

Welcome

Scott Adams, Chair of the Theatre Arts Department at Sierra College welcomed the group. Introductions were made verbally and then also in the Zoom chat box. Scott reviewed the role of the Technical Theatre Advisory Committee for Sierra College and Folsom Lake College.

Scott then shared updates on Sierra College Technical Theatre activities, including about the transition to online instruction, which has been challenging. The department had expected to be able to offer some hybrid classes this fall but learned this summer that all theatre courses would need to be taught fully online. Faculty member Debra Hammond noted that while several learning objectives might be met online, a few sticklers remained that required on site activity.

Scott noted that the department participated in the October virtual Sierra College Preview Day for prospective students and was pleased with participation. The department made and shared a video about the program, which can also be used in the future.

Regarding shows, given the current online situation, not much will happen in that area until, hopefully Fall 2021 which may be some kind of hybrid situation. Details around PPE and other related measures would need to be worked out.

Thor Tivol described new equipment received through CTE funds including LED tape and drivers. He thanked Bobbie Odehnal and Musson Theatrical for their support. He noted that the College now has a Network IO Gateway. Now the College can have both relays and switches and an actor can flip a light on stage and it would automatically trigger the light cue. All the equipment is what one might find on touring venues, so it's important to help students become accustomed to it, along with software that students would need to know as professionals.

Thor then explained that the department received the ETC Conductor, that monitors the entire lighting network and logs any issues that might go wrong during a technical rehearsal or performance. The system has the capability to notify users via e-mail of any problems that may have occurred.

Lastly, Thor described the remodeling of the T-2 classroom, for which we received an \$80,000 budget. The entire project should be completed by summer of 2021. Some of the remodeling includes a new paint job making the space usable for both performances and classes, stage drapes that will line the walls, a mirror on one side of the room for stage movement, new lighting, sound, desks, chairs and a new floor to lay down over the existing one, most likely a sprung floor.

Ian Wallace of Folsom Lake College then began his update to the group. He noted that FLC and the Los Rios District are 100% online this term save for a few specific programs. So the Theatre department is not offering their stagecraft class and advanced technical theatre classes (similar to Sierra). This fall the department is instead offering a set design class which was easier to transfer to an online environment.

Folsom Lake College will be 100% online in the Spring too and so again will not offer the stagecraft class but will offer the lighting design class. As it will need to be 100% online, they are working out how to adapt to that change. They plan to focus more on the programming design and theoretical end of things. They will create some kits that they will send to students at their homes which will include a lighting instrument and a small base so the students can at least focus a light in their own spaces, though it's not the same as being up on a ladder or on a grid.

The decision has not yet been made about summer or fall 2021.

This Fall (2020) the department has decided to do an online production of *Comedy of Errors* where the actors will have green screen kits in their houses. It will be 90% live. Prop kits were sent to students and the student sound team, was led by Eren. A team of assistant stage managers were assigned to a couple of actors to keep track of their virtual blocking in their own spaces. Each kit sent out had a carpet with green squares so that David, as director, could move the actors around in physical relationship to one another. Ian shared a video trailer of the production.

Ian added that the production was a big learning process and that everything one takes for granted in person takes ten times longer and is ten times harder.

Following Ian's update, Sierra College Career Education Liaison Heidi Lyss shared a presentation on virtual work-based learning options. Short virtual project-based internships also known as micro-internships (4-40 hours) are one option and could be wrapped into an independent study class. Industry speakers are an option and many opportunities not normally online are available now, from all over the world and many are free. There are options that appear in Eventbrite for example.

Another virtual work-based learning option is to bring in someone from industry with a question to be addressed, a problem to solve and ask students for their input or to work on the problem. Competitions, contests and entrepreneurial activities are additional options.

Focusing on a portfolio concept for students, even if components of a portfolio are stories about what students did in a given situation can be helpful, along with work samples (costumes), and photographs of work.

Also focusing students on 21 century work skills would be helpful as almost all employers name these general skills as key.

