

# The Search for Meaning

The Department of Dramatic Arts  
Connecticut Repertory Theatre

## Academic Plan 2009

"Even in our sleep, pain which cannot forget falls drop by drop upon the heart until, in our own despair, against our will, comes wisdom through the awful grace of God."

- Aeschylus

"Every seven years an arts institution must re-invent itself or it is simply maintaining old habits that have lost their meaning."

- David Mamet

"Nowadays, anyone who wishes to combat lies and ignorance and to write the truth must overcome at least five difficulties. The first is he must have the courage to write the truth when truth is everywhere opposed, and second the keenness to recognize it, although it is everywhere concealed...."

- Bertolt Brecht

In a Living Theatre, we would each day approach the rehearsal putting yesterday's discoveries to the test, ready to believe that the true play has once again escaped us. But the Deadly Theatre approaches the classics from the viewpoint that somewhere, someone has found out and defined how the play should be done."

- Peter Brook

The best we can hope for with our efforts in Shakespeare is that we will be wrong about him in an original way.

- E.E. Cummings

**Unit Identity and Mission:**

The purpose of the Department of Dramatic Arts is to prepare students for professional careers in the Theatre and related entertainment fields, including digital media, television, film and video industries. The various academic programs and production activities sponsored by the Department of Dramatic Arts provide the serious theatre student with the finest possible professional preparation through classroom instruction, studio training and professional level production experience through direct participation in the various projects produced by the Department.

In addition, the Connecticut Repertory Theatre connects with our classroom instruction as a primary training mechanism and institutional partner as a nationally recognized theatre center for the University and Statewide audience, theatre research, and for the development of new dramatic literature.

Many of the current faculty at UCONN are successful artists who have built their reputations in the professional world of theatre and entertainment and have nevertheless chosen to center their careers at UCONN Drama. As a faculty of creative artists who remain professionally active we love the challenge of teaching talented young theater artists and expanding the potential of theater as an art form. These activities often most comfortably take place away from the commercial environment where every creative decision is also always a business decision. Nevertheless, it has been demonstrated throughout our experience that commercial success in fact depends on creative innovation. Perhaps as much or more than any other department at UCONN, Dramatic Arts understands this paradox. We want to liberate the creativity of our students in order for them to succeed in what is essentially a commercial marketplace.

**Aspirations and Values:**

We aspire to remain a nationally recognized conservatory for advanced professional education and training in our areas of expertise which include acting, stage design, digital media and puppet arts. While we approach our work with students through a conservatory based model, we value our context within a major research university and believe our students, particularly our undergraduates, have a tremendous advantage by receiving a broader education than they would enjoy at many of our conservatory based competitors.

We define a conservatory model as one that focuses primarily on the education and training of artists for professional careers, as opposed to an education based model where the focus is primarily on educating the non-professional or general university student, in the content of the arts.

Significantly we operate complex academic programs in concert with a major public program, The Connecticut Repertory Theatre, a professional theatre in residence that brings our best students, faculty and variety of significant guest artists together to produce a variety of plays for the university and region. While these spheres of activity

operate in some ways according to separate principles, they are sympathetic in their overall objectives which are to transform audience and artist alike in our search for the humanistic values and enlightenment embodied in the great plays from antiquity up to our contemporary world. In order for us to accomplish this we must have a clear and ambitious artistic and pedagogical agenda that work together toward the production of great theatre art and the education of thoughtful, capable and creative artists.

