THEATRE DIV 3

Hampshire College Theatre Program

a guide for students

Introduction

This Advisory was prepared for a wide range of students investigating areas of theatre. The guide would not have been possible without the careful reading and suggestions of the theatre faculty and staff. Many students have also contributed to the range and topics covered here by their example, interests and suggestions.

As part of an experimenting college, the Theatre Program is always reevaluating the strategies, purposes and goals of the educational process. It is always wise to check with your advisor for the most up-to-date information on revisions or changes.

Table of Contents

| Committee Memberships | Page 2 |
|---------------------------------|---------|
| The Contract | Page 4 |
| The Project | Page 4 |
| Advanced Educational Activities | Page 5 |
| The Production | Page 6 |
| Some Production Details | Page 7 |
| Keeping a Journal | Page 8 |
| A Retrospective or Portfolio | Page 8 |
| The Final Meeting | Page 9 |
| Theatre Div Ill Checklist | Page 9 |
| Theatre Faculty and Staff | Page 10 |

Division III is the culmination of your academic career. It has a special and honored place in Hampshire's philosophy and you should be congratulated for achieving this high measure of success. Now that you have a theatre committee member (or chair), you are about to enter the final phase of your Hampshire education. The Division III is an exciting time of focus, production and reflection. The theatre faculty and the Theatre Program welcome you and we look forward to working with you.

To make your Division III experience as positive and rewarding as possible, please spend some time reviewing the following explanations and suggestions.

Committee Membership

If you don't have a committee yet, don't worry. This guide may help you to begin that process by telling you a little more about it. Some of the material in this advisory will be similar to the material you received in Division II (some of the same phrases and paragraphs even. Thank Goodness for cut and paste!). It bears repeating. This advisory may help answer some of the many questions that are bound to come up in the development of your Division III theatre project.

Certainly, all the questions will not be answered here. Because each student has the freedom to develop an individually tailored project based on past experiences and interests, there will always be unique questions and challenges. Your Div III will not be like anyone else's! But we may be able to point to general guidelines and principles that can help you develop your ideas and goals. You should begin now to talk with other students who have filed their Division IIIs as well as with the theatre faculty. These are important sources of information and guidance.

The Center for Academic Support & Advising (x5498, located at the Lemelson Center & open during the semester M-F 8:30am-4:30pm) is also an important source of information, particularly about the newest college regulations on Division III. http://www.hampshire.edu/academics/index casa.htm Anne Downes is the Senior Associate Dean in charge of Division III advising.

Having a theatre faculty member on your theatre Division III is the first important step. As you know, we use an application process for this step. You may just have gone through it. There are times in each semester when we announce the application process on the daily digest and e-blast. These dates are listed also on the wicked important dates list. You can secure application forms in the early fall and late spring semesters online at http://www.hampshire.edu/academics/24275.htm or in the IA office in the Writing Center (next to Emily Dickinson Hall). The application is fairly simple and intended to give the faculty some guidance in how many people are applying and how best to use our resources. We will post the results of the application process about a week after the deadline on the door to the EDH box office. Once the list is posted, and you find you name, you should very quickly make an appointment with the faculty member to discuss your plans.

Most faculty members have regular office hours and post them on their doors or hampedia.org, where you may also sign up for a meeting time. The Theatre Program is part of the Hampshire College School for Interdisciplinary Arts, and the IA office also has a list of everyone's office hours so you can call our Administrative Assistant Natane Halasz (x 5824) and ask her. Because office hours are so important in the Hampshire process (individual conversations with students are at the core) you need to schedule this time carefully. Plan ahead. It's really hard to get last minute meetings unless there is a cancellation. It is also very easy to get caught up in the production and rehearsal process and forget to see your faculty. Don't let this happen!

Sometimes there is the question of knowing the faculty member sufficiently to work on a divisional committee together (either Div II or III). It also works the other way. The faculty member will usually want to know something about the skills and promises of the student. Usually, divisional committees are formed out of the classroom experience between the student and the faculty member. And that class should be central to your concentration and interests. This is the best way for the two groups to

work together. You know something about each other and are both confident in the expectations and promises for a successful experience.

