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**University Theatres & Season Selection:
Toward a Slow Pedagogy of Programming**

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Theatre seasons in institutions of higher learning serve an educational purpose: they offer intersectional laboratory spaces for theatre students of all disciplines to come together to experiment, expand their craft, and learn from their mistakes in a controlled and supportive environment. This educational purpose also applies to studio, craft, and analytic classes, where students learn theory and put it into practice in a series of discrete exercises and projects; however, when it comes to making a more involved assessment of skills and mastery, students must tackle the advanced challenges presented to them during a university theatre season. As an Association for Theatre in Higher Education task force concluded all the way back in 1988, “Productions are not extracurricular or cocurricular—they *are* the curriculum.”¹ Therefore, since few academic theatre programs operate solely in the classroom environment, status quo consensus suggests that production work is a vital part of the pedagogical development of under/graduate theatre students.

¹ Jon Whitmore, “Integrating Instruction, Production, and Research,” in *The Performance of Power: Theatrical Discourse and Politics*, ed. Sue-Ellen Case and Janelle Reinelt (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1991), 253.

Yet, while it is evident university theatre seasons are part of an institution's instructional mission, their structure and potential as learning experiences in academic settings have not been sufficiently investigated. Theatre educators who train under/graduate students in a variety of ways to better prepare them to enter the entertainment industry must be able to discern how the construction of production-based learning experiences, modeled after professional practices, differs from the more familiar academic construction of studio, lab, and analytic coursework. For example, one significant structural difference is that unlike other courses, often taught with one instructor of record, productions are co-taught by many faculty and staff members who guide the process for their students. Another important difference is that productions have a pedagogical charge to intersect all the training needs of students across disciplines, as best as possible. Individual classrooms and labs offer discrete and applied types of learning: university theatre seasons offer the most zoomed-out perspective possible to more closely resemble the professional field itself. As places of theatrical training, classes and productions have individuated structures best suited to teach and assess their respective learning outcomes. We might begin to understand these pedagogical nuances at the level of season selection.

If we look at a year of artistic programming in a university theatre through the lens of academic coursework, then season selection is analogous to the process of creating a syllabus. Unlike most syllabi, seasons are created collectively by many deliberating professors with the aim of balancing meaningful pedagogical opportunities for their students and the institutional resources required to make these opportunities happen. A season is thus simultaneously a rubric for student instruction and a strategic plan for yearly teaching and service functions. The process of selection consequently requires complex thinking to accommodate various departmental learning outcomes and program goals. For example, a proposed play title might have worthy and

significant design challenges for students to tackle but might not support the demographics of the current casting pool. Another title might benefit from a large ensemble but might not support the training of students or match available labor. Sometimes play selections will tip the balance toward contemporary, US-centric dramaturgies and offer insufficient opportunities for students to engage in historical studies, adaptations, and translations from different traditions and epistemic frameworks. Other times, selections are ideal in the way they felicitously marry the pedagogical needs of students in every discipline and yet are not programmable due to a lack of production rights. Whether we think of the entire university theatre season as one class with a reading list of several plays or many classes with individual main texts, season selection faces challenges in the creation of course content and structure that typical classes do not.

Season selection—or the process by which the institutional syllabus for a year’s worth of university theatre productions comes together—is an intersectional matrix of curricula, calculated on a yearly basis. More typical academic classes might not undergo such a frequent change in their reading lists and learning outcomes. Some years we have students that can handle complex sword fights; some years we have students who want to develop their projections portfolio, and some years we have students dexterous enough to run a rotating set safely. In some years, our recruitment numbers are high; in others, they are low. Our seasons must be flexible to solve for a myriad of inconstant variables. Season selection for university theatres thus requires faculty and staff members to come together and deliberate the creation of a large joint class with many sections, almost like a general education or core curriculum requirement (e.g., English Composition, Western Civilization, Theatre History, etc.). Outside of the pre-assigned class loads for faculty members, whose labor is it to assemble this interdisciplinary syllabus? And

what is the ideal amount of time for meaningful deliberation to coordinate this crucial yearly project that is part classroom, part curriculum development?

At our institution, the University of Oklahoma's Peggy Dow Helmerich School of Drama, the committee work of season selection is shared among faculty members and administrators like the director (chair) of our program and the dean of our college. Staff members enter discussions at the point when selection pivots into planning, a moment when the season has already been chosen and now requires further choices to be made regarding workflow, labor distribution, and material costs. Students enter the conversation when planning veers into execution, as they start to participate in concept, design, and production meetings and rehearsals for programmed shows. Most of the institutional time spent on the learning experience that is university theatre is dedicated to the moment this "class" begins, when we get together to plan and produce the season. Meetings are frequent, occurring on a weekly basis. Students receive tailored mentorship to make their learning a success. At a moment when postpandemic conversations about teaching innovations have gathered momentum around student-centered learning, universal design, bias-intervention, and ethics of care, we wondered what would happen if we paid a little more attention at the beginning of the beginning of this class called university theatre. What if we spent more time on season selection? Like others researching this topic,² we believe that thinking critically about season selection for university theatres requires

² Annie G. Levy, "Step One, Collaborate: Emerson Stage Plans a Season," *HowlRound*, March 1, 2022, <https://howlround.com/step-one-collaborate-emerson-stage-plans-season>; Christianne Myers, "One Approach to Student Engagement in Educational Season Selection," *HowlRound*, March 20, 2023, <https://howlround.com/one-approach-student-engagement-educational-season-selection>; Emi Aguilar and Meg Greene, "Programming and Pitching a Season," in *HowlRound Theatre Commons: Essays and Conversations from the First Ten Years (2011–2020)* (Boston: HowlRound Theatre Commons, 2022), <https://howlround.com/sites/default/files/2002-06/Programming%20Pitching%20Season.pdf>; and Tiffany Antone and Amanda Petefish-Schrag, "Season Planning and Wellness: An 'Impossible' Marriage?" (presentation, Mid-America Theatre Conference, Minneapolis, MN, March 2023).

us to think about it as pedagogy and elaborate tactical approaches to addressing the challenges of time, labor, equity, and positionality when creating this syllabus.

The following pages document our developing thoughts and findings on making critical time to co-think with students, faculty, and staff at the University of Oklahoma as we select a season of art/work. We begin by addressing the relationship between time and corporate models of production that impact the experience of season programming in academia; we also include an analysis of typical season selection strategies at our institution. We then continue by questioning whose labor it is to select a season, and posit if there might be an instructional and institutional advantage to solving this labor problem pedagogically by offering hands-on student training in literary management. Following the proposition to partially solve the labor of season selection via a class, we address key issues of equity, positionality, and pedagogy in creating such a learning experience. The paper then presents an initial course design on season selection developed at the University of Oklahoma during the 2022–2023 and 2023–2024 academic years and concludes with some considerations for future iterations of the course and other interventions in season selection at the university level. Though unfinished, this research encourages those teaching theatre within colleges and universities to consider the benefits of tactical slowness and collaboration in artistic programming. We believe inviting more co-thinkers to the table, with an awareness of their differentiated positions within the university, and scheduling the time required for meaningful co-thinking, enriches the learning/teaching experience for all involved in making theatre.