Other aspirations and values include:

- To continue our growth as a professional theatre company that focuses on fresh and contemporary approaches to the classics, and in a similar fashion, offer the same vision and care normally afforded to classical works, to new and contemporary plays.
- To continue our role as a national model for university based theatres by blending the objectives of professional theatre and advanced conservatory training which informs both objectives with the same artistic and institutional vision. This is accomplished through several mechanisms, including and perhaps most importantly, by creating a unique artistic environment where established professionals, from major theater centers such as New York and Chicago, work alongside students and faculty in all aspects of production, in the classroom and in the studio.
- To continue to develop our reputation and capability to bring new American plays to production by offering both workshop and world premier productions of original works, and to introduce them to major markets, both nationally and internationally. Most recently we are involved in two world premieres including the new play by William Gibson, *Jonah's Dream*, a new play *Prudence*, about Prudence Crandall and a joint workshop production between the Lark Theatre and CRT of Jessica Litwak's *Wider than the Sky*.
- Through quality based integration of teaching and artistic expression we will expand our identity as a cultural and intellectual center at the University for the purpose of public discourse. We will continue to sponsor major public programs, including the recently produced Latin American Theatre Festival, the presentation of speakers and visiting artists that are connected to a wide variety of other university departments. In this way we bring a host of cultural, social, and philosophical issues into focus by fostering dialogue between the various arts and humanities units for the benefit of the entire university community.

Committed as we are to our conservatory identity, we also believe the UCONN community benefits greatly on many levels from having a professional quality theatre on campus as a cultural and intellectual center for the benefit of the general university student and the general population of the region. Indeed, many of the most important benefits that can be achieved from including the arts within general education flow from the premise that a great Theatre is a cultural magnet for activities in addition to the

production of plays. These activities include conferences and festivals that connect directly to the work of other units on campus such as the Center for Human Rights, The Humanities Institute, and the Department of Modern and Classical Languages.

Some have expressed concern that the conservatory driven professional theatre model limits access for non-majors to performance opportunities and to performance classes. Indeed, it is often the case nationally that the “conservatory model” and a more access driven “education model” are typically mutually exclusive. But it is important to note that while access driven production activity creates more opportunities for the amateur, the generally poor quality of the work that often results defeats the actual reasons for presenting classical works to a general audience. The result is often that the only really significant thing the university student learns is that they were quite right to dislike Shakespeare in the first place. Public presentations in the arts must achieve a level of quality that inspires the audience with the work, or there is no reason to do it. In fact, there is every reason not to produce poor amateurish work. The general university student would be better off studying the material primarily as literature. To demonstrate the positive nature of this dynamic we can point to the recent sold out CRT presentations of *Hair*, *Pericles*, *A Man For All Seasons*, *Love’s Labour Lost*, *Pentecost*, *The Arabian Nights*, *The Three Penny Opera*, *Julius Caesar*, *Mother Courage and Her Children*, and *Trojan Woman*, and the adjunct benefits and a variety of special events connected to these productions.

### **Focused Areas of Excellence**

The primary emphasis of the Department of Dramatic Arts will remain embedded in conservatory education that drives and simultaneously feeds into professional theater activity as described previously. Our largest and most important programs are in acting and theatrical design. However we see many opportunities to expand our artistic identity through Puppet Arts and we believe this focus should connect with many of our other interests and sub-specialties. In general these specialties will include the creation of unique aesthetic and theatrical language that includes physical theater, mask, clowning, commedia, innovative theatrical design, character design, new play development, and particularly digital media as it relates to computer animation for film, television and gaming, installation art, performance art, video production and entertainment design in a large array of commercial and corporate environments.

Dramatic Arts does believe we have the ability to develop the Puppet Arts program as a bridge between our performance and design disciplines within the department through selected advances in video production, performance art and again, other various forms of digital media.

It should be pointed out that it is extremely rare to find such selective program emphasis in a Drama school of our size and stature. Over the years, we have eliminated programs in directing, theatre management, drama education, theatre history and criticism and have redeployed significant resources to strengthen our three core programs.

## **Academic Programs**

Dramatic Arts is organized differently than almost any other department on campus as we do not divide the majority of our pedagogical goals along the traditional horizontal lines of undergraduate and graduate academic programming. Instead, our Department is organized along a set of, what might be described, as vertical axis related to the three disciplines of Acting, Stage Design and Puppet Arts. Since the vast majority of our students are here for professional education whether they are in a B.F.A program or a M.F.A program, it makes for a clearer and more precise map of our academic identity to initially focus on these three disciplines. It is then a matter of “locating” where each student, whether undergraduate or graduate resides in what is essentially a seven year ladder of education and training. While there are clearly different incremental expectations of the undergraduates and graduate students, often we find that the basic objectives for the students and our methods for educating them are similar.