During the industry discussion, John Kelly said he has been dealing with OSHA regulations and requirements and testing and that the commercial and sports industries are doing most of the work now. Everything else is at a dead stop. So people are trying to get ahead and learn what they'll need to do when places open up again. We may have to wait eight months to a year before we can get into physical space again. The local 50 is closed down. All decisions now involve county, state, and federal officials and as IATSE members are employees they have to wait. The employees are being encouraged to take new classes and offerings. But it's dismal and everyone got put out of work at the same time. It's key to try to stay physically healthy so as to avoid injuries when going back to work in the future.

He added that a lot of people in the industry have moved on to other places and are just trying to survive.

David Pier said that the industry and work with touring artists is going through a shakeout. There's one music agency that has been in business since the 1930s but is now out of business. Major agencies are laying off all their agents. He also sees that as the arts tend to be under-capitalized, it's challenging. The Harris Center has pretty much zero funds available but is fortunate as the Center can go into hibernation mode. Other places with larger endowments are able to keep their staff working and things going on. The industry, which was already ahead of the curve in working on equity issues continues to do so.

David Pier added that safety is also a big issue. For example, ticketing will need to change and is changing to avoid people coming into contact with one another. Some people are trying to see how full you need to make a theater to run a show but for the most part theaters were already running thin and the economics don't really work. There are some people doing interesting things like San Francisco Jazz is offering virtual concerts and are doing well in attracting audiences from a much larger base than before. And they have put out archival tapings they have made over the years and turned them into a product.

Donna Flor noted that the Mondavi Center has been keeping a skeleton staff working at the theater and had to make a quick transition turning off the spigot for live performances and basically had to become a film company.

The Mondavi Center had to navigate artists contracts as all were set up for a short run, not long-term digital rights. Some artists were interested, others not.

The Center did partner with other facilities to present all of Shakespeare's plays. They also recorded a couple of concerts for donors and students that turned into a five-camera shoot, and their staff ingeniously worked it out and edited all down to a very professional looking concert.

Herb Garman noted that UC Davis cancelled the Winter and Spring performances. They might record more theater for online viewing but already there is so much competition online. For some of their well-known groups they created a recording in their own space and put it out for marketing to their normal groups and yet had about 30 instead of the normal 350 attend. With production costs, it's like paying people to attend the actual events. So the Center is looking at least to keeping their name out there to continue to market to their donor and patron base. On a more positive note, UCD is sounding like they do not want permanent separations from staff for winter and spring quarters, so the Center is working on plans to find ways to keep almost all production and administrative staff on at least for this fiscal year.

Donna Flor added that if someone had told her a year ago that she would become knowledgeable about streaming platforms she would have laughed. She said that if there is anything to tell students, it is to be open to everything right now. She is not sure she could start out now and people who are, need to think about connections between different genres, industries, to be open and flexible.

Herb Garman shared that the two gentlemen leading their video production work were the master electrician and the head stage manager, so each had to learn a whole new world and quickly take on that project with minimal staffing. Flexibility is important.

In response to a question from Thor Tivol about transitions, Deanna Trethewey said that she was using green screens as a student at SDSU thinking about how to use them creatively. Acting and then dealing with props and lighting leads to actors becoming on their own crew. That's a limitation she's running into. As a lighting designer, she can bring mood and atmosphere and creativity.

Erin Beatie said that professionally she was able to put together a show called The Summit, a nine-part series. And that they just filmed the fall production for their high school - Bear River in Grass Valley - and it will air 12/4-12/12. Their spring production will be *Cinderella*, also filmed. It's tough in the high school setting as they don't know how to do a lot of video editing. For each minute of footage, you're looking up to an hour's worth of editing time which is hard for people to wrap their minds around. There

is a fund available via the state for buying equipment due to the Covid situation, at least at the high school level and possibly the college level. She was able to obtain funds to buy some cameras and tripods.

Jason Searles noted that he has been in live performance during his entire career and that the online experience can be lovely but it's not the same experience. It doesn't have the energetic exchange of a live experience. If we need to wait a year, we need new solutions, like outdoor theater.

Scott Adams followed up on outdoor theater and how it could work from an audience perspective. The challenge is that when it comes to crews and actors, they still have to be crammed backstage and onstage.