Remember, that each faculty member is charged by the College to write a formal evaluation of your work, and it becomes part of your transcript. The Div III is an intense, highly personal experience. The project can be isolating as well as exhilarating. The faculty member needs to be in careful contact with you during this final year.

During your first meeting with your Div III advisor, don't forget to exchange contact information. Ask them how they prefer for you to communicate with them and when/how often they would like to meet. Your committee member needs to know how to get in touch with you often pronto! What is the best way to reach you? your phone number? your email address? Your P.O. number? Where can messages be left? Is this getting too personal?!

Once you have your theatre faculty member, you need to also find your other member. Division III contracts need two Hampshire faculty members. They do not need to be from the same School though that is often the case at this advanced stage of learning. There can be cross-filings; that is, one member from the School of CSI, for example, and one from IA (theatre). You may also have taken courses at other campuses (during your Div II) and developed a strong learning relationship with another faculty member there. If so, you may want to invite them to be on your committee as a third member.

Many theatre faculty at the other schools have served on Hampshire exams (committees) and are familiar with our way of working. In fact, they seem to really like the process! However, it is not part of their job and so you should approach them with a touch of humility and understand if they say that they would rather informally advise you on specific questions. The other word of caution here is that the bigger the committee, the harder it is to find a time for all of us to meet! Scheduling can became a big headache so anything beyond 2-3 faculty members becomes especially difficult. You'll soon learn this... because one of your first tasks will be to schedule a full committee meeting as soon as all members have signed the contract. Also, you should anticipate regular full committee meetings with the full membership of your committee throughout your Division III. Culminating with a final meeting at the end of your final semester at which point the committee will have had a chance to review your work and ask you questions about it prior to (hopefully) passing you.

Division III meetings usually last about an hour. Use this time wisely. You might also want to create an agenda and send any reading material a couple of days before to allow faculty a chance to absorb it before the meeting. Remember, too, that you will often be meeting with the faculty members of your committee individually, often related to your concerns around their particular areas of expertise.

Hampshire is a small college. Probably that is why you have stayed here. There is a level of personalization to the interaction and learning that is special. It is also an intense experience, for you and for the faculty members. That is why Hampshire offers a generous sabbatical policy for the faculty (time away to recover and do other work). How does this affect you? Well, the best laid plans and all that. Be sure all your committee members will be available BOTH semesters of your Div III, and if not be sure to make arrangements for coverage.

Sometimes, after the results of the theatre application process are posted, a student will ask, "Why did I only get one theatre faculty member on my committee?" The answer is that in some years, the number of students filing Div II and III exceeds the capacity of the faculty. In those years, the faculty will often distribute themselves to one per committee as a way of meeting the student demand. At other times, faculty, who are after all people (amazing!) will have a particular interest in a project or production that matches their own areas of interest. If the divisional filing is a theatre concentration, every effort is made to include at least one theatre faculty on that contract filing. Cross filings or filings outside the theatre concentration guideline will usually get only one theatre faculty member.

The Contract

You will probably have discussed the shape and character of your Div III contract with your committee in the last weeks of Div II. The nature of the project, the scope of the investigations and the particular form the investigation will take will preface the actual writing of the Div III contract. The Hub will make your Div II final evaluation available to your Div III committee as soon as they have officially signed onto your committee. There is often information there that will be useful in crafting the Div III parameters. This is especially important if you are working with faculty members different from those on the Div II project. Unlike Div II, Div III is a return to a specific question or activity. It is project-based. While Div II was a wide-ranging exploration and investigation, Div III is a return to the intensity of a single project or idea. It may seem deceptively simple: writing a play, facilitating an ensemble-based project, designing a play, directing a play, acting in a platform piece or doing a research paper. But you are devoting a year of preparation and planning to this endeavor. Probably, your committee will want you to do some form of reporting out the experience. This could be another retrospective, another portfolio, a journal or some documentation of research in addition to documenting the actual project. This level of specificity is best discussed with your Div III chair in the early stages of contract filing. Remember, though, that this project is the focus of your Div III studies. It is not an independent study of the kind you may have done as part of your Div II. The supervision of your Div III committee must be central to the work of the project. All phases of this work contribute to the collective enterprise: an evaluation of your work as a theatre-maker as well as a critical thinker and/or educator.