Slow Professors: Making Tactical Time for Deliberation

As we began to analyze the pedagogical and administrative process of season selection, we immediately realized we had a theoretical problem with time. Making theatre takes time—to

choose, plan, design, build, rehearse, advertise, produce, perform, observe, record, teach, and understand. Time is a precious resource, of which there never seems to be enough to realize all the visions born of our collective imagining. Time is also an emotional expenditure, that sometimes threatens to leave us burned out. In academia, time is what we spend on thinking and doing. We conduct experiments to develop our thinking about the world; by thinking about the world, we ostensibly make it better. This time we spend comes at a price for our employers, and when academic knowledge work is tied to corporate models of productivity, the assumption is that an increase in afforded time should yield more product.

In *The Slow Professor: Challenging the Culture of Speed in the Academy* (2016), Maggie Berg and Barbara K. Seeber acknowledge the urgencies of time within academia and expose how this pressure to produce with alacrity creates an emotionally difficult and physically taxing working environment for professors. As a form of resistance to the culture of speed in corporate academia, they suggest instructors join the Slow movement: “Slow Professors advocate deliberation over acceleration. We need time to think, and so do our students. Time for reflection and open-ended inquiry is not a luxury but is crucial to what we do.”³ According to Berg and Seeber, insisting on “slow time” is a way for professors to *do* the critical work historically associated with academic life. Like enjoying a home-cooked meal, some processes in higher education should take their time. Berg and Seeber also contend that moving ahead slowly does not mean abdicating a sense of responsibility but rather taking the critical nature of our work seriously enough to give it the time it deserves. Ultimately, if enough academic workers join the Slow movement at their universities, they can help motivate a culture of deceleration and

³ Maggie Berg and Barbara K. Seeber, *The Slow Professor: Challenging the Culture of Speed in the Academy* (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 2016), x.

meaningful change. With more time allotted to thinking, professors can take deliberate action to improve their institutional well-being.

In an article published in *Reversing the Cult of Speed in Higher Education* (2018), Margarita Rayzberg and Blake Smith critique the corporate self-help/productivity genre they see as undermining Berg and Seeber's argument. For Rayzberg and Smith, both graduate students at the time of writing their article, tenured faculty members are in a positional advantage to advocate for the Slow movement; contingent laborers do not have the political power to make policy changes that effect a culture of Slow.⁴ Rayzberg and Smith conclude that addressing systemic problems with time in academic institutions will take a differentiated approach depending on the ways positionality affects our perceptions and receptions of time.⁵

In the same anthology, Scott Magelssen and Shelby Lunderman argue, "We may not be able to turn back the clock or even slow down the fast university in a large sense, but we can be much more tactical and specific in choosing how to slow down."⁶ Their response to the problem of time is to use "tactical slowness" as professors, a form of active slowness that makes a critical intervention within the corporate academic system:

Slow professors must navigate through the delimited place upon which those in power overlay their templates of organization, but, like resistance fighters, nevertheless work tactically from within, recognizing the structures of power, knowing where they can be manipulated, and finding the sweet spot between pushing back too little and too much.⁷

We should also add that as professors we are likewise complicit in power structures that affect those in the lower rungs of the academic ladder, like adjunct faculty, staff, and students;

⁴ Margarita Rayzberg and Blake Smith, "Queerness over Time: Slowness, Speed, and the Chronopolitics of Scholarship, in *Reversing the Cult of Speed in Higher Education: The Slow Movement in the Arts and Humanities*, ed. Stephannie S. Gearhart and Jonathan Chambers (New York: Routledge, 2019), 61.

⁵ Rayzberg and Smith, "Queerness over Time," 63.

⁶ Scott Magelssen and Shelby Lunderman, "Tactical Slowness: Fomenting a Culture of Mental Health in the Academy," in *Reversing the Cult of Speed in Higher Education: The Slow Movement in the Arts and Humanities*, ed. Stephannie S. Gearhart and Jonathan Chambers (New York: Routledge, 2019), 131.

⁷ Magelssen and Lunderman, "Tactical Slowness," 131.

therefore, we must ensure our tactics of slowness include and benefit others. These tactics cannot be used solely to resist *up* toward tenured colleagues and higher administration and then become strategies of control that police *down* the hierarchy.⁸ To encourage systemic change, our tactical efforts to solve the issue of corporate fast time must be inclusive.

A procedural way to slow down time is to consciously work together as a coalition with an awareness of the way each person experiences time and is held accountable for their labor. Magelssen and Lunderman agree: “Collaboration lessens the burden of a single project on an individual scholar’s shoulders, combats the isolation brought on by research broadly expressed by academics, and can often lead to more invigorating conversations, research, and mentorship.”⁹ Collaboration can happen more horizontally to resist the hierarchy of academia and, as bell hooks reminds us, include students in the process, as an act of “engaged pedagogy.” hooks writes, “Expanding both heart and mind, engaged pedagogy makes us better learners because it asks us to embrace and explore the practice of knowing together, to see intelligence as a resource that can strengthen our common good.”¹⁰ Thus we arrive at a potential liberatory practice—tactically resisting the urgencies of corporate academic time through a coalition of community members sharing knowledge of how they experience time differently and use that knowledge to better our working conditions. In an academic theatre department, this approach can make a considerable intervention when first applied to season selection.

We wondered if season selection at our institution could benefit from slow time. We noticed that despite the constant presence and pressure of season selection during the academic year, the time dedicated to deliberation was neither optimal nor entirely structured. As faculty

⁸ Magelssen and Lunderman borrow the differentiation between tactic and strategy from Michel de Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984).

⁹ Magelssen and Lunderman, “Tactical Slowness,” 132.

¹⁰ bell hooks, *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 22.

members, we only met to decide our season in brief, isolated bursts of activity. As researchers, we wondered if we could make better use of time by increasing the time we made on our collective calendars to get together and deliberate an important joint decision that happens on a yearly basis. We wondered what would happen when academic workers insisted on slow time *within* the school year and thus *made time to think*. To get an idea of the time spent on season selection at our institution in years past, we include a summary below. This analysis will become a point of reference for the pedagogical intervention described in the latter half of the paper.