Therefore we will describe first the particular identity of each of our disciplines, so as not to duplicate this information and then focus on other specific details of our undergraduate and graduate goals.

### **Acting**

We will continue to refine further our particular approach to actor training that focuses on physical theatre, and in particular continue to develop our identity as a North American center for actor training that incorporates Jacques Lecoq mime and mask theatre as a core artistic style. Hiring Greg Webster from the International School of Mime in London was a strategic decision made specifically to meet this objective. This is a unique and specialized approach that will continue to incorporate traditional Stanislavski based principles to create actor/artist/creators for a reinvigorated theater in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We will also continue focus on classical theatre literature especially Shakespeare as a primary training tool and also as a long term commitment to define our artistic personality.

In addition, by acquiring Pat McCorkle as Adjunct Faculty in acting we have now one of the premiere casting directors in New York working for us in the class room and likewise working for our students in the industry. Ms. McCorkle has profound credibility in the New York market and has provided casting for innumerable major feature films and Broadway productions. At UCONN she is now teaching Acting for the Camera, which helps integrate our training more emphatically in the commercial markets and in concert with our developing activity in digital media.

### **Stage Design**

Arguably we live in the most “Visual” age in history. This truth is so embedded into our culture and the entertainment industries that visual story telling is now an essential quality in all live performance and in many entertainment based or environmental venues that are experientially based rather than text based or even performance based. The

viewer/audience essentially 'inhabits' these spaces and interacts with them to create their own narrative. Nevertheless traditional stage design skills and professionals are in tremendous demand throughout a variety of related industries and we are well situated to make a significant contribution in these areas. We will develop further our focus on stage design, and continue our integrated approach in scenery, lighting and costume design that requires our students to study multiple disciplines as part of their program. In addition we demand that our students approach their work as stage designers with a well informed dramatic imagination, and an artistically and stylistically broad set of visual forms of expression for all areas of the theatre and entertainment industry including legitimate theater, film and television. The programs in stage design are designed for the serious professional artist. Many times working professionals decide to return to graduate study at UCONN to better prepare them for success in what is an artistic marketplace. We devote our energies to educating professional artists, and we do not intend to train or develop college instructors.

We will continue our development of curriculum in digital media, video, television production and performance for the camera as integrated systems of expression to existing programs. This will benefit both the design and performance programs of the Department and again, with Puppet Arts as the bridge, connect all disciplines in the Department through a commitment to digitally based performance media. This supports our students as they connect with professionals throughout the various performance industries and draws upon the strengths of many of our faculty who have done extensive work in television, film and entertainment design. Similar to the hiring of Greg Webster in Lecoq mime, the recent hiring of Tim Hunter from New York was another strategically focused hire to bring our design program to the cutting edge of digital media in commercial, performance and installation based design.

### **Puppet Arts**

We will develop our Puppet Arts program more fully by broadening our artistic approaches to puppet arts and integrating puppet arts more thoroughly into the production program of CRT and the curriculums in both acting and design. As the most established Puppet Arts program in the country, this is perhaps a key objective and represents a critical priority in our program development and in the assignment of new resources.

Through the integrated use of various performance styles, including physical and language based theatre, design and technical theatre, and with Puppet Arts the bridge between the two, we pursue an artistic vision that develops a unique and original form of theatrical language that, often through the development of new works, utilizes and indeed defines the most exciting forms of theatricality and artistic expression. The appointment of Paul Spirito as a puppet arts supervisor was yet another targeted hire because of his background in industrial design and mechanics that once again focuses our personnel decisions according to particular strategic directions.