Again, remember that this is a contract, an agreement between you and your committee. This is your commitment to the year's investigation and report, and your committee's commitment to following you through the project and evaluating you. If you want to make changes, you must file a new contract. And there are filing deadlines. If changes are to be made, check first with your committee chair. There is a strict limit on the number of changes to the contract and a point beyond which no changes may be made. A good advisory here would be to check with the Center for Academic Support and Advising (CASA) about the series of Div III deadlines. Post these dates where you can see them daily. Do not assume that your chair will call you with friendly reminders. These deadlines are your job now. You are Div III.

Finally, be sure all committee members get a copy of your latest contract. Yours, of course, is the most important. But those sticky other contracts keep distracting the faculty! A personal copy is a healthy reminder!

The Project

Most Div Ills in theatre are centered around the investigation or production of something. They may involve designing something, writing something or performing something. They may also involve the investigation of a specific social or culture issue (such as class or race or domestic violence) through the lens of theatre. They may involve devising (and/or performing) original dramatic material based on or inspired by interviews, or biography, or children's books, or imagination. They may be created in collaboration with specific communities outside of Hampshire. The common thread is that your Div III is grounded in theatrical practice. And it should be of a scope and breadth that justifies a year of your labor. Presumably, it is a major undertaking that exacts the best skills and most focused talents you have developed during your time at Hampshire.

Your Div III need not necessarily be associated with a fully realized production. It may in fact take the form of a research project, teaching a series of creative drama workshops, directing a staged reading of original drama, performing a series of characters as a study of your own actor training, or creating a project which is completely unique as a means of experimenting with theatrical form or theory. Sometimes, the fact that the Div III is the final production at Hampshire leads folks to want to do everything perfectly – or to put all of their ideas into a single show. This is understandable.

However, it can create unnecessary tension and can also take away from the joy of working with friends to tell a story you love. Try your best to see your Div III as one show in your ongoing development as a theater maker. And trust that there will be many more.

You should begin your planning by reviewing the Theatre Program website. There may be new information there that will affect your Div Ill project plans. The website can be located at: http://www.hampshire.edu/academics/theatre.htm. In particular, check the schedule for other productions, classes or guest artists. Plan any presentations or productions so they don't clash with your colleague's work. If possible find ways to collaborate or cross-publicize with other Div IIIs – the Spring Division III Theatre Festival provides one vehicle for such collaborations.

Sometimes, if you are doing a production, especially as the focus of your Div III project, it is hard to remember that the production is also an individual experience for other people. In this way, theatre Div Ills are very different from other discipline Div Ill projects. Say, for example, your Div is in NS or CSI, it usually means you are doing a project and doing a write up (a research paper, perhaps) for your committee. The work is yours alone. You go to the library when you want, when you need to, on your time. You set your own schedule and your own expectations. For a Div III in theatre, it is somewhat different. You are working with other people. You are depending on them to help you complete your Div III. They are depending on you to provide them whatever experience they need for their academic work. Beginning students may be working with you on your production as part of a class requirement. Or as part of their Div II. Or even as their Div III also! There is a lot of interdependency here. Theatre people really need each other to get something accomplished. Sometimes this makes things harder. But remember your production has become a learning environment for other people, other students. Sometimes it's easy to lose sight of this and think of everything as "your project" to the exclusion of others. It's equally easy to forget that the entire resources of the theatre (the staff, the building, and the equipment) have been put at your disposal. For that reason, the Theatre Board and the faculty are very concerned about keeping that environment as safe and productive and creative for everyone involved. This is one of the reasons we expect Div Ills in production to have done the minimum course work and the minimum crew work. You need to know what you are doing and how to work in an informed and productive way with the other people in the theatre community, [see the checklist on page 9 for details].

Since the project is at the core of the Div III, the chair is usually the person most closely working with you. Occasionally, the nature of the project is such that another member of the committee is better able to guide your work, make sure that this shift is understood by everyone by bringing it up at a committee meeting. In any event, your chair will write the evaluation for your Div III.