To help select the 2022–2023 University Theatre season, we were asked to voluntarily submit play titles to the Director of the School of Drama at the start of the fall semester 2021.¹¹ The Director would then consider these titles among others, like an Artistic Director might curate a season at a professional theatre. In the two faculty meetings between September and October, among the other business items up for discussion, the Director would offer updates as to what titles were under consideration. There would be a brief pause for comments, if any, and we would continue through our agenda. In a trilogy of other meetings in November and December, the Director would meet with the Dean of the College of Fine Arts, the respective Directors of the Schools of Dance, Music, and Musical Theatre, and the School of Drama’s Design and Production faculty and staff to further deliberate the intended season. For those meetings, faculty and staff members would have done a careful study of eighteen show proposals to narrow them down to nine. Around January, an email would go out to the College of Fine Arts community informing us of our University Theatre season, after which the School of Drama faculty would voluntarily begin submitting titles for our internal Lab Theatre season, repeating the same

¹¹ At the University of Oklahoma, University Theatre produces two shows chosen by the School of Drama alongside other shows chosen by the other Schools in the College of Fine Arts for a total of nine productions a year. The School of Drama’s Design and Production Area faculty, staff, and students participate extensively in all nine productions.

pitching and picking process in the three faculty meetings between February and April.¹²

Alongside the selection of these titles, faculty members in the Performance Area would meet once in April to choose student proposals for the Studio Theatre season, an opportunity for BFA undergraduates to direct a show with supervision.¹³ Once titles were selected for internal School of Drama productions and directors confirmed, the Lab and Studio seasons would be announced in May.¹⁴

In this version of season selection, early deliberations took place within the limited time of our once-a-month, one-hour-long faculty meetings in which other vital administrative tasks needed addressing. To achieve department-wide critical thinking prior to negotiating a season with the other schools in the College of Fine Arts, there would have to be a clear sense of preparation and pre-existing knowledge of the scripts about to be discussed; given the fluctuating and differentiated labor burdens of everyone on faculty, this was not always the case. While there was some time set aside to decide on a season, there was not enough time built into the internal School of Drama meetings to riff on each other's ideas or dig deeper into the potential of plays prior to going into season planning. There was not enough time to read the scripts we were vetting, even if they would have been excellent options for a season. Despite good will and showing up to meetings, these actions alone are not enough to guarantee depth of deliberation. There was no robust structure akin to a literary management department that would help scaffold our efforts to engage with season selection more critically. The problem was not just one of

¹² The Lab Theatre season is internal to the School of Drama and involves four additional productions, one of which is an annual ten-minute new play reading initiative.

¹³ Typically two student directing projects are chosen for the Studio Theatre season, one per semester.

¹⁴ This approach to season selection at our institution seemed to be a pandemic shift from previous years. Our colleagues have told us that pre-pandemic, there would be a meeting where all the faculty could write titles up on the whiteboard, consider them, and then later have conversations outside of this faculty meeting to drum up support for given plays. Another faculty member is said to have kept notes on the season selection titles discussed in previous years. We get the sense from these anecdotes that the impulse for tactical slowness was there.

scheduled time to think together but also of putting in more time, of doing more work, and have that work be accounted for. Engaging with season selection with the tactical framework of slow time makes the activity take up more space on the calendar and requires more people to do it. Thus, to solve the time-intensive process of season selection demands more labor, another resource at a premium.¹⁵

Labor: Using Course Structure to Make Season Selection Accountable

Labor is one of the assumed and invisible challenges to season selection in an academic setting. As we have noted above, finding, reading, analyzing, and vetting scripts takes time to do well and requires much more than an hour-long meeting to do. Without a carefully guided season selection process in which these time and labor demands are accounted for, these vital tasks for critical deliberation are left to the individual discretion of workers with different institutional demands. But there are other processes in our academic theatre program that are more advanced in their assessment and structuring of labor, namely season planning and production.

Depending on the size and scale of an institution, the number of stakeholders throughout the season selection, season planning, and season production processes can fluctuate greatly, along with how their labor is quantified and remunerated. Specifically as it pertains to the training of students, their labor on theatre planning and production is either paid or unpaid. Students work on shows in many ways: they crew backstage, manifest the vision of designs through crafts classes, and work varied hours a week in the costume studio, lighting lab, or

¹⁵ We should clarify that institutional models for slow deliberation exist at the level of season planning, which happens after season selection. Once the Schools of Dance, Drama, Music, and Musical Theatre select their top choices for potential shows, the Design and Production Area do a thorough analysis of the scripts, proposals, and the needs for each of these opportunities. Through area meetings and the three scheduled November–December University Theatre Season Selection meetings, they are able to align the shows with available resources. This formal process of deliberation is a model that is not yet present in the way the School of Drama internally curates its show proposals or how it selects its Lab and Studio seasons.

scenic studio to execute necessary production tasks. Depending on the institution, student paid labor can also be reflected in a partial or full tuition waiver in exchange or in addition to hourly wages. Student labor also exists within unpaid labor, but the unpaid labor is usually generated from laboratories like a lighting lab to assist with a hang and focus, scenic painting to work on a set for the upcoming musical while learning scumbling techniques, or serving as crew for a show during the tech week and performance process. In a sense, these students are remunerated by the institution for their labor in exchange for the knowledge and skills gained in these course experiences; their “receipts” are credits on a transcript. Regardless of whether student labor is paid or credited on a transcript, the number of students available for production work directly influences what an academic theatre produces. A chosen season directly impacts the curriculum in the hands-on craft and studio classes, and design and production laboratories. Their curricula are shaped by which shows are being produced, if they are being produced in a given style, and in what scale and scope.

Knowing that labor forces within an institution have their time accounted for in different ways, it is essential that season selection consider the limitations of each labor force and how these limitations can impact the proposed season. Those involved with season selection might respond to decreased labor capacity by choosing shows with smaller design build requirements or reducing the number of productions offered. Beyond season selection, the institution might choose to redistribute the labor of production among salaried positions or dispense with certain production elements all together. In any case, when selecting a season, an institution must consider the given circumstances of its production capacity and program feasible work.

By examining how labor is accounted for in the executable tasks of season planning and production, the question then becomes, whose responsibility is it to do the labor of season

selection? Most of the labor in season planning and production is accounted for, so why is season selection not similarly structured? Selecting a season at an institution like ours is a large undertaking, precisely because of the institution's size, and yet the systems in place for selection are not set up to entertain consistent deep reflection. One option for assigning the labor of season selection is to have a Season Selection Advisory Committee.¹⁶ This way, the labor of considering, analyzing, and vetting potential productions could be accounted for in service labor at the faculty level. But it is interesting to note that the season planning and execution processes benefit from accounted labor among faculty, staff, and students. If university theatre seasons are pedagogical spaces, the first third of this process could likewise be transformed into a learning opportunity.

We believe that having more minds thinking through the merits and challenges of each proposed production ensures that our deliberation is slower, more intentional, and more extensive as we can investigate more material. By leaning on the paid and credited structures already in existence, we could benefit teaching literary management like we teach a craft lab. We can remunerate the labor of season selection through the creation of a course that is a direct and active practice of literary management, which is a necessary and vital skill for students emerging from our dramaturgy program. Moreover, a course focused on critical season selection could expose students to a potential future as artistic directors, producers, or company managers, which are roles that are difficult for students to gain access to as undergraduates. By creating a course on season selection that produces labor that is helpful to the creation of university theatre, we account for and remunerate the labor of slow co-thinking, horizontal collaboration, and informed critical deliberation.

¹⁶ This is what the Department of Music and Theatre does at Iowa State. Their committee consists of faculty, staff, and students, ensuring an intersectional look at season selection, for multiple constituencies.

