

Final Assessment Report

Dramatic Arts

Undergraduate Programs

(reviewed 2023/24)

A. Summary

1. The Department's Self-Study was considered and approved by the Senate Academic Review Committee (ARC) January 29, 2024.
2. The Review Committee consisted of two external reviewers: Kim Solga (Western University) and Cole Lewis (Toronto Metropolitan University), and one internal reviewer, Tim O'Connell (Brock University).
3. The site visit occurred April 17-18, 2024.
4. The Reviewers' Report was received May 28, 2024.
5. The Senate Undergraduate Program Committee (UPC) response was received June 6, 2024.
6. The Department response was received September 9, 2024.
7. The Dean, Faculty of Humanities, response was received October 18, 2024.
8. Annual Implementation Reports will be submitted from 2025-2028.
9. The next Cyclical Academic Review is scheduled to take place in 2031/2032.

The review was conducted under the terms and conditions of the June 2023 IQAP. The Self-Study was prepared prior to the ratification of the 2023 IQAP.

Program Outcome Categories:

Based on their knowledge of the discipline, the content of the Self-Study and the interviews conducted during the site visit, the Review Committee gave the programs the following Outcome Categories:

Program(s)	Excellent Quality	Good Quality	Good Quality with Concerns	Non-Viable
BA in Dramatic Arts (Honours)	X			
BA in Dramatic Arts (Pass)	X			
BA in Dramatic Arts with Major	X			
BA in Dramatic Arts, Co-op (Honours)	X			
Concurrent BA/BEd				
Combined Major Program (Honours, Pass)	X			
<i>If you have chosen 'Good Quality with Concerns', please summarize the specific concern(s) briefly below. If you have chosen 'Non-Viable', please summarize the specific reason(s) below.</i>				
NOTE: Our understanding is that the concurrent BA/BEd was not subject to this review and so we have not ranked it. We understand that the BA in Dramatic Arts' courses play a significant role in the BEd, and we find those courses / that contribution to be of excellent quality.				

Executive Summary:

The Reviewers wrote:

DART's programs are an exemplary example of alignment with Brock University's Strategic Plan. DART boasts a long history of excellence in areas like curriculum, research, and community engagement, all directly contributing to Brock's strategic goals. With increased support from Brock University, DART is unequivocally poised to become a leader in the field of Performing Arts as well as a cultural cornerstone for the Niagara Region.

Strengths of DART's Program:

Exceptional Faculty & Curriculum: DART's faculty are highly qualified researchers with significant research projects who share a focus on social justice and anti-supremacy in the arts. The program's curriculum redesign offers a world-class education building upon faculty research interests and disciplinary needs, graduating citizen artists who are future leaders in the field.

High Demand & Student Success: Applications to DART are exceeding those of Brock's Business program, indicating strong program value that deserves attention. The high quality of DART's curriculum provides a strong foundation in theory and practice ("praxis"), preparing students for diverse career paths.

Innovative Program Design: DART prioritizes "praxis" pedagogy, fostering experiential and transdisciplinary learning as demonstrated through the Posthumanism Research Institute and the new Summer Institute of Performance Research. The program demonstrates innovation in areas like curriculum development, community engagement, and anti-supremacist values.

Thriving Research & Community Engagement: DART faculty produce high-impact research with significant dissemination. The program, rooted in Niagara, actively engages with the local, national, and international community, offering new perspectives to enhance the vitality of the region.

While some resource limitations exist, as per our final recommendations, DART's overall strengths highlight its potential for even greater achievement with continued support from Brock University.

B. Program Strengths

The reviewers noted the following strengths:

DART is a collegial, non-hierarchical community of faculty, staff, and part-time instructors who obviously respect each other and feel able to sit together in difficulty and challenge in order to find solutions to shared problems. This is one of the current cohort's greatest strengths; we consistently witnessed this respect and collegiality and sense it is a major reason that the current curriculum redesign is proceeding so well.