### **Undergraduate Initiatives**

In our professional programs, Drama has long been a leader in so-called “experiential learning,” as all our undergraduates participate in professional theater activity with Connecticut Repertory Theatre at all levels of production. It might be interesting to note that our production of *Pentecost* that was produced last year employed an undergraduate graduating senior as Lighting Designer. His work formed the basis for his Honor’s Thesis and he is currently employed by CNN as a Lighting Designer for their major T.V. studio in New York. This is not unusual. In addition, many professional opportunities, too numerable to innumerate here, are arranged by the faculty for each of our undergraduates during their stay as undergraduates and immediately upon graduation.

We have spent significant energy and resources to improve and enlarge our undergraduate offerings in dramatic literature and performance theory and to integrate these offerings more fully with our colleagues in the Humanities, particularly through The Departments of English, Modern and Classical Languages, The Humanities Institute, the Human Rights Institute and the various other institutes on campus including the Asian American, SUBOG, The Rainbow Center, Latin American and African American Studies Institutes. We recently won a hiring competition through the Provost’s Office to enhance our undergraduate offerings to general education by hiring Dr. Adrienne Macki to revamp our general education course in Theatre, but also as a strategic hire, contributing to the work being done on campus in African American History and Theatre. Dr. Macki’s dissertation is in Theater during the Harlem Renaissance, and she maintains a research interest in Women in Theater as well.

We would like to develop our literature and history offerings further to better serve both the intellectual growth of our majors but to integrate Dramatic Arts more fully into the academic fabric of the university since so much of our energy is devoted to the professional education of our majors and the production of theatrical events with Connecticut Repertory Theatre.

### **Liberal Arts Education in Drama**

Another mechanism for these initiatives is our B.A program in Drama which not unlike a B.A degree in CLAS and is not a professional degree. Instead this program invites students from across campus to engage in Drama through the literature, history and text development of new plays, or dramaturgy. This program also is the operating envelope for our minor in dramatic arts which is open to any student at UCONN. It remains to be seen whether additional personnel, currently planned and hoped for will be hired to fulfill these particular aspirations.

### **Graduate and Professional Education**

The Graduate programs in Dramatic Arts are our highest priority and are the most important programs to the life of the Department, the health of Connecticut Repertory

Theatre and the value we have to the University community. The main goals and aspirations for our graduate programs have been enumerated in the section on Academic Programs. However, it is important to note that Dramatic Arts has had a consistently strong enrollment of high quality graduate students in our various M.F.A programs in Stage Design, Acting and Puppetry. All programs require three year residencies as prescribed by the University Resident Theater Association of which we are a member. URTA, is the only peer reviewed member based national organization of drama schools in the United States and is currently restricted to 33 institutional members. Our general population of M.F.A students is approximately 40 students, and currently we have 27. We graduate roughly one third every year, with the vast majority receiving their degrees on time and on schedule.

One of the principle benefits of being a member of URTA is that we may participate in the National Unified Auditions and Interviews. This is a remarkable event where all 33 members attend auditions and interviews for potential graduate students in New York, Chicago and Las Vegas over a four week period every winter. Over 1200 graduate applicants attend these auditions and interviews held simultaneously in order to more easily co-ordinate a particular student's interview or audition for up to the 33 member graduate schools within the same week. Last winter we auditioned 600 acting students for the 10 spots in our current first year M.F.A class in Acting.

It is essential to note that ONLY member schools can participate in these auditions, and statistically, over 90% of the students in the United States attain entrance into various theater graduate programs through these auditions. This a significant distinction for our program and one that must be maintained if we are to have access to the major talent pool of students interested in graduate education in theatre arts.

To continue to improve the effectiveness and distinction of our professional programs on the graduate level, we continue a series of initiatives to engage major national and international artists with our students both here and abroad. We have a regular relationship with Theater Projects with offices in Stamford CT., and London and have placed a rising senior from our B.F.A program in London in each of the last three summers, as a paid intern. In addition, because of the experiential contacts made during their time here at UCONN, many graduates move directly into corporate design environments in New York.