Equity: Accounting for the Learning of Others

Another challenge educational theatres face when it comes to selecting a season is equity. When an institution offers a degree, the assumption is that each student will have a universal or at least similar educational experience regardless of who they are within their cohort; however, the specialized training that comes with a BFA does not guarantee this. One example of strained universality within a BFA program involves the training of acting students through the pedagogy of production work. Unless a department puts fail-safes into place like a minimum requirement of how many roles an actor might perform during their time at the university, the size, complexity, and educational opportunities with a given role will vary widely depending on what season is chosen and who is chosen to portray roles within it.

These variances in production opportunities impact female students more so than male students as there is a national trend of more women in college than men and a higher representation of women within theatre departments.¹⁷ As documented in *The Count*, academic and professional theatres alike overwhelmingly produce work by white men, and this work has historically had more scripted roles for those who share these identities.¹⁸ As a result, there are statistically more opportunities for male students to perform over their female counterparts, and among those female students, the distribution of opportunities is not always something that is codified or equitable. And the statistics of normative season selection likewise restrict the

¹⁷ This holds true across the pond as well: in the United Kingdom, “a report from the university admissions service has revealed that 68 per cent of undergraduate drama applicants for the 2020 admissions cycle identified as female, a similar gender distribution to that in 2019.” Harriet Clifford, “Almost Seventy per Cent of University Drama Applicants in 2020 Identified as Female,” *Drama & Theatre*, February 5, 2021, <https://www.dramaandtheatre.co.uk/news/article/almost-seventy-per-cent-of-university-drama-applicants-in-2020-identified-as-female>.

¹⁸ Julia Jordan and Marsha Norman, “The Count 1.10,” *The Lillys*, accessed June 26, 2023, <https://the-lillys.org/the-count-1>; Jordan and Norman, “The Count 2.0,” *The Lillys*, accessed June 26, 2023, <https://the-lillys.org/the-count-2>; Sharon Green et al., “‘The Count’ for Liberal Arts Colleges: Data on Gender and Race in the Production Seasons of Davidson College and Its Peers,” *HowlRound*, August 11, 2020, <https://howlround.com/count-liberal-arts-colleges>.

number of opportunities for trans and nonbinary students, students with disabilities, and students of color. Season selection can help us solve part of the equity problem. Going into season selection without thinking of the performing bodies is setting us up for failure. Even though we want to have everyone to have a comparable experience in education, the task is impossible unless we have statistical data of who the program needs to support.

At the OU School of Drama, the Performance Area began to count how many students identified as women, men, or nonbinary and how many identified as students of color. This internal calibration allowed us to assess which productions are actually feasible and which productions would be equitable experiences for students. For the purposes of season selection, we exclusively looked at the freshman, sophomore, and junior classes, as the senior class would likely graduate out of consideration by the following year and the incoming freshman class would largely be an unknown factor of gender and racial distribution. For the 2023–2024 season, that left us with twenty-seven female students, nine male students, one nonbinary student, and eight students of color who were declared BFA Acting Emphasis students. Seeing that the women triply outnumbered the men, our season selection had to be significantly more intentional in creating opportunities for the female students. Some questions we considered were how many roles could be gender flexible, whether there was a possibility of double casting certain roles to create more performance opportunities, and researching what all-femme and nonbinary shows we could potentially produce to create an equitable experience for those receiving the same degree.¹⁹

¹⁹ A greater clarity on casting mathematics does not necessarily resolve the difficult computation of season selection. For example, a method of increasing equity for actors—double casting—can negatively impact labor for costume design students, the costume design faculty, and the costume construction staff by increasing the number of costumes needing to be made and/or sourced in the same season.

An additional challenge of critically examining our BFA Acting Emphasis pool was our distribution of students of color within the program. While considering titles, it was important that we did not select plays that pigeon-holed an actor of a certain race or ethnicity into only being considered for that specific show. For example, if we selected a show that specifically had a Latina character but the BFA Acting Emphasis only had one Latina actor, that would force the Latina actor into only being considered for that role whereas she might have had possible casting opportunities in other productions with a less prescriptive character description.²⁰ In our season selection, we strived to find plays with flexible racial identifiers or racial identifiers for which we had multiple actors who could fulfill those roles, so as not to pigeon-hole their casting prospects. To make more racially prescriptive material accessible to our students of color—which is an imperative matter of equity to their education as white students have always had access to racially prescriptive work—we must focus our efforts in recruiting diverse students to enable us to produce the plays they are passionate about without forcing students into the metaphorical “diversity checkbox.” And, of course, the work must continue internally by addressing systemic racism within our institutional structures, pedagogical approaches, classroom curricula, artistic programming, and hiring practices to create a welcoming, sustainable, and accountable place of learning for recruited students.

In conjunction with season selection, the Performance Area created a spreadsheet of all BFA Acting Emphasis students to track what acting opportunities were given to each student over their time at our institution. This spreadsheet tracks factors like which production a given

²⁰ “Less prescriptive” can mean a show that in contemporary performance practices and the general imaginary welcomes actors from across experiences of race, gender, ability, religion, and sexuality regardless of historical casting practices and authorial intent (e.g., Shakespeare). It can also mean shows created specifically to support the body of the actor in the role, whomever they may be (like *Town Hall* and *Theatre: A Love Story*, two recent plays by Caridad Svich).

actor was cast in, whether the role was a leading role, ensemble role, or understudy, whether actors turned down performance opportunities after they were cast, and, most vitally, if they were not cast at all—especially if this happened over multiple semesters. Spreadsheets and data tracking are strong, quantifiable methods of bias intervention in the arts. For example, Arts Emerson makes a season planning data sheet,²¹ as does Iowa State University.²² The Performance Area at the OU School of Drama uses spreadsheets to establish equitable casting practices (see Appendix). If used well, spreadsheets can become rubrics to put our values into words and into action, making ourselves accountable to our purported missions of inclusivity, equity, and excellence. Tracking this data became significantly more helpful as it made visible which students were being passed over for performance opportunities. Quantifying these gaps gave the faculty the opportunity to advocate for students to be cast or understudy shows during the casting process to provide a more equitable educational experience.

The equity challenge also extends to Design and Production Area students for what options they have available in their training. In our institution, Design and Production students are assigned to productions at the end of the previous academic year. As the College of Fine Arts produces dance, opera, musical theatre, and drama, the equitable goal would be for each student to experience working on each form of performance. With each performing art, different challenges emerge as differing pedagogies need to be accomplished: dance often necessitates the use of side lighting and matching costuming that is durable and flexible; opera sets need to account for a clear line of vision from the conductor to the performers; musical theatre often requires a variety of props and transformable set pieces, and drama creates a space for

²¹ David Dower, “How a Season Comes Together,” *HowlRound*, August 29, 2015, <https://howlround.com/how-season-comes-together>.

