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PERSONAL STATEMENT

Overview

Since I received my Ph.D. in Drama in 1997, I have been privileged to teach and write under the auspices of two excellent universities, Minnesota and Arizona State. In both settings, I have also been given numerous and important opportunities to "preach what I practice" in my own research: at Minnesota, in the broad area of "Theatre of the Americas;" at ASU, in Theatre History and Culture Studies.

As suggested by my current position, my research and teaching draws heavily on new work in cultural studies, which in recent years and across a variety of disciplines has undergone a significant shift in focus: from the perception that culture is a cluster of phenomena to be read or interpreted, to one that views culture as something that is performed, produced and, by extension, consumed. Within my own discipline, a cultural studies approach views the relationship between the dramatic and performance text on the one hand, and the socio-historical context on the other, as mutually constitutive. My work on Mayan theatre in Mexico and Latino theatre in the U.S. addresses these broad issues by focusing on how theatre helps to produce cultural identifications at the local level that reverberate nationally and internationally.

I have published and presented on these issues in a variety of venues, summarized as follows and described in more detail below:

- 1 book in press
- 1 book in process
- 4 articles in print (3 refereed, 1 invited to submit)
- 2 essays in press
- 1 essay under review for an international anthology
- 2 book reviews in print
- 27 presentations of research and teaching practices (19 refereed, 7 invitations, 1 public report to funders)

This work has also been integral to my teaching at Arizona State, at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Since joining the faculty in August 2001, I have taught more than 300 students live and reached an additional 250 more via the on-line theatre history course I facilitate and supervise. As honors advisor for the department, I have also helped to mentor some of our brightest students in their research and theses. I have also taken very seriously the role of mentor to our graduate teaching assistants, both in the classroom and in the development of their own teaching philosophies. Perhaps most significantly, I am developing a proposal for a new Ph.D. concentration in theatre and performance of the Americas which has the potential to establish a new discipline, administratively located here but spanning the hemisphere.

In the realm of duty and service, I am or have been a committee member for 10 of our graduate students (including four dissertations); serve as Honors Disciplinary Advisor for our departments (and reader for three theses); and serve on a number of departmental committees and community outreach programs.

My work in bringing Mayan theatre to the Southwest, and in serving as advisor to the first Teatro Caliente festival of new Southwest performance, described in more detail below, illustrates a commitment to a notion of Service driven by research and intended to extend its reach from the academy to the larger community.

In the following sections I describe in more detail my accomplishments in the areas of Research, Teaching and Service, and describe my plans for the future at ASU.

Research

My first book, *Contemporary Theatre in Mayan Mexico: Death-Defying Acts*, is in production at the University of Texas Press, and is due out in early 2004. It is the first full-length work to study how groups self-identified as Mayan are using theatre to open up new spaces for political dialogue in Mexico, and treats this theatre seriously as both art and as action. My study situates such theatre in terms of Mexico's increasingly neo-liberal definitions of democracy, in the wake of the ongoing Zapatista rebellion -- which will mark its tenth anniversary in the year the book will appear. Thus, it is extremely timely and important precisely at this moment in both Mexican and U.S. history.

The second, *We Are Here and This Is Who We Are*, is a closer look at one of Mexico's most controversial indigenous theatre companies, the Laboratorio de Teatro Campesino e Indígena. Over the past 30 years, the Laboratorio has built a controversial and international reputation for employing indigenous Mayan performers in works they collectively develop, as well as in plays by Shakespeare, Aristophanes, Lorca, and Mexican playwrights, among others. In my study of this company, I look at questions of performance and cultural identity from the multiple and extremely contested positions occupied not only by the troupe's non-Mayan leaders and facilitators and its indigenous performers, but also by U.S. American and European researchers as well. Southern Illinois University Press has expressed an interest in publishing this study as part of its prestigious "Theatre in the Americas" series.

Both of my books cross disciplinary boundaries and will be of interest to readers in theatre history and criticism, performance and cultural studies, anthropology, and Latin American studies.

While Mexican indigenous theatre has been the focus of my book-length projects, I have also written a number of articles and conference presentations exploring issues of cultural representation and production in U.S. Latino/a theatre and Native American performance. I have also had the opportunity to reflect on how this work relates to pedagogical practice, which I share in national and international conferences. My curriculum vitae provides the titles of those articles and presentations.

Teaching

In my undergraduate and graduate theatre history and criticism classes, I incorporate my research into my teaching in at least three ways:

1. By introducing a cultural studies perspective into the study of theatre history (specifically, by juxtaposing dramatic and performance texts with other texts and with sociopolitical and historical contexts)
2. By including more texts and contextual examples from this hemisphere and south of our nearest border; and
3. By offering graduate level seminars in theatre and performance in the Americas that expands students' understandings of "the Americas" as both a locus of inquiry and a cluster of practices (artistic, historical and critical).