Advanced Educational Activities

The College requires two "advanced educational activities" as part of the Division III. The nature of these activities should be discussed with your committee early on; usually around the time you plan on filing or at least after you have gotten your committee together. Often, students will use this opportunity to take the advanced classes they always wanted to take. Sometimes the course may be outside theatre specifically but it is still a chance to engage intellectually with an important idea. Sometimes it's just good to get away from the main project of your Div III and have some reflective time or distancing. New and exciting upper-level courses are being offered all the time. But be particularly careful with taking off-campus courses to satisfy this requirement. The deadline for submitting your work to the committee before graduation is usually in early to mid-April. This is well before most classes end. If you take a Five-college course be sure to advise the faculty member teaching that course that you will need some form of evaluation and assurance that you have done the work of the course prior to the end of the semester. At the final meeting for your Div III you will need to show your committee that you have completed the course satisfactorily.

There are some courses that are particularly designed to be a place for Division III students to

workshop their projects in a given area, (the Division III Theatre Seminar is one such course, but depending on your project it may be more relevant to take the CYL Div III Seminar, or join a Creative Writing Div III Workshop for example.)

Some students have used involved internships or professional work as an advanced learning activity, (for example a semester at NTIs advanced acting training, or an internship with a community-based TYA organization).

Another possibility is serving as a TA (a teaching assistant for a particular class). Many Div III students in theatre use the TA experience as one of their advanced learning activities. This is particularly satisfying for us and for them, for example, when students who began their Hampshire theatre careers with "Where are the dressing rooms?" or "From Dramatic Play to Creative Drama" return in their final year to help teach it.

As you can see, there are a lot of options for the advanced educational activities. Think carefully about this area and talk early with your committee.

The Production

Div IIIs that incorporate a full production are exercises in leadership skills as well as flexing artistic muscle. It's a presentation of your advanced theatre work, but remember that it is also a period of exploration and experimentation. Here you will put into practice many of the ideas and approaches you have studied in Div I and II. Div III is not about discovering how to do productions. It is about implementing and testing skills you have acquired. That is why there is a list of expectations for a Div II in theatre. We take taking the practice of theatre seriously. It is hard work and requires particular sets of skills and talents. These cannot be taught or learned in one year. So please check the expectations for Div III at the end of this advisory. That list reflects what you minimally need to have done prior to doing production work for Div III.

For your Division III, production work means carefully planning and recording your artistic process. That is, what did you go through to get to opening night? Your committee needs to be in on the process with you. This is where the real learning takes place. And this is where your committee belongs. You need to carefully work out a series of intersections with your committee in your process. In essence, you are now taking charge of your process. You initiate meetings with your committee and you remind yourself of deadlines.

This process will begin with a series of conversations with the members of your committee about what you are planning to do on the production. If you are writing, it will be especially important to set up a series of meetings to discuss the various drafts and narrative developments. If you are directing, it will be important to discuss script interpretation, dramaturgy and rehearsal strategies, as well as audition approaches (ask for our separate guide to auditions). If you are acting, it will be important to discuss character development, exercises and actor body/voice work. If you are designing, it will be important to discuss approach, metaphor and logistics. The key here: start conversations early and consistently with your committee as you plan your involvement in the production. What is really important to your Division III is how you made decisions along the way. What obstacles did you encounter? How did you resolve them? Did the solutions work? What did you learn?

You will also need to set up a series of interactions with your committee in the rehearsal process. For example, this may mean the faculty members of your committee seeing an early rehearsal to observe your process as a director. It may mean seeing a model of the set and discussing the blocking issues. It may mean seeing the first rehearsal off book to observe character development at an early enough stage to discuss other options. Usually, the committee members will want to see at least three different rehearsals or stages of the process. One is early (what is planned), one is in the middle (what's happening now and how should you be thinking about it) and one near the end (a dress or

tech rehearsal). The committee will also want to see at least one performance. Remember when a faculty member comes to a rehearsal it is as a guest. The faculty member is there as an invited guest (either yours or another member of the production team). The rehearsal process is still yours. It's your space and your production. But try not to treat the faculty member as some bug that just invaded. Remember, it is awkward for the faculty member as well. We've been through this too. So be polite. Be courteous. Be prepared. Maybe even introduce the faculty member to your cast and crews. Oh, and maybe a seat for the faculty member at the rehearsal wouldn't be so bad either. Also, just because a faculty member is at a rehearsal does not mean they are necessarily looking at YOUR work. They may be there at the invitation of someone else on the production team. You need to schedule your own faculty visits. Back to the bug metaphor - we only have two eyes! After each faculty visit, a debriefing visit would be useful. This will give you both a chance to discuss what is happening in the production and rehearsal process and, also, what remedies or successes need to be encouraged or explored. This is a private time and confidential. It is also extremely helpful. Sometimes, depending on the time of the semester, it's hard to schedule these meetings. It may be useful to set up an email exchange to facilitate this feedback. Talk with your committee about what form of feedback would be useful.