²² Antone and Petefish-Schrag, “Season Planning and Wellness: An ‘Impossible’ Marriage?”

environmental and atmospheric sound design possibilities. Period costuming and scenic design offers the opportunity for designers to research historical clothing and furniture: additional challenges include how to effectively create historical-looking pieces with modern techniques and make sure that students are engaging in different time periods during their training. If the opera is in a language other than English, the set and lighting designers must account for a designated location for clearly visible supertitles so the audience can follow along. Scenic, props, and costume designers must decide what can be pulled from existing stock and what can be built with the time and labor they have access to through the costume and scenic studios. All of these executive decisions also must be made in conjunction with the director of the work (whether that be a guest choreographer, faculty director, or guest director) to ensure that the students are supporting the directorial vision and creating a cohesive world for each performing art. Stage managers spend rehearsal time meticulously documenting entrance and exit plots, where props are brought onstage and taken offstage, how and when set pieces move, and how to construct the cue calling to optimize the timing desired by the director and designers. The timing of cues for musicals and operas often necessitates the stage manager has an understanding of music notation. On top of all these tasks, stage managers benefit from facilitating production meetings, which encourages the student to practice leadership skills and growing their voice in a room of peers, staff, and faculty.

In addition, the equitable goal would also account for scale, venue, time period, and scaffolded design challenges. Typically, Design and Production students have a progressive increase in responsibility and design vision. While one may start by assisting in light hang and focus, they might serve as the light board operator on the next production. Once the student understands these positions, they might progress to serving as master electrician or assistant

lighting designer before taking on the mantle of lighting designer themselves. Stage managers are often paired: upperclassmen stage managers lead by example and then serve as support to freshman and sophomore students tackling the head stage manager position for the first time. At our institution, operas and musicals are often the grandest in scale, so design students are asked to dream big with these spectacle-filled (and often, large ensemble) productions. But with dreaming big, there also comes the challenge of editing a design when time runs low and labor demands to fully realize their vision run out.

While a perfect production opportunity would check pedagogical boxes for all students, the reality is that one production cannot achieve it all. As faculty members, we aim to choose productions that cover the design, production, and performance needs of as many students as possible. To best achieve equity in production work, it is important to select shows that in the span of a season check most pedagogical boxes. To best achieve equity across four years of a training program, we must have a mechanism in place to assess the curricular choices of each season over time.

Positionality: Understanding Our Roles in the Process

As noted above, the pedagogical art of selecting a season requires measured considerations of labor and equity. Labor includes putting in accountable hours to read plays and debate them with colleagues as well as tracking the labor required to make a season happen. Equity concerns the range and quality of training opportunities offered to all students, regardless of degree plan: if they invest in the same institution, students must receive a comparable education. Apart from labor and equity, a third key consideration in season selection must be positionality. Without an analysis of position and power, we lack an ethical compass to

understand the societal and institutional biases affecting our understanding of labor, equity, and pedagogy.²³

As professors in the third year of the tenure track and relatively recent doctoral graduates, we remain mindful that we were but recently where our students now stand—on the other side of the learning/teaching power line. Where we once followed curriculum, now we make it for others to follow. Our students must walk the journeys we chart for them in our curricula, syllabi, and seasons. The season we vote on affects the learning and labor of our students as well as the work lives of our colleagues. Furthermore, the ways in which we respectively walk the world and the advantages or impediments in this metaphorical walking affect our relationships to other members of our learning community. As educators, we have different life experiences and perspectives that shape our pedagogy, but these perspectives are limited by design. Only an intersectional coalition of perspectives can reveal a more composite understanding of what we are teaching, how we are teaching it, why we are teaching it, and to whom.

We return to an initial observation about the three-stage process of putting together a season of artistic work at a theatre institution: students are involved in planning and producing a season but are not usually involved in selecting it. To understand the reasons behind this phenomenon requires us to address the intersection of positionality and teaching philosophy. In dominant modes of education, there is a clear hierarchy based on the premise that those on the top know more than those on the bottom. Just as most syllabi are written without student input, the syllabus of a university theatre season is likewise not necessarily shaped by most of its constituents. The status quo response to this reality is that the teacher has more discernment than

²³ artEquity’s “Everyday Justice: Antiracism as Daily Practice” training has been indispensable to our thinking here. As artEquity expresses in their Theory of Change, “We believe that having shared language and a shared analysis (by analysis we mean a way of understanding the power dynamics that affect our lives) is the gateway to collective action and collective impact.” “About Us,” artEquity, accessed June 30, 2023, <https://www.artequity.org/about-us>.

the student, which is true in the sense that a professor has had more education. But the teacher's discernment is partial, because it is limited to their own training and life experiences. So, while it is true that a teacher might have an awareness of what has been meaningful pedagogy for students most like them, they might not be able to address the pedagogical needs of students who are *not* like them.

According to bell hooks, "So much academic training encourages teachers to assume that they must be 'right' at all times. Instead, I propose that teachers must be open at all times, and we must be willing to acknowledge what we do not know."²⁴ As professors, we do not know what it is like for each of our students to execute and experience the season we select; therefore, we would benefit from intentional channels of conversation that allow us to reflect on future iterations of the season, i.e. our university theatre syllabus. Seeking to understand the personal is not a matter of capricious asks and wants, but rather a move toward more invested listening, more careful approaches to community-making, more human/e and caring interactions with one another. As a predominantly white faculty, working together with our more racially diverse student population also theoretically increases our exposure to other walks of life and ways of thinking about theatre practice, something which Miranda Haymon advocates in "How Liberal Arts Theatre Programs Are Failing Their Students of Color" (2020). She writes, "It's not just about the plays chosen, but who is choosing them."²⁵ Therefore, because professors are not an all-knowing deliberating body, they benefit from including student perspectives in the process of season selection.

²⁴ hooks, *Teaching Critical Thinking*, 10.

²⁵ Miranda Haymon, "How Liberal Arts Theatre Programs Are Failing Their Students of Color," *HowlRound*, June 17, 2020, <https://howlround.com/how-liberal-arts-theatre-programs-are-failing-their-students-color>.

As we have noted previously, one way of including student perspectives during season selection is to ask for them to volunteer their time and ideas, as an act of unaccounted service to the institution. Another way is to remunerate students for their time and have that labor be quantified through a class structure. For the latter to happen, faculty must buy into the notion that the inclusion of student perspectives in season planning is a pedagogical issue and an opportunity for meaningful learning. A clear way to do this is to frame student involvement in season selection as dramaturgical training. An institution could offer a course run like a literary management office: students would read and respond to scripts through critical reports that help develop student discernment in season selection and help faculty with their own labor and process of selecting a season. We could treat this opportunity as we do other aspects of production training in a theatre program—train students via praxis. In this case we would be training dramaturgs and those interested in pursuing adjacent careers in artistic leadership and management. Not only is such a lab-based class a meaningful form of engaged pedagogy for BFA students, but like the intersectional spaces of production work, it promotes affective and intellectual bonds across discipline. More importantly, by having a class dedicated to thinking about season selection, even if the class does not ultimately have the power to choose work, makes productive use of the academic system's course-credit remuneration structure. Creating a class to address the critical thinking of season selection plays to the strengths of curricular planning: the labor is not committee work students must do on an unpaid, voluntary basis. It is a part of their transcripts if they choose to take the class.