DART has a long, established history of work in anti-oppression—stretching back at least twenty years—something the current team is building on as it prioritizes anti-supremacist teaching and learning in the revised curriculum. Hiring toward this goal has actively taken place and the team is clear that it will focus the direction of future searches (for example, for a Black Cluster hire hopefully soon). The program's commitment to this work is genuine, shared across the entire team, upheld in school values, implemented in the curriculum, and has the potential truly to set DART apart among comparator programs going forward. Anti-oppression is commonly claimed by institutions but rarely put fulsomely into action - here, at DART, we witnessed that it is being put into action. For example, on page 42 of their Self-Study, they propose a new scale for curriculum mapping and offer a critique to Brock. We suggest Brock look to DART as leaders in actioning strategic goals related to fostering “a culture of inclusivity, accessibility, reconciliation and decolonization.”

DART is the second largest program within the MIWSFPA with a growing student population. We commend DART for prioritizing small studio classes that are scheduled in 5 or 6 hour time slots to enable “slow learning” pedagogy required to obtain curricular learning outcomes. Their programs offer flexible degree options, including a three-year, four-year, and Honours streams in Performance, Production, and Theatre Creation. Students benefit from significant industry partnerships from highly reputable companies such as Shaw Festival to local reputable companies such as Suitcase in Point (which is founded by DART alumni). Opportunities for students to work in and around the Niagara region are created through co-op placements, internships, and collaborations with theatre groups and arts organizations. We celebrate the high quality of DART's curriculum, research, and activities that is an exemplar of Brock's strategic priority and actions to “Enhance the life and vitality of our local region and beyond.”

DART's current curriculum redesign is making the very best of its existing human resources, pivoting away from applied theatre (with the departure of specialists in that area) and leaning into strengths including devising, climate justice-driven and ecocritical creation, playwriting, design, theory, strong production values, etc. It is important to note that the program was founded by Paul Thompson who was known for pioneering techniques in performance creation. The new stream in creation nods to the historical roots of the program and will have an exciting future, particularly given the new addition of Matthew Mackenzie (citizen of Métis Nation of Alberta) who is a nationally renowned award winning creator of theatre. The hiring of Jennifer-Roberts Smith as Chair is an outstanding strength and her influence is clearly felt in the thoughtful, creative, consensus-driven ways in which the

program has pursued curriculum redesign in order to ensure maximum staff and faculty buy-in.

DART's students clearly love and respect this program and its teachers; they emphasize feeling included in program-level discussions and having enormous appreciation for their teachers. We noted, along with them, that overall, communication within and across DART's sub-cohorts appears to be very strong and authentically pursued. Student success is also a strength with many alumni pursuing graduate studies and finding a wide variety of employment in fields related to their study, although we note that DART is in need of a system to better track alumni and additional staff support to communicate the significant student activities during study and alumni success stories after study.

Research at DART is laudable and worthy of note with a wide range of dissemination and knowledge mobilization through major creative activities, publications, and conferences. The Department is currently administrating just under \$6 million in cash and in-kind revenues and has external applications in progress or planned for \$2.5-3 million by December 2025. DART is actively working to enhance research capacity at Brock University and its success in doing so is evident. The SSHRC Partnership Staging Better Futures/Mettre en scène de meilleurs avenir (SBF/MSMA) is noteworthy and has, as the Self-Study shares, "established impact-focused, problems-based research collaborations across academic institutions and with non-academic partners." A peer-review forum was established through the inaugural Creative Research Exchange to develop and disseminate the work of staff and part-time Instructors. The Summer Institute of Performance Research, also developed in 2022, allows Brock to collaborate with community partners and share resources through a series of creative workshops. We support DART's efforts to submit a formal proposal for a new Centre inspired by the Summer Institute in 2024/2025. We applaud the significant research undertaken at Brock and encourage the University to amplify it.

DART's facilities are excellent overall, a signature strength. We note that the technology in MIWSFPA is in need of some updating and we have recommendations around this below.