Following the production (remember to reserve seats for your committee!) you will want to again meet with your committee to discuss the production. This final decompression is especially important in a learning environment, where what we did is one way of learning how we can do it better next time. This discussion may be a separate meeting from your final Div III meeting or concurrent with it.

Often playwrights will identify the writing of a new script as the focus of their Div III. This is particularly exciting when the script will be staged in some way. That may involve other Div IIIs also and so will become a truly community-centered collaboration. But there are caveats. Don't try to write your play in January and have it done in the spring. It just won't happen. Trust us! One of the most important lessons of a Div III is: Even if you think you have plenty of time you don't! What appears to be so manageable in September starts taking time and effort. The clock starts ticking. And before you know it, it is February. On the other hand, starting in September with a focused, manageable project and working through it carefully and intensely can be a real world experience. And very rewarding. You can finally focus your energies and attentions in a way you have never been able to do before. The creative process can move to the front of your thinking.

Not all Div IIIs will be production-based. Resources are limited, as are production slots for the season, so by process of elimination some people will not be doing full theatre productions. In fact, their projects might be better served with a workshop, an informal staged reading or general research. You should discuss your options and choices with your committee early (remember that slotting for the season begins the academic year previous!)

Some Production Details

The mounting of a production means you will encounter at least four major groups of people. First, you will be working closely with the faculty as members of your committee. Second you will be working with our wonderful theatre staff, the Technical Director Amy Putnam and the Costume Supervisor Beth Smolin. Third, you will be working with the Theatre Board as the executive producer of the season. Finally, you will be working with the box office.

Doing a theatre production includes identifying the person who will be the Producing (slotting) Agent. This is, in the first instance, the person who started the whole thing. It could be a playwright wanting to produce that hot script. It could be a designer wanting to work on something more challenging. It could be a director who always wanted to do absurdist theatre. There are infinite reasons for being a Producing Agent. This person is the catalyst. The Producing Agent starts it all with an idea. That person then collects a group of like-minded people to work with. Then a proposal is submitted to Theatre Board for Season Slotting. If slotted, you become the key contact person for

the production. If more than one Div III is working on the production, you may identify one person as the producing agent or you may share the responsibility. You will be reporting, weekly, to the Theatre Board on the progress of your show or some member of the production team will be. This is a time to share concerns or problems that have arisen. The Board is usually able to come up with suggestions for solutions or can recommend someone else to see.

The supervision of the theatre spaces is a shared responsibility. Theatre Board is responsible for several areas (Check the handbook again, just as you did when you were doing your Div II). The theatre faculty is constantly evaluating the spaces for updates in equipment and methods. They are also responsible for maintaining a healthy and productive educational environment for all students in a production. The staff technical director is responsible for implementing the College policies regarding fire safety, public safety and building codes. The technical director is also an important person for early consultation regarding your production. You will have several meetings with this office. The same is true of the staff Costume Supervisor. Get to know these people. They are there to help you. If you are a designer, these two offices are critical to your success.

Please carefully proof your posters and programs – as you can see from our lobby area in EDH these become the public face of Hampshire Theatre long after you have graduated. Have your poster and program checked by a faculty member BEFORE you go to the printers! We've been doing this kind of editing for years and it will really help you out. By the way, you have learned by now whether it is "theatre" or "theater," haven't you? And you DO know that the overarching rule of any publication is that a single word cannot be spelled two different ways in the same document?