Pedagogy: Advancing Curricula and Learning Outcomes

Season selection, planning, and execution at an institution of higher learning is foremost a matter of pedagogy. As we argue in the introduction, the purpose of having a theatre season is

for students to amplify their classroom learning and put it to the test in front of live audiences. The hope for these pedagogical seasons is that students will be able to refine their craft prior to entering the profession, where the primary focus of seasons is revenue and entertainment not training. And even if they do not enter the profession, students benefit from understanding the creative and collaborative processes that unfold specifically in the intensity of putting together a large-scale project and sharing it with others. At our institution, students participate in the pedagogy of season planning and execution, by attending design and production meetings, as well as making the shows happen themselves. But season selection is not an area we have sufficiently explored as part of our training model.

To propose a class on artistic programming, we looked at the School of Drama’s mission and theorized ways a pedagogical approach to season selection that includes students advances our institutional curriculum. Three statements stood out from our website:

- We train students for professional careers in Acting, Design, Dramaturgy, and Stage Management.
- We continually adapt our program to meet the needs of the professional entertainment industry.
- Students are trained in their emphasis while also being urged to discover themselves creatively, with courses offered in directing and playwriting and double-emphases possible.²⁶

As a BFA theatre program, training students into the profession is a clear goal. What we program and how we program it helps our students train to become actors, designers, dramaturgs, and stage managers. As professors, we select a season to determine the course our students’ educations will take. As an institution, we are committed to training dramaturgs and other students to discover themselves creatively. In the profession, dramaturgs are not only production or new play dramaturgs, they are also literary managers and help select seasons. If we want to

²⁶ “Why Choose OU Helmerich School of Drama?,” University of Oklahoma School of Drama, accessed March 12, 2024, <https://ou.edu/finearts/drama/why-drama>.

train dramaturgs to be professionals and be ready to meet the needs of the industry, then a class on artistic programming helps us achieve our mission.

For student dramaturgs, participating in some way with our season selection process is meaningful pedagogy: it prepares them to become freelance script report writers and prepare for internships in literary management and artistic leadership. For students who wish to pursue careers as directors, artistic producers, or theatre managers, an upper-division elective in season selection that intersects with our own programming process is also meaningful pedagogy: it helps them prepare for future careers and programs not offered as specializations at our institution. The theory of season selection could be contained to a classroom experience, but as we know from the praxis of putting on shows on our mainstage and laboratory stages, ranging beyond the controlled environment of the classroom into the complexity of the theatre season itself is essential to our training model.

We agreed that teaching a lab-like class on season selection is meaningful pedagogy for BFA dramaturgs and interested students. After making this decision, we had to think about the pedagogy of the class itself. As researchers and co-instructors, we pondered professional training in literary management and professional training that benefitted all School of Drama students, regardless of emphasis. That ideation resulted in the following learning outcomes for the course:

- Identify aspects of playscripts most relevant to season selection, planning, and execution at university and regional theatres.
- Define institutional parameters and limitations for theatrical production and explain their relevance to season selection.
- Analyze playscripts and appraise their institutional fit.
- Produce concise, accurate, and compelling literary management reports and presentations.
- Sketch potential sequences of scripts for a season of theatrical work and deliberate the merits and challenges of each sequence.
- Design a curatorial project that demonstrates competency in the art of critical selection.

- Develop ease, precision, and confidence when presenting ideas and asking questions.

Our goal was to create a class on artistic programming that pedagogically engages students and faculty members in a dialectical mode of training, like the mentorship model practiced in production work at our institution. Another goal for the class was to strengthen the critical thinking and deliberation skills of our students as artistic citizens. We wanted a chance to grow our collective discernment.

Season, Sequence, Script: Structuring and Teaching the Art of Selection

In the fall semesters of 2022 and 2023, as a response to the institutional season selection challenges outlined above, we co-taught a course called “Season, Sequence, Script: The Art of Critical Selection.” We wanted students to develop competencies in literary management, artistic leadership, project curation, and institutional outreach by getting a behind-the-scenes glimpse into the pedagogy and dramaturgy of institutional programming. We also wanted to help increase accountable time for critical thinking and deliberation on season selection in our department. For us, *accountable time* has a double meaning: it is time that is accounted for in the sense of labor and a time to be held accountable in the sense of justice. Our hypothesis was that strategically expanding the number of hours devoted to season selection would grant us needed slow time to think deeply and make better critical interventions for our institution to plan and carry out an artistic season.

Each semester, before the class began, we asked faculty and staff members to share the name of plays they thought we could produce in the upcoming season. While this still required faculty and staff members to volunteer their unaccounted time and expertise to contribute titles, we thought we would reduce some of the variability in their labor by clarifying the ask for a single title per person. This inclusive, volunteer-based call to participate resulted in the

submission of twenty-four play titles in the first year and nineteen in the second. We also sent out a Qualtrics survey to students to submit play titles they thought we should consider for our season and to tell us *why*. Adding the clarification of telling us why we should produce a given play greatly lowered the response rate from students: out of approximately one hundred students enrolled at our institution, eleven submitted plays in the first year and two in the second. Like our request of faculty and staff members, we were asking students to volunteer their time to think, but unlike faculty and staff members, we were asking them to fill out a form that asked them to answer questions in depth. This friction to submit titles no doubt contributed to the low response rate (apart from the fact that students do not have a paid imperative to solve the riddle of season selection like faculty members do). Nevertheless, the proposals offered higher-quality depth and rationale as to what makes the student excited about the prospect of producing a particular play. In our experience, the tradeoff of having fewer, yet higher quality submissions suggest the questions asking for depth of critical thought are worth asking. The way the request of play title submission interacts with the person making it is another opportunity to tactically slow things down and increase the time to think critically.

Yet increasing the time for individuals to reflect prior to suggesting a play title is not enough on its own to generate more critical submissions. These play titles must be seen and reflected on in their totality, to reveal the unconscious biases programmed into the status quo. For example, out of the first eleven faculty and staff play title submissions in Fall of 2022, only one faculty-submitted play (*Everybody* by Branden Jacob-Jenkins) was written by a person of color, and none of the eleven student submissions were written by a person of color. This result is not surprising for a predominantly white institution, which is why accountable time is vital for season selection. When we reflected on this disappointing data, we were able to critically

intervene and add more racially diverse voices to the pool of submitted titles for students to investigate in our class. Out of twenty-four final faculty submissions, six ended up being written by people of color. Slowing things down allowed us to *see* some of the programming biases built into the status quo. Of which there are more, another major one being that only twelve of the thirty-five play titles under consideration for the first year were written by women.

Before classes started, we also collected institutional numbers necessary for season selection. From the Performance Area, we compiled demographic data of the junior, sophomore, and freshman BFA Acting Emphasis students. We wanted a clearer idea of the number and kind of roles needed to be addressed at season selection to ensure a more equitable casting process during season planning and production. From the Design and Production Area, we solicited calendar, material, and labor numbers, to gauge what each production slot could reasonably achieve within current capacities while preserving the health and well-being of every worker. All this information was essential to establish an intersectional roadmap of our collective needs or the “given circumstances” of our future seasons.