C. Opportunities for Improvement and Enhancement

NOTE: Supporting/clarifying text was provided for each recommendation.

Recommendation #1: We recommend the current chair continue efforts to obtain additional Faculty positions that provide ongoing and predictable support to the curriculum delivery and research programs.

The Department responded:

The Department accepts this recommendation.

DART thanks the reviewers for noting that requests for faculty positions arise from and explicitly support the Department's mission, values, strategic goals, research, curriculum, and learning outcomes. We agree that both the delivery of existing curriculum and also curriculum expansion (see Recommendation 8) depend upon sufficient, predictable faculty resources, particularly in light of DART's current excessive dependence upon part-time instructors. (A small correction is needed to the reviewers' figures here: they note on p.11 of their full report that 30-43% of DART courses are taught by part-time instructors; that is in fact the proportion taught by FT faculty, with 57-70% taught by part-time instructors. This error is carried over by the reviewers from a typographical error

in DART's Self-study; DART apologizes for the confusion.)

DART appreciates the reviewers' encouragement to collaborate with the University to develop effective strategies for securing faculty positions in Black Canadian, African, and/or African Diasporan Theatre and Performance and in Scenography. As recommended, the Chair looks forward to consulting with the Dean of Humanities and the Provost for this purpose.

DART also notes that we will proceed with both position requests even if a targeted Black Cluster hire is not possible. Our commitment to increasing diversity among DART faculty applies to all positions, and we will fulfill this commitment by actively recruiting a diverse applicant pool, as we have successfully done with another non-targeted position.

The Dean of Humanities responded:

Recognizing that this is outside the purview of the current exercise, the Dean encourages the Department to follow the established practices for faculty position proposals. It is noted that DART's commitment to increasing the diversity of their faculty complement goes beyond a targeted hire, underscoring their interests in strengthening and expanding curricular offerings and perspectives.

ARC Disposition of the Recommendation

ARC acknowledges that the recommendation is worthy of consideration but outside of the Committee's jurisdiction. The Committee expects the Department to advocate through the usual channels for additional faculty positions.

No Implementation Plan required.

Recommendation #2: We strongly recommend that DART explore all available avenues to increase staff and administrative support, including avenues to make the current Theatre Technician and Production Coordinator full-time positions and receive support in Communications/Marketing.

The Department responded:

The Department accepts this recommendation.

As the reviewers note, DART's new curriculum explicitly prioritizes anti-supremacist teaching and learning, and experiential, work-integrated, community engaged teaching and creative research. These elements represent our recruitment advantage, since they differentiate DART from other undergraduate theatre and performance programs in Ontario; they are directly related to DART's national research profile as the lead program of the *Staging Better Futures/Mettre en scène de meilleurs avenir*s SSHRC Partnership (SBF/MSMA); and they directly support the University's strategic plan.

Developing the new models for undergraduate curriculum design and pedagogy that DART is undertaking as part of this mission requires active participation from all contributors to the creative research and learning environment. As the reviewers note here and in Recommendation 5 below, this means staff - and especially production staff, integral to theatre-making activities - have essential pedagogical roles, as well as essential roles as members of collaborating creative research teams.

Since curriculum is now delivered over all three terms (fall, winter, and spring/summer) - which increases the accessibility of the program, increases teaching, learning, and creative resources through co-production with resident professional companies, increases revenues through course enrolment and ticketed public events, and increases community engagement - continuity throughout the three-term academic year is also essential.

Communication about creative research, teaching, and production is also crucial at this point in the program's development: the program's student recruitment, faculty, part-time instructor, guest artist, and resident company recruitment, community and alumni engagement, and the University's national research profile all depend on levels of internal and external communications beyond the current capacity of faculty, our part-time Production Co-ordinator, and our Marketing and Communications Liaison manager (who does superior work but is now assigned to multiple Faculties).

Faculty are currently bearing significant program delivery and communications labour, which would be more appropriately assigned to staff positions, so that faculty could more effectively lead creative research and professional development across the Department, including by increasing applications for external research and creation funding. If all staff positions were full-time, year-long positions, the University could also be assured of continuity and institutional memory that would have benefits beyond DART. Please also see Recommendation 6.

