

Theatre BFA The Academic Business Plan

In order to facilitate the design of an academic program or support facility as well as to determine its feasibility, benefit, cost, and ongoing viability, it is essential that a business plan be developed as early as possible in the development process. While the general form of a business plan as used in the commercial world can serve as a guide for a plan in academia, there are some characteristics of the two sectors that are different. In general, an academic business plan should have the following components.

An **Overview** that provides a brief description of the program or facility being proposed. Emphasis should be on the capability that will be gained. After reading this section, the reader should have no question about just what is being proposed.

Binghamton University's Theatre Department has always had a strong BA acting program rooted in realistic acting technique and strong analytical skills, with courses taught by theatre faculty specializing and/or certified in Stanislavski, Meisner, Linklater, and other premier methodologies. Superb acting students have graduated from the program. As the field/career path of our graduates has changed over time becoming even more competitive, students need to graduate with a wider range of skills in order to be considered for all types of work. Students who intend to follow entertainment careers must be offered the option of training not only in acting (which we will continue to provide at the same level of quality), but in dance and singing as well. With these skills they can expand the range of roles for which they are qualified, increasing their chances of professional survival.

In the past few years, the Theatre Department has geared its hires to support this new direction and is now ready to support a conservatory style degree such as the BFA in Musical Theatre. The department consists of voice and music specialists who will provide singing technique, musical skills, and an understanding of vocal health. The dance courses, taught by dance faculty, will cover dance technique and performance styles essential to contemporary musical theatre. Additionally, holistic courses in musical theatre performance will synthesize acting, singing, and dance to ensure that the performer is successful in these areas simultaneously, stressing the importance of a unified performance that will make graduates of this program clear and strong musical theatre storytellers. With the faculty and staff we now have or are already approved to hire, we will be able to cover all areas and produce a well-rounded musical theatre artist.

A **Context** analysis that examines the current situation of the academic unit and suggests how the proposed development can utilize existing resources and structures to good advantage. In general, it will be easier and more cost effective to build on existing strengths rather than undertake development in an entirely new direction.

The Theatre Department currently has three full time positions whose skills cover the major areas of musical theatre. In addition, it has acting teachers, historian theorists, dance teachers, and an array of staff and faculty who make up the technical/design component of theatre production. All courses necessary for the Musical Theatre BFA are already being taught by existing teachers. To fulfill the BFA requirements, a student will take all required courses in the BA program, plus additional musical theatre, music, and dance courses (currently offered but not required) and repetitions of existing classes. Singing lessons are now offered as electives, and musical theatre students will take them as requirements every semester. Dance classes will also be required for several semesters. We anticipate that as the program reaches capacity, additional requirements such as Musical Theatre History will be included. We intend

that by staggering when these classes are offered, these classes can be covered within existing faculty loads. If the program were to be wildly successful, the need for additional faculty support may arise, but as currently imagined, all academic resources for this program are currently available. The musical theatre faculty and the faculty of the department have been developing this curriculum for several years based on successful existing programs. We feel that when implemented, this program can be highly competitive amongst professional musical theatre BFA programs. Adding to this program's desirability is Binghamton University's closer proximity to New York City when compared to other programs in the SUNY system that are in the western reaches of New York State.

A **Benefits** statement that details what the sponsoring unit and the University will gain from the establishment of the program or facility. It is essential that a clear connection be drawn between the new development and the existing mission and goals of the unit and that the associated improvements in program be examined. It should also be made clear how the program or facility relates to the mission and the strategic plan of the University. Since this is an academic plan, it will be necessary to address separately the aspects of education, research, and service.

A Musical Theatre program serves the strategic priorities of Binghamton University by fulfilling our commitment to "creative activities that shape the world" as is becoming increasingly standard in premier public universities throughout the country. This program will further augment the university's cultural impact on the local community and will reach the global community through the artistic work created throughout the careers of its alumni.

A musical theatre program will encourage young artists to engage in interdisciplinary conversations with their peers to create work in dialogue with the world around them. Binghamton's program will provide students with skills demanded of the profession and position them to succeed in this highly competitive career. Demand for this level of training is not currently filled by any Eastern NYS SUNY school. As a rigorous liberal arts and professional institution, Binghamton is well equipped to meet these demands.

Many students pursue undergraduate education seeking professional-level musical theatre training while also pursuing what their parents may call a more "practical" major. These students consider our lack of a musical theatre program a "deal breaker" and therefore do not apply to this university. (Binghamton faces a similar struggle with students wishing to attend a university with a football team.) Offering a musical theatre major will surely deliver more high quality applicants to the university. We anticipate that once we have established a desirable musical theatre program, we may need to hold auditions for entry, as is frequently the case with BFA programs, but rarely BA degrees. Having a program with stringent barriers to entry will elevate our perceived status to that of a more desirable theatre program.

A **Cost** statement that outlines the capital cost of establishing the program or facility. This should also provide as much detail as possible concerning the source of the capital or one-time funds that will be required. When appropriate, there should also be an analysis of intangible costs such as lost opportunities and political liabilities created. Also included should be an outline of human resource costs. What type and level of personnel are envisioned as being involved with the program?

Costs associated with this new major will be primarily non-monetary. There may be occasions where the department feels it should produce an additional musical in a given season, thereby resulting in an overall decrease in the number of roles for non-singing/dancing students in a given year.

Producing musical theatre productions requires additional rehearsal spaces, which are a commodity in the Fine Arts building at Binghamton University. It is possible that the availability of these space to non-theatre students will be decreased by the introduction of the program, which will be a welcome change to how departmental spaces are utilized.

We may find that the new program will necessitate that some classes be offered less often in order to adjust to the shifted demands and in order to keep faculty loads consistent. .

An **Operating Plan** that specifies not only what will be done but who will do it and when it may be expected to be done. The period of the plan will depend upon the program or facility being developed but it would generally span at least the first five years of existence.

Costs that may come, with the implementation of this program, would fall under the categories of additional piano tunings and more regular maintenance of the dance floors. It is not possible to determine these costs exactly, but we would plan for them to be accommodated in our OTPS budget.

A **Financial Plan** that is keyed to the Operating Plan. This should include an analysis of the ongoing cost of operation and identify the sources of the funds that will be required. Obviously, the plan must show a surplus or break-even bottom line but it may include a subsidy from the sponsoring unit.

This program will not require any additional funds to support its ongoing operation. The Theatre Department already includes in its budget such costs as regular piano tunings, refinishing floors in dance classes, production budgets (rights, scenery, costumes, props, etc.), etc. These are currently paid for through our OTPS budget and we intend to continue doing so after the implementation of the Musical Theatre BFA.

We are currently working toward replacing the dance floors with modern synthetic floors through the Provost office and may eliminate those upkeep costs in the future.

A **Design** that provides as much detail as possible about the program or facility.

It is clear that all of these elements are inter-related. It is not likely that one section can be developed first and then followed by the others. Rather, development of this plan will, of necessity, be an iterative process with preparation of one section being dependent upon preparation of another, which may well be dependent upon preparation of the first. Also, it is likely that some of the data needed to complete a section will not be available. In that case it is essential to make a best estimate rather than not complete the plan. Where estimates are used, it should be indicated that it is an estimate and some statement should be made concerning the probable accuracy thereof.