You may be asked to write evaluations of other people who are working on your show (some many be using the show for their CEL1 or CEL2 so you'll need to record the hours that they worked). Please be very sensitive to this. As an advanced student you are in a special position to evaluate younger students with care and insight. You have a special perspective and skill at this point. Please take this responsibility seriously. And please do the evaluations as quickly as possible. Others will be depending on you just as you depended on them when you were doing you Div II work, for example. It is very hard to secure an evaluation from someone who has graduated.

There are lots of other details to mounting a production. They can't all be covered here. These are just some of the more common problems that people have encountered. The key to an effective and successful production is consultation with as many people as you can. Also read the Theatre Handbook (again!) and the Production Styles book (again!) for important and useful information.

Have a GOOD SHOW!

Keeping a Journal

You probably learned, as part of your Division II and especially as preparation for the final portfolio and retrospective of your Div II, how valuable keeping a journal was to both recording that process and then reflecting on it. The same is true of the Div III. It would be very useful for you to continue keeping a daily journal of your experiences, frustrations and achievements as well as your breakthroughs and insights. There is a kind of double-tracking going on here. You are doing the project and you are reflecting on it at the same time. Amazing!

A Retrospective or Portfolio

Since the Div III is project-centered, there will be some form of reporting out the research, the process and the conclusion of this investigation. While the actual project is the centerpiece, the ability to reflect on this project intelligently and coherently is very important to the committee. There is, however, a shift from the process of Div II. Div II concluded with a retrospective and portfolio that

were central to the conclusion. In Div III, the project is central to the conclusion. That conclusion may also have a retrospective or some other reflective documentation. There will also be other documents. Programs, class plans, prompt books, dramaturgical research, actor journals, floor plans, drawings, renderings, or models may complement the final meeting and discussion of your project with your committee. Again, it would be wise to talk with your committee early on and come to some agreement on the final reporting out of the project.

The Final Meeting

The final meeting is a response to the year-long project. Conversations will focus on what was learned, what shifted, how the perspectives have changed. A portfolio or retrospective may prompt this conversation. There will probably also be some discussion of general areas of skill and competency and areas that need to be addressed. Probably there will also be some discussion of what happens next. Graduate school? Training programs? Or time off? All have value and place.

The timing of the final meeting is especially crucial. The College requires this meeting to happen at a specific time before graduation. It is not like Div II! Central Records will need to assess the final pass form, which must then be forwarded to the full faculty for a final vote on conferring degrees (pretty heady stuff, huh?) This is the highest responsibility of the faculty. There are no exceptions here. All work for the final meeting must be ready if you are to graduate. An earlier, as well as on-going, conversation with your committee chair will help maintain the schedule. Of particular note is the issue of the advanced educational activities. If you have taken courses off campus, remember that evaluations and grades must be available at the final meeting. You will not receive a pass form without them. Enough said. By now this is not your first experience with deadlines.

Faculty must write the evaluations for Div III in a very short period of time (not over the summer or winter break as with Div II) so timing is critical. Then there's the food and laughter again. But now there's something special added: THERE'S THAT BELL TO RING!

Theatre Div III Checklist

If your Div Ill is theatre-based and you are working on productions, you need to have completed the following courses at the Div II level:

- ✓ A course in acting or directing
- ✓ A course in theatre for young audiences or social change
- ✓ A course in design
- ✓ A course in playwriting or play creation
- ✓ A course in theatre history and/or dramatic literature

If your Division III is theatre-based and you are working on productions, you also need to have completed the following learning activities at Div II level:

- ✓ A running crew (costume, props, stagehand, light or sound board operator)
- ✓ A management crew (technical director, assistant director, stage manager or master electrician)
- ✓ A front of house crew (house management or publicity)
- ✓ A building crew (set, lights or costume)

During your Division III studies you will need to complete the following:

- ✓ Two advanced educational activities
- ✓ A project portfolio or retrospective if agreed to by the committee.

Hampshire Theatre Faculty and Staff

Ellen Donkin: A theatre generalist (covers all areas, but has primary interests in playwriting and theatre history)

Room: ASH 107

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Peter Kallok: A theatre generalist (covers all areas, but has primary interests in technical theatre and design for theatre).

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Djola Branner: A theatre generalist (covers all areas, but has primary interests in performing and directing)

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Natalie Sowell: A theatre generalist (covers all areas, but has primary interests in Child Drama and theatre for social change)

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