

Scholarship in Theatre

The creation and production of performance work, central to the activities of many theatre academics, can be considered a form of scholarship within Boyer's model. The Carnegie Foundation categorizes creative work within 'scholarship of discovery.' They write that the scholarship of discovery 'comes closest to what academics mean when they speak of research, although we intend that this type of scholarship also include the creative work of faculty in the literary, visual, and performing arts.' ATHE can imagine a given creative work, including playwriting, dramaturgy, design, acting, or directing, potentially fitting into any of Boyer's categories. The ultimate determination of the kind of scholarship a performance fulfills will depend on department and institutional guidelines, as well as: 1. The artist's initial questions of investigation 2. The form of the artist's documentation of the inquiry 3. The focus of peer evaluation. (ATHE "Scholarship" 8)

Creative production should be accepted as equivalent to scholarly publication or research as a criterion for appointment and advancement in all institutions. (NAST 49)

TYPES OF SCHOLARSHIP

The art of theatre is about integration and collaboration. We consider the building of "ensemble" a primary goal in all of our work. As such, we see significant overlap between the various categories. Creative work may qualify as or contribute to any of the four kinds of scholarship. The scholarship of integration or synthesis emphasizes this holistic approach, but we value scholarship from every category.

Scholarship of Discovery

Theatre artists may communicate their scholarship of discovery through traditional publication of books or journal articles or by the production of creative material. Traditional research may be undertaken in a range of categories, including: Theatre History, Dramatic Theory and Criticism, Performance Studies, Studies of Plays, Artists, and Theatrical Artifacts, Performance in Historical Context, or Dramaturgy. New creative material may be produced in any of the following categories: Playwriting, Designing, Directing, Acting, or Dramaturgy.

Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

The Association for Theatre in Higher Education's White Paper on Scholarship defines the scholarship of teaching and learning as "inquiry that produces knowledge that supports the process of learning the art of Theatre." We value this kind of scholarship highly because of the priority of student learning in all of our work.

Drawing on a paper by higher education scholar Bob Bain, ATHE defines the differences between "scholarly teaching" and "scholarship of teaching and learning" in the following manner:

The scholarly teacher...is a self-reflective teacher who:

1. identifies a problem related to teaching and learning

2. researches potential solutions
3. tries them out
4. assesses their success

In order to transform this research into the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, the scholarly teacher takes the next step and 5. makes the research public—opening it up to peer review and discussion. (“Scholarship” 5)

This specialized kind of scholarship may be pursued in relation to traditional classroom work or production work on SPU stages, which holds student learning as one of its central goals. Creative work may lead to scholarship of teaching and learning by creating research studies relating to student learning within the production internship process.

While we do not expect that every faculty member will pursue this kind of scholarship, the Department of Theatre encourages this kind of work which directly connects with teaching and production practice.

Scholarship of Application

The emphasis of this kind of scholarship is connecting with a larger community and its needs or priorities in creating or disseminating the work. An example might be creating a new work which expresses the values, joys, frustrations, or hopes of a particular group. On one level, all of our work applies to or engages a range of communities all of the time. The larger theatre guild values this kind of connection very highly, partly because it helps theatre to appear relevant to real-world issues. This, in fact, is what sometimes makes this kind of approach unattractive from an aesthetic standpoint, because it may appear that the “application” goal supersedes artistic ones. However, at its best, theatre is effective as art and as application, and scholarship which connects theatre practice with new communities is immensely valuable, both for the artists and the community. SPU Theatre values this type of scholarship, but does not expect that every faculty member will engage in it.

Scholarship of Synthesis / Integration

While Carnegie definitions prioritize interdisciplinary work under this heading, Seattle Pacific University includes “the relationship of Christian theology and tradition to particular disciplinary issues” as a key type of integrative scholarship. This form of scholarship holds high priority in theatrical production and in reflection and writing about what was successful in production. Theatre by its very nature synthesizes theory with practice, and regularly and consistently synthesizes theatre with other disciplines and ideas. We are concerned to synthesize who we and our students are as Christians with who we are as artists. We intend that all of our work strives toward this goal, and we strongly support scholarship which articulates this relationship and reflects on practice informed by faith.

SCHOLARLY PRODUCTS

Our department values a range of outlets for scholarly products. ATHE also offers a list of forms in which scholarship in any of the four above categories may be published (“Scholarship” 11). Below we list, in roughly rank order, those which we most value and expect to see faculty creating:

- Publicly presented productions, readings or stagings
- Publication of book-length scholarship in theatre studies
- Publication of articles on theatre in peer-reviewed journals (examples include, but are not limited to: THEATRE JOURNAL, THEATRE TOPICS, TEXT AND PERFORMANCE QUARTERLY, TDR, JOURNAL OF DRAMATIC THEORY AND CRITICISM, and THEATER)
- Presentations at conferences (both individual and collaborative)
- Invited lectures
- Published textbooks or other learning resources
- Authorship of grant proposals
- Policy papers related to the discipline of theatre
- Peer reviews of practice

PEER REVIEW

For traditional written scholarship in any of the categories in theatre, peer review will follow a traditional model of submission of papers, blind peer review, recommendations, revisions, and eventual publication.

