Learning Outcomes Assessment Review 2019
PhD Program in Theatre and Performance

The area of assessment in this report is the First Examination. As shown in the program handbook, the first examination is:

taken after the student has completed thirty (30) course credits of work. The exam will consist of written and oral components, consisting of three essay questions to be written in a four-hour period and followed by a 90-minute comprehensive oral examination.

The relevant learning outcomes for this assessment is:

Proficiency in both classical, modern and contemporary practices and contexts of theatre and performance across time and place as a major as well as a minor field, orally and in writing. Students identify, summarize, and assess the significance of literature dealing with major issues in theatre and performance studies and broader historical, political, and cultural context of theatre and the performing arts. They do this in writing, through term papers and oral presentations and completing written and oral components of the first examination (direct evidence). Students also demonstrate their knowledge through successful completion of first and second-year coursework. (indirect evidence).

Prior to the examination and in preparation for the examination, students complete three core classes, 70100 (Theatre Research), 70300 (Contextual and Intertextual Studies in Drama), and 70600 (History of Theatrical Theory), as well as elective courses. Students receive preparatory information about preparing to sit the first examination through a number of means and programs: (a) professionalization events dedicated to introducing the scope of the first examination and study methods, (b) a mock exam is held with volunteers from a previous exam ‘re-sitting the exam, (c) organized mentoring by students who have previously passed the first examination.

Evaluation and findings
An important measure of evaluation of the learning outcomes is in measuring successful completions of the First Examination. A total of seven students sat the first examination in the year 2017-2018 and the pass rate was 100 percent. The 2017-18 examinees were:

- Christine Snyder – Passed August 2017
- Curtis Russell – Passed August 2017
- Ashley Marinaccio – Passed August 2017
- Nina Mercer – Passed August 2017
- Kim Kyeun – Passed August 2017
- Corrine Tamler – Passed January 2018
- Mayurakshi Sen – Passed January 2018

A comparison with the 2018-2019 first examination round shows that we maintain a consistent and acceptable pass rate for the exam. From a total of six students electing to take the examination in 2018-19, we had only one failed applicant (who will retake the exam in the next round). This is very much in line with our expectations and reflects the changes that we made to the first exam following a review in 2015-16.

**Curriculum review: outcomes of evaluation of the first examination**

The PhD Program in Theatre and Performance undertakes periodic reviews of all aspects of our program. Recent reviews of professionalization (2017-2018) and our Second Examination (2016-17) found the each of these programs were working well and resulted in only minor recommendations for changes. We also had an External Review in 2016 that found the program to be thriving. Recommendations from the External Review have been considered and implemented.

Our review of the First Examination in 2015-16 was transforming in a number of important ways. The review was undertaken in a period when the pass rate for the First Examination was inconsistent and students reported high levels of stress. The review found that for some students, failing the exam in the first sitting was seen as an unfortunate ‘rite of passage’. The review also focused on inconsistencies in the oral component of the exam and discrepancies between the approach of individual faculty to the line of questioning. The review made several
recommendations that were adopted including: (a) formal incorporation of training for the First Examination in the professionalization program, (b) a new description of the process for conducting the oral examination, and (c) a regularized procedure giving written feedback to students who fail the exam with a focus on positive feedback and how best to prepare to retake the exam in the next cycle.

**Report on findings**
The response to the review was positive and transforming. The First Examination has now been improved to focus on a diagnostic of students’ general knowledge of and in the field of theatre and performance. The adoption of improved information and training for the exam and communication of a clearer statement of the expectations of the exam and how it is to be conducted has created greater clarity for faculty and students and reduced unnecessary stress. With these steps, we have been able to increase the pass rate to a consistent and appropriate level while maintaining the required level of rigor to the exam process.

**Further changes & next steps**
We will continue to monitor the outcome of the First Examination and we will conduct a further review in the coming years as part of our regular cycle of annual reviews of all aspect of our program.

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