Our course structure followed 2 “H” principles: *hype* and *hypotheticals*. We did not want students to think of season selection solely as a numbers game or condition them negatively toward the problem-solving aspects of the process; after all, creativity benefits when it is informed by joy first. Thus, we prioritized hype in the earlier stages of season selection and let hypotheticals manifest later in the investigative process. We did this by endowing our students with the title of “hype ambassadors” and asking them to find the artistic potential in each play title. Rather than approach plays from an angle of mistrust, we encouraged students to enter into artistic conversation with them on a wave of curiosity. They ultimately channeled their encounters with plays into literary reports in which they outlined the institutional needs required

to successfully produce a given play in either our university mainstage theatre season or in our lab experimental season. Students would then condense the information from these reports in PechaKucha format,²⁷ which they would present to the class. Following these presentations, we would engage in critical discussion as to which plays we were “hype” about and why. Over the duration of the course, the students had three primary assignments: two producer reports that are then presented to the class as two PechaKucha slide shows, and a final project that could be one of three options—a full season pitch for next year’s season, a pitch for a new theatre company, or a directing proposal for a student-directed project.

Another guiding philosophy for the course was the concept of *hypotheticals*. We asked students to entertain various “what ifs,” such as “what if we set the show on a smaller stage” or “what if we reconsider the gender attributed to the character roles”? By learning to question assumptions about what “works” as a School of Drama production, students expanded their perceptual range of what is possible. We wanted students to dive deeper than the shallow waters of likeability to make their assessments: hypotheticals helped them on their journey from “I don’t know if we should stage *X* play because it’s a little outdated,” to “what does this play demand of us in order to stage it, and do we have the materials, facilities, workers, and time to do it?” Furthermore, students started asking themselves larger questions of institutional identity, such as, “how does this play reflect our collective values as an organization?” To think through the frame of hypotheticals allowed students to become attentive listeners and invest in the potential of shared ideas, regardless of who pitched them. Reading through a play someone else proposed and seriously assessing it involves deep, critical engagement with someone else’s imaginary; in

²⁷ PechaKuchas consist of twenty slides with a duration time of twenty seconds each for a total of six minutes and forty seconds of presentation. “About PechaKucha,” PechaKucha, accessed June 27, 2023, <https://www.pechakucha.com/about>.

the learning-making community of a drama school, hypothetically “yes-and-ing” creative ideas is a primary way of building trust.

Hypotheticals also were essential to structuring our class discussions after the students had presented their chosen plays. They worked in small groups to make a hypothetical selection of plays for our mainstage and laboratory season, and then they tested those hypotheses with each other. Students had to practice being in charge and making choices that affect the training and labor of others. Of course, from a perspective of power, students knew they could influence a season but never dictate it, since they have no voting power in faculty meetings where our institution currently decides its season. We explained the power structures that affect them as students, us as faculty members, and the School of Drama as an institution. Thinking hypothetically became a way of demystifying dynamics of power, making visible the good-faith efforts faculty members make when deciding a season. To have them think like faculty members, even if hypothetically, made them more sensible to the challenges of season selection beyond the limited experience of being a student. Hypotheticals continued to be a way of connecting to the minds, structures of thinking, responsibilities, and creative potential of others.

To expand student perception of season selection and humanize key decision-makers at our institution and beyond, we invited artistic directors of local theatre companies in Oklahoma City and the Great Plains region to class, the artistic producers of University Theatre (the Dean of the College of Fine Arts) and the Lab Theatre (the Director of the School of Drama), and faculty members from the Performance and Design and Production Areas of the School. These leaders shared their respective processes and thoughts when curating a season of artistic work. None of their testimonies revealed a simple path toward selection—and that was great! Throughout the semester, students craved a simple, streamlined answer to all the woes their

hypotheticals created. They wanted a one-size fits all producer report (i.e., checkboxes and short sentences), the perfect play and playwright (i.e., morally pure, thematically salient, and all-inclusive), and a formula for programming success (i.e., a guarantee that everyone will love to work on a selected season and watch it). Meeting with artistic leaders allowed students to share time, space, doubts, and enthusiasms with people in power and see that there's nothing fully programmatic about season selection, only a sense of institutional mission paired with a set of creative and produciorial best practices. No matter the amount of deep thinking, slow deliberation, and accountable time an institution invests in selecting and making a season, it cannot predict the final outcome or minimize all unknowns. Nevertheless, the affordance of spending time together to entertain hype and hypotheticals is the surplus value of connection and collective work.

One discovery in this class process was that the range of our imagination spans the limit of our experiences. For some students, it was hard to think through a play's design and production scope, because they are not used to solving theatrical challenges beyond those presented by embodiment. For others, it was hard to gauge the potential of a show on our stages, because they do not frequently entertain questions of adapting material to match institutional capacities. For all students, it was hard to think about the labor and material demands of a play, because they are not in charge of scheduling load-ins, ordering materials, hiring staff, or worrying about infrastructure. For us as faculty members, it was hard to recognize our own biases in what we found to be dramaturgically meaningful and the outsize role selecting a show can play in the morale of the student body. This is why intentional moments of interaction between students, faculty, and staff are necessary at the level of season selection: all our perspectives reveal multiple aspects of a play that are needed to be thought about before we

commit to it in our season. Taking our time in selecting shows and collaborating on this selection, even with differentiated levels of power and influence, is an investment in ourselves, in our value as a deliberating cohort.

What also became apparent in this course structure is the importance of the archive. After assignments were submitted, we would upload all PechaKuchas and producer reports to a folder that all faculty could access and review. These became the primary documents that we would reference not only for our University Theatre season selection process, but also as the primary plays for consideration in the Lab season. So, if the work done in these reports and presentations lacked depth, it hurt our collective ability to make informed decisions. That is, spending more time on thinking does not necessarily result in deeper engagement with material: while facilitated by accountable time, deeper engagement ultimately emerges from an inclination toward curiosity, wide range of theatrical training and experience, and the writerly skill to communicate with clarity and intention. To nurture a rich archive that intersects faculty and staff expertise with student experience consequently requires us to train our students to be critical thinkers through practical exercises in literary management, dramaturgy, and artistic leadership.

We created “Season, Sequence, Script” as an experiment, a hypothesis for institutional accountability to the dramaturgy of our season as well as its labor requirements and pedagogy. We also created the class so students could exercise critical inquiry to open up to possibility rather than shut it down. The class allowed us to practice flexibility while simultaneously giving visible shape to our collective values as a learning community.