As the reviewers note, the cost of extending the Theatre Technician's contract to a full year position, and making the Production Co-ordinator's roll a full-time, year-long, continuing position would be a relatively small investment for very significant gain. DART has already benefited from support from the Dean's office to calculate the actual cost of these changes to positions. As recommended, the Chair looks forward to working with the Dean of Humanities to draft both position requests and advocate for the resources to fund them.

The Dean of Humanities responded:

Recognizing that this is outside the purview of the current exercise, the Dean encourages the Department to continue to work with this office to find the necessary resources (of all sorts) to sustain the programmes.

ARC Disposition of the Recommendation

ARC acknowledges that the recommendation is worthy of consideration but outside of the Committee's jurisdiction. The Committee expects the Department to advocate through the usual channels for additional staff positions.

No Implementation Plan required.

Recommendation #3: We recommend that DART explore all avenues to address ongoing concerns regarding space, technology, and materials budget and to develop a strategy to address these increasingly relevant and important issues that impact curriculum delivery.

The Department responded:

The Department accepts this recommendation.

DART thanks the reviewers for suggesting the Department compare infrastructure, technology, and materials budgets with other programs, to ensure resources align with comparators, keep pace with increased costs, and can sustain the intensity of theatre-making essential to our curriculum. This information will contribute to the development of a resource management strategy. The Department thanks the reviewers for noting that the management of upkeep of technical equipment should not be a burden on the Department’s annual operations budget and staff labour.

DART agrees that expanding our capacity for technology-enhanced scenography in projection and virtual reality is an area in which the program is not keeping pace with comparators. That said, the need to replace our existing failing infrastructure and equipment must be our immediate priority. The current state of DART technical infrastructure brings the emphasis on the excellence of DART’s facilities in historical and existing recruitment materials into question.

We also note that a key element of an effective strategy would be the assurance of a predictable resource stream dedicated to infrastructure and technology.

DART looks forward to collaboration among our production staff, the MIW Associate Dean’s office, the Dean of Humanities, and the University’s IT and AV staff to develop this strategy.

The Dean of Humanities responded:

Recognizing that this is outside the purview of the current exercise, the Dean encourages the Department to continue to work with this office to find the necessary resources (of all sorts) to sustain the programmes.

ARC Disposition of the Recommendation

ARC considers the recommendation to be accepted recognizing that the Department is following best practices. The Committee believes the Department, in consultation with the Dean’s office, is best positioned to develop a strategy to address resource issues that impact curriculum delivery and advocate through the usual channels for additional resources.

Implementation Plan (1st Priority)	
Responsible for approving:	Department
Responsible for resources:	Department/Dean
Responsible for implementation:	Department
Timeline:	Dean of Humanities to report by the end of academic year 2024-25.

Recommendation #4: We recommend that DART explore ways to better access existing staff supports, including from the library, academic advising, and Instructional Technology.

The Department responded:

The Department accepts this recommendation.

The following points will require co-ordination through the MIW Associate Dean’s office, since they are handled at the School level:

Support for students in seeing and accessing learning services such as Library and academic advising

at the MIWSFPA.

More consistent and effective support from central IT for teaching and learning technology (a responsibility that already falls into central IT's portfolio).

Greater integration of teaching and learning services (specifically the Library and CPI) into DART program development and delivery can be handled at the Department level. Work in these areas has already begun, including through a dedicated CPI workshop for DART part-time instructors delivered in August 2024.

The Dean of Humanities responded:

This, too, is outside the purview of the current exercise. Further engagement and collaboration with the Library and with the IT staff is strongly encouraged to better support the curriculum and students' learning. The involvement of the Academic Advisor in recent curricular plans has been helpful, and students are encouraged take advantage of both in-person and online supports for programme advising.