Both my research and teaching, then, aim to realign the canon of theatre history, literature and criticism toward a more hemispheric awareness of their trajectory, and toward a different understanding of theatre not merely as a mirror that reflects the dominant values of an age, but also as a tool in the shaping of those values in that age and over time.

This represents a rather radical departure from most theatre history/criticism curricula, which are typically more chronological and evolutionary at the undergraduate level (teaching the history of the art form largely through its innovations); and Eurocentric at both undergraduate and graduate levels (in terms of the scope of inquiry and the methods employed to pursue it). At present, I am active in three curricular initiatives designed to situate our department and College at the forefront of this movement away from traditional academic programs:

- 1) a new Ph.D. concentration in Theatre and Performance of the Americas
- 2) a re-vamping of our undergraduate curriculum in theatre history and literature to reflect the notion of theatre as a force in world history;
- 3) a new, College-wide concentration in Post-Disciplinary Arts Theory

The first initiative will increase ASU's international stature by offering what will be the only Ph.D. concentration so designated in the country, and I am most energized to be involved in its creation.

When possible, I have attended faculty workshops to improve my teaching; most recently, I participated in ASU's "Embedding Diversity in Higher Education: Best Practices for Teachers, Learners, and Communities." Finally, I have also left my own comfort zone to incorporate more technology into my classroom practice, largely via web-based supplements and judicious use of PowerPoint presentations; and have worked over time to incorporate more active-learning strategies into my in-class time and in the work I assign for outside of class. Examples of these strategies are included in my Teaching portfolio.

Service

In addition to shouldering my share of the departmental service load, there are three areas in particular I wish to highlight as illustrative of the ways the strands of research, teaching and service are interwoven in my professional life.

In February of this year, I arranged and coordinated the visit of the Mayan women's theatre collective La FOMMA, about whom I have written extensively, to perform at the annual Lincoln Center for Applied Ethics Conference, "Ethics when Cultures Clash." This not only became a

central component of my graduate seminar in Theatre and Performance of the Americas, it also drew hundreds of audience members from the campus and general communities and grew into a state tour for the group that resulted in international publicity.

At the community level, I continue my work as liaison and a play reader for the Heard Museum Theatre project, a unique program that seeks new voices for new programming that uses live theatre to educate Heard visitors about the peoples of the Southwest.

Finally, I have also been active as an advisory board member in the planning for a new, Phoenix-based performing arts festival called "Teatro Caliente," which debuts October 2003. It brings together performances – music, dance, theatre, storytelling, spoken word poetry – from more than twenty artists in the Southwest; several of them are or have been associated with ASU as students or faculty. As the event grows, I hope to increase ASU's formal involvement with this festival, by incorporating critical forums and moderated discussions about them.

This festival, my work with the Heard Museum, and my work on bringing La FOMMA to this side of the border exemplify my commitment to integrating my various commitments to research, teaching, and service. Within the department, I am also committed to improving not only the quality of the students we attract, but also the quality of the experiences they have while they are here.

Goals/ Future Directions

My first goal is to complete my second book on Mexican indigenous theatre.

At the same time, I want to increase the reach and profile of our graduate program, by building the Ph.D. in Theatre and Performance of the Americas. As mentioned above, this is a unique degree concentration that will both attract unusual scholars and produce important new knowledge about the rich histories and continuing practices of performance in this hemisphere.

A parallel project will be to broaden my exploration of theatre and performance that flies "under the radar" of cultural power brokers by looking at the phenomenon of women's participation in the private theatricals of the 19th century U.S. household, in terms of how it helped constitute societal attitudes toward gender, ethnicity, and religion. (A wonderful collection of these texts is housed in our own Special Collections.) Of course, academic discourse has a tendency to put such work back on the radar, and so a tangential exploration will be the nature of the academic production of knowledge about such work.

In the realm of teaching, I want to increase the academic rigor of our offerings at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, through continued work on curricular revisions and admissions requirements. I also plan to participate in pedagogical workshops that will help me to take full advantage of the technology available and new findings in best classroom practices.

Overall, I see my research, teaching and service continuing to expand and re-integrate in the development of the Ph.D. concentration, which will increase the number and kinds of knowledges ASU produces; provide new opportunities for students to pursue here and abroad; and deepen the impact of this work in other areas of public practice that constitute our larger community of shared endeavor.