Conclusion: Accountability and Learning Take Time

Some sobering math: the number of accountable hours we met as a full School of Drama faculty to collectively deliberate and select a season at our institution in the 2021–2022 academic

year? Three to four, plus the three to four additional meeting hours the Design and Production Area dedicated alongside the Directors of the Schools of Drama, Dance, Music, and Musical Theatre, and the Dean of the College of Fine Arts to agree on the University Theatre season and production calendar. This is by no means insufficient or inefficient use of time to program a season, which the many years of successful season planning and producing at our institution affirm. Additionally, there are unaccounted hours here, for the people who invested time in critically thinking about the season prior to the meetings. But when we zoom out and consider that we had six to eight hours of accountable deliberation time to program a University Theatre season of nine shows and a Lab/Studio Theatre season of six, that means we dedicated about half an hour to deliberate each show as an institution. From a literary management and pedagogical perspective, the institutional time dedicated to open deliberation of a large season in comparison to the time we use to plan and execute that season invites further investigation.

Structurally, an executive/administrative approach to season selection suggests that meetings are about saying *yes* or *no* to ideas with a few *maybes* here and there, simply because there is not enough time scheduled to deliberate without having to make conclusions at an hour's end. That is, to best execute these meetings, those involved in said meetings must spend time away preparing their suggestions and responses to ideas in either unstructured or siloed time. While conceivably efficient, this *modus operandi* encourages us to think of season selection as something that "happens on the side," as homework. And what happens when folks come to these meetings without having had the time to do it? What selections do we risk making? While it is true that the greater season selection process for the entire College of Fine Arts depends on the many closed-door meetings between each school and their faculty, staff, and students, which includes many hours not accounted for in our "math," there are still not enough accountable

hours dedicated to collective work on a larger, deliberative scale. At least within our own School of Drama faculty meetings, there is little to no room for expansive critical thought because we meet mostly to execute rather than hypothesize vital functions of our institution.

In addition, because season selection is a matter of pedagogy, we need more hours of deliberation to be able to unify the training needs of our students, depending on their area of emphasis. Our students need variety and complexity in their challenges: different scales, genres, periods, movements, languages, cultures, roles, imaginaries, relevance, audiences, and theatre spaces. To make these challenges equitable pedagogical training and labor across the institution demands more accountable time. How are we keeping track of our selections across time? When do we reflect on this process and conduct curriculum review? Furthermore, how are we thinking about the intersection of positionalities in season selection?

Teaching our season selection class showed us as co-instructors that making intentional time to meet, using the credited structures of the university toward our favor, to keep us accountable, can make the process of season selection more critical and tactical. Rather than increasing our chances of having to be reactive during season planning and production (problem-solving on the go), lengthier, engaged deliberation helped us anticipate challenges and commit to these hypotheticals with intentional hype.

Some hopeful math: in the last two years, fifteen students took “Season, Sequence, Script,” for a total of twenty-four hours of in-class time, which does not include the structured asynchronous time required to type up thirty producer reports and create thirty PechaKuchas. If it takes three hours to read a play, six to eight to write a report, one to two hours to create a presentation, and seven minutes to present it, that is about fourteen hours more *per play*, so 420 hours-worth of dramaturgical depth. In total, these 444 hours of dedicated and tangible collective

time directed toward season selection represents a considerable increase from the six to twelve of the last two years (faculty meetings and University Theatre meetings). And it is accountable time in the sense that we had to be responsible for it as course instructors, for producing knowledge, for guiding students through the work. The first time we taught the class, students took it for one credit; the second time we taught it, we increased the worth to two credits to match the amount of time and effort students put into the producer reports.

Hypotheticals for growth: circulate our debates more widely, perhaps recording our sessions and continue to share our results in all-school and faculty meetings. Have the students in the class visit others to gauge interest in works and solicit more titles for consideration, thus becoming true ambassadors of hype. Rethink the corporate structure of our Qualtrics survey and create intentional and accountable time within the academic calendar to fill it out.²⁸ Determine how staff members can benefit from having more direct voices in season selection without adding to their labor pile. Have a deeper pedagogical understanding of Design and Production curricula and address the Performance bias of the course given its two area instructors.

Hype to share: after the explorations of the last two years, “Season, Sequence, Script” has been added to the BFA Dramaturgy curriculum and has been bumped up to official course status within the School of Drama (it used to be an experimental special studies class). We are also considering suggesting the course to the Arts Management and Entrepreneurship minor offered by the College of Fine Arts as another way to train the curators, artistic directors, and producers of tomorrow. Finally, thanks to the extended interactions with our colleagues in the intentional time and place of our classroom, as well as the executive sanction of faculty meetings, the

²⁸ At the University of Michigan, for example, thanks to the involvement of every faculty member, students fill out a season selection brainstorming survey within a designated period at the start of class, across all classes. Myers, “One Approach to Student Engagement in Educational Season Selection.”

School of Drama has created an ad hoc Season Selection Committee to further structure our programming process. The work continues! We believe selecting a season should be as exciting, collaborative, and pedagogical as putting that season on its feet. Students, faculty, and staff can share the joy and labor of season selection, if differentially, considering our institutional positionalities. We can make gains in learning, teaching, and programming—slowly, together.²⁹

²⁹ We would like to acknowledge and thank our academic/artistic community at the OU School of Drama, without whom we could not have written this article: the fifteen students who took Season, Sequence, Script; the School of Drama faculty and staff; Performance Area Coordinator Judith Pender; Design and Production Area Coordinator Renée Brode, who offered us indispensable advice; Interim Director Jon Young; current Director of the School of Drama Yuanting Zhao; and Dean of the College of Fine Arts Mary Margaret Holt. We would also like to thank the following artistic leaders and their companies: Kathryn McGill at Oklahoma Shakespeare in the Park, Kelly Kerwin at Oklahoma City Repertory Theater, Kevin Lawler at Great Plains Theatre Commons, and Paul Michael Thomson at The Story Theatre. And finally, to OU again, for financing our travels to the Mid-America Theatre Conference, where this paper emerged in Spring of 2023 (shoutout to the conference, panel coordinator, fellow panelists, and, of course, this publication, peer reviewers, and editors).

Appendix

Below is a sample of our Audition and Casting Spreadsheet at the University of Oklahoma’s Helmerich School of Drama (student names and play titles have been anonymized). Students are separated by graduating class rather than class rank, as some students graduate at different times than the peers in their cohort. This spreadsheet exclusively lists BFA Acting Emphasis students rather than all students who audition for productions as the BFA students are a pedagogical priority for casting. For readability, there are only a few students listed on the model spreadsheet below, whereas our official spreadsheet lists between twelve to twenty students per class.

KEY				
Cast - Lead(ish)				
Cast - Ensemble				
Understudy				
Not Cast				
X - Didn't Audition/Wasn't at OU				
Cast, then Dropped				
AP = Academic Probation				
Name	Jane Doe	John Doe	Allie Jones	Marcus Smith
Fall 2020	Rent		Corpus Christi	Corpus Christi
Spring 2021	Still Life with Iris		Academic Probation	
Fall 2021	Cloud 9	Bluefish Cove	Nicholas Nickleby	Nicholas Nickleby
Spring 2022	Angels in America	Much Ado	Much Ado	Much Ado
Fall 2022	X	The Seagull	X	X
Spring 2023	Animals out of Paper	Mother Courage	X	Mother Courage
Fall 2023	X	Inappropriate	Romeo and Juliet	Inappropriate
Spring 2024	X	Plano	X	X

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