ARC Disposition of the Recommendation

ARC considers this recommendation to be accepted. The Committee encourages the Department to collaborate with the units mentioned by the Dean to better access staff supports.

Implementation Plan (1st Priority)	
Responsible for approving:	Department
Responsible for resources:	Department/Dean
Responsible for implementation:	Department
Timeline:	Dean of Humanities to report by the end of academic year 2024-25.

Recommendation #5: We encourage DART to continue, materially, its stated investment in Production staff as educators as part of the current curriculum redevelopment plan.

The Department responded:

The Department accepts this recommendation. Please also see our response to Recommendation 2.

DART notes that while the Chair's role is certainly to lead in this area, progress requires communication, collaboration, and labour from all faculty and staff. As the reviewers suggest, this work intersects directly with the work of the *Staging Better Futures/Mettre en scène de meilleurs avenir*s SSHRC Partnership (SBF/MSMA) Partnership and also supports DART's vision, mission, and curricular outcomes. DART is sensitive to the relevant Collective Agreements (BUFA, CUPE, IATSE, and OSSTF) as well as working conditions of non-unionized employees in defining roles.

DART also notes the expression of faculty concerns about staff and staff concerns about faculty described by the reviewers points to an additional need for clarification of lines of communication, approaches to conflict resolution, and increased opportunities for professional development in the Department. These needs were identified in an open discussion between faculty and staff at our

August Departmental retreat. First steps forward will include dedicated professional development time in the Departmental timetable, the inclusion of pedagogical training as job training in IATSE job descriptions, and the development of new policies.

The Undergraduate Programs Committee responded:

UPC will expect to see some items submitted regarding course offerings, leading to additional work. This will not be problematic.

The Dean of Humanities responded:

The Dean appreciates the role played by the DART staff in all aspects of the education provided to the students and recognizes the importance of these staff members to the unit's programmes. The involvement of these staff members in the development and delivery of courses is crucial and strongly encouraged.

ARC Disposition of the Recommendation

ARC considers this recommendation to be accepted. The Committee believes the Department is best positioned to determine appropriate strategies to involve production staff as part of their curriculum redevelopment efforts; this may be pursued in conjunction with Recommendation #2.

Implementation Plan (1st Priority)

Responsible for approving:	Department
Responsible for resources:	Department/Dean
Responsible for implementation:	Department
Timeline:	Dean of Humanities to report by the end of academic year 2024-25.

Recommendation #6: At this time of significant change and renewal, we recommend DART continue to build upon and ensure strong, clear communication pathways across student/staff/faculty lines, leveraging existing communication networks to ensure everyone is aware of emergent developments.

The Department responded:

The Department accepts this recommendation.

While DART continues to work towards fuller and more consistent communication about change in the program (including through monthly meetings of the full Departmental Committee; bi-weekly meetings of faculty and staff respectively; an operations committee with faculty, production and admin representation; internal Brightspace communications hubs for students and part-time instructors; a conversation series responding to students' questions about the program called Pizza with the Chair; a dedicated faculty member liaison with MarComm), we agree that this labour is both essential and greater than the current capacity of DART Chair, faculty, and staff.

The Department agrees with the reviewers that a robust response to Recommendation 2, with a successful outcome, is the best means of addressing this recommendation: a full-time Production Co-ordinator could be responsible for essential communications.

DART notes that its response to Recommendation 5, however, should be the collaborative work of the Chair, faculty, and production staff, rather than the work of one individual staff member.

The Dean of Humanities responded:

DART already takes great care and attention to communicating among the faculty, staff, and students in the programmes. With the new changes to the curriculum, the Dean supports the Department’s additional efforts through Brightspace communication, ‘Pizza with the Chair’, and through meetings with the student representatives. The continued development of the different avenues will only strengthen this already cohesive unit and ensure that all members are informed of recent curricular changes and their impacts.

ARC Disposition of the Recommendation

ARC considers this recommendation to be accepted and in the process of implementation. The Committee believes the Department is best positioned to determine appropriate strategies to continue developing effective communication pathways; this may be pursued in conjunction with Recommendation #2.