For creative work in theatre, peer review is more complex, and occurs after the “publication” of the work. In a 2000 document on promotion and tenure evaluations, the Association for Theatre in Higher Education suggests the following approach for peer review of artistic work:

The quality of artistic process and achievement and the learning experience it provides to students can be documented by a variety of measures. This documentation should be accumulated over an extended period of time and should include:

- Written evaluation by the chair;
- Written evaluation by faculty peers;
- Written evaluation by outside experts. (“Guidelines” 2)

ATHE goes on to suggest materials which may be preserved and submitted by the candidate in order to document successful theatrical work (“Guidelines” 2). These documents are intended to supplement evaluations by supervisors, peers, and outside experts, and should themselves be subject to evaluation as evidence of scholarly and artistic accomplishment. The list below is edited from that source as well as the “Scholarship” document cited above (11), and indicates those materials we consider valid documentation:

- Written evaluation of work submitted for competitions by qualified adjudicators
- Research and analytical materials

- Scripts of original produced plays, including adaptations and translations
- Slides of productions, working drawings, video tapes, photographs, light plots, and other supporting material
- Directors' production books, study guides, and program notes
- Web-based presentations, publications, productions, or archives of pedagogical or research material
- Marketing and public relations materials
- Letters from the public
- Reviews in the professional media
- Awards

TRAJECTORY OF A SUCCESSFUL THEATRE ARTIST / SCHOLAR AT SPU

In general, we expect the following of all theatre artist-educators: that by the time of tenure, each candidate has a clear plan for scholarly and artistic work, along with some record of success in beginning to work that plan. For promotion to Associate Professor, we expect continued progress and development with that plan, which would include increasing engagement beyond SPU. For promotion to Full Professor, we look for a teacher-artist with significant skill, sharing those skills and insights in production and scholarship within and beyond SPU.

However, faculty members in Theatre at SPU are by necessity generalists. Each of us teaches a range of courses from general education to technique classes for majors. As a result, none of us has a single specialty area from which most or all scholarly products will develop. We see our primary role as teachers within our artistic and scholarly pursuits. At the same time, each of us interacts with a number of sub-disciplines within theatre which have varying rules and expectations about scholarship. We would like to identify these sub-disciplines, and some of their unique characteristics.

Acting

A theatre generalist with a specialty in acting might be expected to perform at least one role on campus each year, and to seek out off-campus roles as schedule and availability would allow. By the time of tenure, some off-campus work should have been sought, with evidence of participation and performance off-campus by the time of promotion to Associate Professor. Promotion to Full Professor would require continued efforts to refine both personal craft and teaching skill through workshops, seminars, and conferences.

Directing

A theatre generalist with a specialty in directing is expected to direct at least one season production per academic year, and to document that production with materials which evidence the scholarly research and preparation which went into it. At least occasionally, peer reviews by fellow academic or professional directors will offer evidence of achievement in stage directing. As schedules allow, directors should seek outside academic or professional venues for directing. This may or may not be possible

on a regular basis, and will be supplemented by conference presentations and publications. For tenure, some off-campus work should have been sought, with evidence of production off-campus or publication related to production by the time of promotion to Associate Professor. Promotion to Full Professor would require continued engagement with the larger theatre community through conference papers and presentations, as well as additional off-campus production work as available.

Design / Technology / Production Management

A theatre generalist with a specialization in production management, design, or technology might be expected to produce, manage, or design one or more productions of the mainstage season. Such teacher / scholar / artists might also be expected to seek opportunities to design in other academic or professional theatres. Their primary outlet for scholarship is their artistic work, on campus and off. By the time of tenure, some off-campus work should have been sought, with evidence of participation off-campus for promotion to Associate Professor. Promotion to Full Professor would require continued efforts to contribute significantly to on-campus design and technical needs, as well as additional off-campus professional or academic engagements.

Playwriting

A theatre generalist with a specialty in playwriting might be expected to submit, publish, or stage an original work on campus or off with some degree of regularity. Involvement in play development projects, judging new play competitions, and workshopping new plays at conferences or seminars would also qualify as scholarly artistic work. For tenure, a playwright might be expected to have submitted work for outside evaluation through contests or publishers, with a record of publication and/or production of original works by the time of promotion to Associate Professor. Promotion to Full Professor would require a continued contribution of original work for both on- and off-campus production.

Dramaturgy

A theatre generalist with a specialty in dramaturgy might be expected to provide background research and learning materials to director, cast, crew, and audience for at least one mainstage production. Such a teacher / scholar / artist might be expected to pursue this work in other academic or professional theatres, with some documented outside work by the time of tenure and promotion to Associate Professor. It might be expected that a dramaturg would have an established record of on-campus work and additional off-campus efforts by the time of promotion to Full Professor.

Theatre Education

A theatre generalist with a specialty in Theatre Education might be expected to pursue scholarship of teaching projects with student educators as well as studying departmental courses and productions as part of the assessment of the department's contributions to student learning. Such teacher / scholar / artists would be expected to communicate the results of that work through conference presentations and publications. By third-year review, a plan for such research should be articulated, with

at least one project completed and reported through presentation or publication off-campus by the time of tenure and promotion to Associate Professor. For promotion to Full Professor, a Theatre Education specialist might be expected to have an established record of such research, particularly in service to the department and university.

Works Cited

“Guidelines for Evaluating Teacher/Artists for Promotion and Tenure.” ATHE, 2000.
National Association of Schools of Theatre (NAST) Handbook. 2005-06.

“Scholarship for the Discipline of Theatre: An Association for Theatre in Higher Education
White Paper.” ATHE, 2001.