

An Outline of the Theatre Arts Department's First Year Student Mentoring/Advising Program (First Year Success at the Department Level)

The Theatre Arts Department has developed a comprehensive, integrated program of mentorship and advising to assist in the success and retention of first year students in the program. This system is incredibly collaborative and interactive, due in part to the nature of our highly connected “company” of students, staff, and faculty. In a sense, creating a sense of “company” and connectedness to a common goal (producing the finest possible theatre artists and productions) is crucial to the success of the program – and our first year students.

Steps in Mentoring/Advising Process for All New Theatre Majors

(traditional and transfer)

1. **REQUIRED INTERVIEW FOR PROGRAM ENTRY:** All prospective new theatre majors are required to interview/audition with a panel of theatre staff and faculty members in order to be considered for acceptance into the program. In a sense, this is our first “assessment” of the prospective new student and it allows us to better understand their needs and expectations. The prospective student must present the following to the staff at their 30 minute private interview/audition:

- Resume of previous theatre experience
- Statement of personal, artistic, and career goals
- Two letter of recommendation from current or former theatre teachers
- Transcript of past four years of schooling – including proof of an ACT of 20 and a GPA of 2.5 (minimum requirement for interview)
- Presentation of Talent and/or Portfolio of Previous Theatre Work

2. **ORIENTATION/REGISTRATION PHASE 1:** All incoming, accepted theatre majors are asked to attend one of two specific targeted registration/orientation dates for new students. Here are some specifics about how we handle this process:

- At least two theatre staff members and two successful upper class theatre majors are present at each orientation/registration session to assist the new students with the process.
- We also provide students with a detailed check list of the theatre and general education courses that they **MUST** take their first semester at UWP. We require them to take all academic skills courses immediately, based on placement test results.
- We attempt to place each new major in at least three theatre courses (1-3 credits each) in their first semester to make sure that they are immediately “connected” to as many staff members and peers as possible in the learning environment. First year students generally take foundational courses in theatre.

3. **SPRING/SUMMER COMMUNICATIONS:** We send admitted theatre students a variety of summer communications to make them aware of various academic, artistic, and social events and activities that are planned during the spring, summer, and early fall that they are invited to attend. Most new students actually come to campus in the spring to audition for the first shows in the fall semester – making it possible for them to become involved in the production of theatre immediately.

4. **ONE-TO-ONE STUDENT MENTOR PROGRAM:** Each spring we ask for upper class theatre majors who meet all of the department’s academic and artistic requirements to volunteer to mentor one incoming new student in a related area of interest (i.e. acting, directing, design). We then pair up each new major with a returning “peer” mentor, exchanging contact information with each. We find that many peer groups make

multiple formal and informal contacts though out the summer before classes begin and throughout the first year. We do a mentor training program for all new mentors, highlighting our goals and expectations that we have for the program.

5. **REQUIRED ALL MAJOR MEETINGS:** Each semester we hold required “all major” meetings at the beginning of the semester and at midterms. This important meeting brings the entire “company” of students, staff, and faculty together for important information, advising, and mentoring.

6. **BACK TO SCHOOL PICNIC:** The first week of the fall semester we have an all-department gathering at Petrified Springs Park. This is an informal social gathering with food, games, and conversation. Most new majors come to this meeting.

7. **NEW STUDENT MEETINGS:** At least 4 times during the fall semester we require all new majors to come to a new student meeting. At this meeting, the entire staff and new students discuss various policies and procedures in the department, including the Quality Assurance Statement, Academic Policy Statement, and Active Engagement Policy (SEE ATTACHED). We make sure that the students understand and sign these agreements.

8. **JANUARY ACADEMIC REVIEWS:** At the beginning of second semester ALL theater majors (including new students) are required to meet with the entire staff and receive an Academic Review of their progress. Each staff member fills out an assessment, which is given to the student and placed in the student’s advising record. Each student’s academic progress is directly discussed and assessed. DARS reports are used extensively to make sure that all students are maintaining the required 2.5 GPA. Students who do not have a 2.5 GPA are put on “probation” in the department and can not work on any productions until approved by the advisor and staff (based on weekly progress reports).

9. **MAY TALENT REVIEWS:** At the end of every academic year ALL majors (including new students) are required to present their “talent” to a committee of faculty/staff members and professionals from regional theatres (i.e. the Milwaukee Repertory Theatre). We then provide oral and written assessment’s of each student’s work – including developments and areas needing improvements.

10. **ADVISING ASSIGNMENTS:** Each new student is assigned to a theater advisor in their primary area of interest (acting, design, directing, stage management, etc.) to further assist in the development of the student’s portfolio and career goals.

11. **SOPHOMORE SEMINAR:** New transfer students and all theatre sophomores take a required course called Sophomore Seminar, a career preparation course which focusing on career goals, resumes, portfolios, websites, and other related topics.