Implementation Plan (1st Priority)	
Responsible for approving:	Department
Responsible for resources:	Department/Dean
Responsible for implementation:	Department
Timeline:	Dean of Humanities to report by the end of academic year 2024-25.

Recommendation #7: We encourage DART to pursue the development of a Centre for Performance Research.

The Department responded:

The Department accepts this recommendation, with caution.

DART agrees with the reviewers that in addition to amplifying the robust creative research activities already underway in the Department, this new Centre for Performance Research would also create momentum for other interdisciplinary and inter-sectoral initiatives at the Marilyn. Additionally, the launch of the centre could serendipitously coincide with the Marilyn’s 10th anniversary year.

The activities that would form the core creative research, administrative, production, and funding streams of the new centre are already in place. However, without the assurance of a continuing role for the Production Co-ordinator, both our curriculum and this new Centre would be at risk of becoming unfeasible. The Department believes that a robust response to Recommendation 2, with a successful outcome, is the best means of addressing this recommendation: a full-time, continuing Production Co-ordinator would make the Centre sustainable.

The Dean of Humanities responded:

The caution expressed by the Department is warranted. While such a Centre might indeed create momentum for the interdisciplinary research and creative work happening in the Department, and potentially foster more opportunities across the MIWSFPA units, attempting to focus on this

development without adequate and dependable resourcing could overwhelm the other on-going projects and initiatives currently offered through the programme.

ARC Disposition of the Recommendation

ARC considers this recommendation to be accepted for consideration. The Committee advises the Department to work with the Dean’s office to explore the viability of establishing a Centre for Performance Research; this may be pursued in conjunction with Recommendation #2.

Implementation Plan (1st Priority)	
Responsible for approving:	Department
Responsible for resources:	Department/Dean
Responsible for implementation:	Department/Dean
Timeline:	Dean of Humanities to report by the end of academic year 2024-25.

Recommendation #8: We encourage DART to pursue a Doctor of Fine Arts Degree Program.

The Department responded:

The Department accepts this recommendation in principle, with caution, but wishes to consult with the Deans of Humanities and Graduate Studies and the Provost, and conduct market research, before proceeding.

DART remains committed to developing a DFA program for the reasons the reviewers note.

However, we are also aware that the budgetary reality and changes in the landscape of graduate training in the Faculty of Humanities may mean the University would prefer to prioritize the other graduate program DART has discussed with the Dean of Humanities’ office: namely a cost-recovery MA in Teaching Theatre. Such a program may also be more feasible in the short term. DART is equally committed to developing this program.

The Department feels that institutional support for market research into the feasibility of these programs would be an essential first step. It also feels that the outcome of the response to Recommendation 1 will determine the Department’s capacity to proceed with Recommendation 8.

The Undergraduate Programs Committee responded:

UPC will expect to see some items submitted regarding course offerings, leading to additional work. This will not be problematic.

The Dean of Humanities responded:

The development of a DFA presents a promising initiative, as the research and creative work of the members of the Department shows that they are ready to contribute to the academic world of Dramatic Arts in this way.

That said, the Department’s caution is soundly based. Resources are scarce, and some investment in both the necessary preparation of a Statement of Intent and a Programme Proposal Brief would be necessary - as well as additional staffing for the unit.

The cost-recovery MA noted by the Department is a separate issue that could be pursued independently of the DFA, with good result.

ARC Disposition of the Recommendation

ARC considers this recommendation to be accepted for consideration. The Committee advises the Department to work with the Dean’s office to explore the viability of establishing a Doctor of Fine Arts degree.

Implementation Plan (1st Priority)	
Responsible for approving:	Department
Responsible for resources:	Department/Dean
Responsible for implementation:	Department/Dean
Timeline:	Dean of Humanities to report by the end of academic year 2024-25.

D. Summary of Recommendations:

Recommendations 1-2	No Implementation Plan required
Recommendations 3-8	First Priority