Steven Schmidt noted that Cal Shakes is an outdoor theatre and that even this summer they could do some amount of socially distant events though they were not producing. But they wanted to make the space available to groups that were trying to do socially distant events outdoors. Outdoors is a powerful option right now but just because it's outdoors it doesn't make it safe. You still have to factor in social distancing and reduced capacity. If Cal Shakes sells 100 seats a night when the theater is designed for 500 seats, they still will lose lots of money on the production. So a lot of the work happening right now is thinking about 2021 and how they can budget to be flexible.

Steven added that one of the most important things we can teach students right now is how to handle a crisis. And this is hard not only for students but for all of us. And Steve said that he encourages folks to be open and honest with their students about the challenges that we're facing and how to approach these times.

Steven added that the other point he wanted to make was that theatre and performing arts has a history of unsafe culture. And he feels that we've been going through a hard process over the last 10-15 years to shift the culture to one that prioritizes safety and have made good progress. So it is important not to throw all that out the window.

The discussion then moved into one about concerns expressed by Eren about theatre being a privilege during a time when protests are going on.

Dave Pier shared the perspective that one could also consider that theater is not so much a privilege as a right to participate in arts as a human being.

John Kelly added that we're talking about theater lives, about people. The virus has stopped the world and we need to take our time and do what we want to do if we can safely.

Scott Adams then asked about the student experience.

Catherine Morris noted that as a counselor for visual and performing arts students, one common thread among all the different areas is that students are becoming depressed and are withdrawing from classes. She tells students that this is an unprecedented situation and students don't need to necessarily rush through many classes. They can slow down. And they can go out and have other experiences as the combination of schooling and life's experiences and journeys is what makes people great musicians and actors and human beings.

Debra Hammond added that her students are concerned that they will be having a harder time getting jobs since they were educated during the time of Covid.

Christian Johnson said that as someone who hires students, he definitely wouldn't react like that.

Debra said yes, she tried to reassure students.

Christian said that it's all about communication. He tells students to think about a process, to talk about it, answer it. If stagecraft students never touched a table saw or a drill press, that's fine. He's not going to let any of them touch either without talking to him or a carpenter first anyway.

Eren said that she knew some students who for them slowing down made sense, and for others like her, she liked to continue at a faster pace. But it's key for the curriculum to match the hours it is supposed to and not to overwhelm students especially.

Catherine says yes, some students don't learn as easily online as in person. And that it isn't necessary to take 15 units and get in and out in 2 years.

Eren agreed and noted that it would be helpful to send that message to Admissions because when she goes, they emphasize the two years of fee schooling and they scare students with the need to get in and out in two years.

Madison Forst said that she has asked her father for help in stagecraft as he knows tools and she looks for video demos. Practical experiences for students would be helpful and outside resources too. She has noticed the pressure from Admissions too. She does not feel that pressure from professors.

Erin Beattie shared that theater is a practical art, and that we are storytellers. We are people who do amazing things based off of all the different things we have in our lives. We can put together pertinent stuff for people. So if we're not able to put on a show

right now that's live, yes that's not great for us. However we are still able to put forward information that is pertinent to people's lives. We tell those stories that we are able to put together. Theatre arts is actually necessary because it puts in perspective all the elements in life.

Mari Takao (a Sierra alum and current Sac State student) shared that because not all theatre classes can be offered, it is making it hard to graduate which is especially challenging for her, as an international student.

Deanna Trethewey said she would graduate from SDSU soon and wanted industry advice on what to do. The group then discussed other lines of work right now with Christian Johnson noting that he knows many are doing work in installation.

John Kelly said even consider volunteering. Ed Lee said it's good to keep an eye on the overall landscape of theater because it's changing. He has noticed that a lot of the larger theatre companies are playing defense and smaller theatres are going on the attack, doing things like radio plays.

Sierra student Chris Busby shared about how he has responded to the current situation by moving his focus to online networking with people, specifically in video game design which interests him from an audio and composer perspective. Chris described that after entering a competition he met someone with the University of Chicago's theatre where they worked on live streams where actors could interact with an audience live in the moment. So it was a different kind of production, not pre-recorded, not like a movie, and not like a video-game. It was more like a tabletop game that brought in everything from sound and set design to acting, writing and directing.

Scott thanked everyone, followed by Ian Wallace who noted that FLC will host the spring meeting on Zoom.