Every four years we play a major role, through Professor Laura Crow in the Prague Quadrennial, the so-called "Olympics" of stage design and continue to have a major influence in placing student and faculty work, prominently in the U.S. exhibits sent to this important event.

We are embarking on a partnership with The Lark Theatre Co. in New York in the development of new plays, which, through Professor Michael Bradford, may bring New York playwrights to Storrs to showcase their work and give UCONN alumni performance opportunities in New York based workshops.

Through our sponsored spring audition program we are able to place our acting students in Shakespeare companies throughout the United States including Utah, Minnesota, Illinois and North Carolina.

The continuation and scope of our graduate programs is essential to the effectiveness of all our other artistic, pedagogical and social agendas. The graduate student cohort is in fact the core of our artistic ensemble. In addition, as graduate assistants who do not teach, they are closely integrated into the administrative and production management of our department. There is likely no affordable substitute to the math that dictates these internal structures.

The formula for this approach comes down to a series of basic components:

- Professionally engaged faculty with national and international credibility.
- Regular participation of guest professionals in the teaching and production activity of Connecticut Repertory Theatre.
- High artistic standards in the production of our work in CRT.
- Professional assignments for students both in CRT and in professional companies nationally and internationally that are arranged by the faculty.
- A first class professional staff that guarantees the safety of the students and allows them to BE students rather than overworking themselves in production.
- A strong talented cohort of graduate students at a minimal level of size and scope to meet the production and management needs of the department.

### **Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activity**

Obviously the major contributions made by faculty in the Department of Dramatic Arts are the many and varied professional projects we pursue away from the academy. This work is extensive, extends to all major national markets in the United States and overseas, includes commercial and non-profit activity and has brought us many awards, critical praise in many major news outlets including the New York Times and Newsweek. This work includes traditional or legitimate theater, motion pictures, television, architectural design and facility planning, experiential environments, theme park and commercial retail concept design and execution. Members of the faculty have partnered with major software manufacturers in the development of motion graphics for live theater, and as a result of these contacts we have been twice asked to serve as a “Beta” site for new software and lighting equipment for at least two separate manufacturers.

### **Factors that encourage professional engagement**

This significant body of work is possible because the administration of our department has consistently supported faculty efforts in the field and we have had an excellent record in acquiring new faculty with significant professional credentials who also maintain the stamina and ambition to continue their professional lives away from UCONN.

Significantly, our merit system has focused on professional activity as the primary goal for achieving merit awards, and support systems including team responsibility management, and careful construction staff responsibilities have given the faculty the operating room to pursue this work. Often, faculty at other drama departments are weighted down with production responsibilities on campus and we have worked hard to keep the professional staff in place to protect both student safety and faculty creativity.

Attracting high quality graduate students has not been difficult considering the significance of our faculty, but we do have to compete with other major drama schools for these students including NYU, Boston University, Yale School of Drama, Penn State, Northwestern, U.C. Irvine, Cal Arts and Florida State. A significant advantage we have is our proximity to New York and our professional engagement, but we are always looking for new inroads into the profession to create an institutional support structure for career transition for our students. At this time, monetary support is not the major factor in our acquisition of high quality students. By far and away the bigger problem in recruitment is the current state of our facilities.

### **Scholarship and Research in Dramatic Arts**

While Dramatic Arts has historically been focused on creative activity including the development of new plays, we are very interested in developing further our scholarly and research based contributions, particularly in the area of African American Theatre, Women in Theatre and dramaturgy, or dramatic structure. This initiative will have several objectives: First, it will strengthen our diversity profile by focusing on African American Theatre as a specialty; second, it will provide a causeway for our larger engagement within the academic fabric of the university and third, it will improve our undergraduate offerings for both our majors and non-majors throughout the university.

### **Diversity**

The two most important aspects of diversity programming in Dramatic Arts include first, the recruitment of students of color thus building of an acting ensemble that can handle literature focused on various ethnic and multi-cultural experience for Connecticut Repertory Theatre, and second, the delivery of course sequences to the general university student in areas of dramatic literature and theatre history focused on these same and adjacent experience.

