, unique for venues in the Pacific Northwest.

The Theatre program is currently staffed by three tenured faculty, each with specializations that enhance the curriculum and offer mentorship to students with diverse career interests:

- Heather Tomlinson, Professor of Theatre – Costume Design and Stage Makeup
- Kenn Wheeler, Associate Professor of Theatre – Musical Theatre, Stage Management, Acting and Directing
- Mike Heather, Associate Professor of Theatre – Stage Design, Theatre Technology and Playwriting

Data, Insights, and Analysis

Theatre has seen a decline in student FTE, SCH, majors and graduates in the last five years, which is mirrored in the on campus enrollment trends overall at EOU; nevertheless, the curriculum and the faculty continue to maintain high standards in production through high-impact, experiential, and hands-on learning. The program sees very high full time freshman (90%) and transfer retention (75%) in the major while at the same time successfully delivers about 89% of its SCH to non-majors (e.g., students seeking to fulfill general education credits). Major students move through the program in cohorts, collaborating often with Music students and faculty, which has produced well-rounded and highly successful graduates who have moved onto careers in theatre, film, teaching, and arts professions.
The program continues to produce two mainstage (McKenzie) and one small stage (Schwarz) production each academic year – often including community members and non-majors – in addition to 2-3 student-directed capstone productions every spring. While this brings some revenue in ticket sales, overall expenses for set design and instruction continues to outpace production and tuition revenue in the program. In addition, the program has relied nearly completely upon Student Incidental Fee committee budget allocation that is typically in flux each year, making planning for a production year challenging.

Included in the APR is an analysis EOU requested from EAB, which offered both comparisons to like-situation Theatre degree programs and actions recommended for enhancing the profile of our degree. The faculty took notice of several opportunities for improvement detailed in the analysis:
- Website update and refinement to better tell the story of the program (recruit)
- Focused curriculum revision to be more competitive in the disciplinary field
- Diversified marketing approaches to connect with potential students

5-Year Program Goals and Actions

After evaluating the data and discussing opportunities, the Theatre program is forwarding the following overarching program goals with actions to be implemented over the next five years. In collaboration with the Dean, the faculty will complete prioritization of these goals and chart timetables for action by fall of 2021.

Goal 1: Increase enrollment in the major (targets TBD)

Actions (G1): re-introduce concentrations in the major; website refinement; marketing/recruiting strategy with Admissions (e.g., more videos and testimonials); develop recruitment pathways (e.g., Elgin Opera House, rural schools and CCs); develop summer camps/programming to get K-12 students on campus

Goal 2: Increase attendance to and participation in productions (targets TBD)

Actions (G2): more consistent promotion and marketing; website refinement; increase student ambassadorship in the community; increase popular musical theatre productions; increase usage of newly renovated performance venues

Goal 3: Intentional and thriving community partnerships

Actions (G3): engage Elgin Opera House, Shakespeare Company and Eastern Oregon Film Festival, among others, in program partnerships, internships, and collaboration; increase student ambassadorship in the community

Goal 4: Sustaining budget

Actions (G4): establish more stable annual budget allocation (e.g., E&G); diversify funding to the program in collaboration with Foundation; increase scholarships/paid internships

Goal 5: Increased Student Opportunity

Action (G5): increase internships/practica with community partners; re-introduce concentrations in the major; solve spring term scheduling conflicts to allow students to work at summer stock theatres outside of the region; increase student ambassadorship in the community