### **Initiative in African American Theatre**

In the spring of 2007, as part of a “New Initiatives” package of proposals, the Provost’s Office approved the development of a specialty in African American Theatre. This proposal had many components including the reassignment of Professor Michael Bradford from Avery Point to Storrs and the re-distribution of anticipated retirement dollars to promote this new initiative in African American theater, dramatic literature and playwriting in the Department of Dramatic Arts. The conditions continue to exist at this time to create a niche area of expertise in African American Theatre and to further

develop our offerings in Dramatic literature and playwriting that could positively change the cultural landscape of the School of Fine Arts and the university at large. In addition, this initiative would contribute significant academic and creative programming to the African American Studies Institute, The Women's Studies Institute, The Asian American Studies Institute and the Creative Writing Program, and could strengthen the general education offerings in fine arts and for the general university student.

Indeed, we had hoped that by replacing Professor Carlton Molette with at least two additional faculty of color we could become a national model for the instruction of theater history and dramatic literature to both majors and non majors.

Our current course offerings including DRAM 231, African American Theatre, DRAM 230, Women in Theatre, DRAM 272 Playwriting and FINA The African American Experience in the Arts would not only continue but we could include more sections and include them in Groups I and IV of the General Education Requirements. In addition, and in some ways as important, *the core of our academic faculty in dramatic arts would be made up entirely of faculty of color or women.* This means that they would function as role models in the areas of playwriting, and dramatic literature and criticism for the entire department. Their work would focus on ethnic based studies in the arts but would also include classical theatre studies, modern drama and contemporary theatre. With more faculty focused in this area, new courses could be developed that would be cross listed with the various studies institutes, again enhancing the overall general education opportunities at large. Eventually an undergraduate minor in African American Theatre might be developed.

### **Student and Faculty Recruitment**

One of the keys to diversity in Dramatic Arts is the recruitment of talented students of color on both the graduate and undergraduate level, particularly in the acting programs. This is important because it allows us to pursue a much broader range of dramatic literature in our public performance programs. In this way, we not only create more diversity within the university community, we actually reach a much larger level of engagement in issues relating to diversity by producing plays of racial, ethnic or cultural significance.

We have pursued aggressively minority recruitment fellowships and as a result now have 3 African American actors out of 10 students in our 1<sup>st</sup> year, M.F.A acting cohort. In addition, we have a larger undergraduate population of students of color than we have had in some time. It is extremely difficult to attract students of color in the arts to Storrs for a variety of reasons, and our access to minority support fellowships is important to continue this trend.

The major factor in our work on diversity is the ability to hire faculty of color across the department disciplines. With the retirement of Carlton Molette, we are very much in danger of losing ground on this particular point. The transfer of Michael Bradford to UCONN Storrs from Avery Point has helped, but we have a particular opportunity to

bring an African American teacher of Acting to UCONN – a well known acting professional from the West Coast and this would deepen our commitment and opportunities on many levels.

### **Public Engagement**

The most significant public engagement we practice is clearly the work of Connecticut Repertory Theatre, as a professional theatre in residence. The work we do spans a large selection of artistic styles but also deals directly with a series of important public issues and we view the theater as a center for public discourse as well as an arts organization.

With a significant subscription, we reach a large audience from September through April. Many of our productions have been co-produced with other units on campus including the Human Rights Institute, and the Humanities Institute. Our production of *Julius Caesar* was produced in conjunction with the first conference sponsored by the Human Rights Institute, *Human Rights in an Age of Terrorism*. Several themes were connected between the interpretation of the production and the common themes of the conference. In this way, our public engagement illustrates abstract concepts in actual human conflict – through drama. Many other examples can be shown, but the main point is that professional theatre activity engages the humanistic, social and scientific agenda on campus and throughout the region.

Our morning matinee series is an important partnership with the area schools and is in particular funded in part through a grant from the Connecticut Commission on the Arts.

### **Product Development and Exportation to Major Markets.**

Over the years, various efforts have been started to export our artistic products into a major market. The most important aspect of this is in the development of new plays, many of which have been given workshops here to then receive world premiere productions at other theatres nationwide. This effort however is expensive and difficult to finance and depends in large measure on continued support from the Research Foundation which has consistently supported these efforts.

The most important factor in the transfer of productions from CRT or the School of Fine Arts in general is that they are professional in their scope and execution. We cannot afford to simply put student based work on the road to simply increase the number of performances we create and call that successful public engagement. The transfer of new plays, produced professionally here and perhaps in New York in conjunction with an independent producer is the best way to increase our public engagement on any significant level.

### **Institutional Partnerships**

External institutional partnerships are essential for both the benefit of our students and as producing partners for our work. These partnerships include our current internship

program with the Metropolitan Opera, ongoing relationships with Shakespeare and Co., and includes past relationships with The Berkshire Theatre Festival, The Utah Shakespeare Theatre, The Pioneer Theater Co. in Salt Lake City and many other partners.

## **Conclusions**

We are well aware that the times we are facing in our larger social context are more challenging now than they have been for some time. Some would argue that America is in a state of permanent economic decline. The cost of energy, (perhaps in the future the cost of water) transportation and manufacturing may place us in an ever tightening spiral downward since, with our relatively high wages, we cannot hope to compete with China or India for jobs in an ever expanding global market. Every theater in America has been forced to cut back on the number of Equity contracts they use, and even the major theatres like Hartford Stage can rarely afford to do large cast plays. The State of Connecticut, although recently reprieved from deficit spending, will have some major choices to make in the coming months. How many people will get fuel oil assistance? How many won't? What percentage of children will be able to get health care, or hot school lunches? How well will the State deal with the current crisis in the Department of Children and Families – How much money can the State afford to spend on keeping the roads safe in the winter?

These choices are coming to the university as well. Which programs are the most important, which contribute to the economy of the State providing jobs, or a trained workforce or other economic incentives? What arguments does the School Of Fine Arts and Drama in particular put forward if and perhaps when we are asked what we contribute in the face of a bitter winter and unaffordable health care?

Every day in America and throughout the world various institutions, populations or governments struggle with the complex problem of what defines a culture. The radical religious Taliban government in Afghanistan destroyed hundreds of icons from a previous era, some priceless, profound in scale and scope and irreplaceable, some perhaps worthless, but the entire lot, good or bad, tossed out for the sake of an idea: that those strong enough to hold power can dictate the cultural values of a society.

The cultural revolution in China was based in large part on the proposition that if enough ignorant and undereducated youth could be empowered and made angry enough they might just eradicate 5000 years of cultural memory in one violent rush, within a single generation.

As we struggle setting institutional priorities, how do we decide what can we afford? But more importantly, what can afford when we are broke - when it gets tough, what are our values then? Does democracy hold up when survival is at stake? Do the ideas of the founding fathers only work in a society that is wealthy? Drama often sets a stage in the most unlikely of places, the first penal colony in Australia, the court of Henry VIII, an obscure orthodox monastery in Eastern Europe, or between the pages of a book of

Islamic folk tales, but in all dramatic situations, the artist is himself a metaphor for the individual in a democratic society, expressing that fundamental right to individual expression and individual accountability.

Art and theatre in particular is essential to modern life. It is the best medium where the meaning of human experience can be explored and revealed. We are the children of Dionysus - we are the experiment constantly reinventing ourselves tuned to the circumstances of the day. Meaning. We discover meaning - meaning in the world, meaning in our lives, meaning in our tragic circumstances and meaning for ourselves as artists. Drama insists on the value of culture at all times, in all places and irregardless of financial or political realities and sets forth a simple set of propositions: first, that no matter what the circumstances, art will happen by the sheer force of its own necessity, second, that the making of art is central to the discovery of self, and third, that like no other form of human endeavor, as a society and as individuals, we are transformed by the power of art.