

Majors hopeful but still dissatisfied

Drama disputes dissipating as year closes

By ANN SMALLWOOD
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After the surge of undergraduate unrest last fall, the spring season in Carolina's department of dramatic art has been calm by comparison.

The earlier mass indignation toward the metamorphosis of the old Carolina Playmakers into the new professional repertory company had left students either hopeful, apathetic or simply resigned about the state of Carolina drama.

Arthur Houseman, drama department chairperson and executive director of the professional Playmakers Repertory Company (PRC), pointed out in a recent interview that historically UNC undergraduate drama majors complained that their needs were neglected by faculty who favored the older adult Playmakers in the community. He said that it is "a great irony" that now complaints are directed against PRC instead.

Of the more than 80 undergraduate drama majors, the dozen who were interviewed did not have many complaints about the PRC, however. They were more concerned with the lack of communication between the department and its students, the scarcity of roles open to non-drama majors, the absence of a major undergraduate production this year and their shrinking curriculum.

Matt Clayton, a freshman prospective drama major, said he decided to transfer last semester because of his dissatisfaction with the department, but this semester he said he is more hopeful and plans to stay.

Clayton said that he decided to remain at UNC because he had found that "if you really push, the involvement is there." He added that he had also discovered numerous acting opportunities through other departments of the University — language, speech and RTVMP.

Both Clayton and another freshman, Betsy Halleck, were angered by the format of the Drama 64 class (stagecraft), though. Clayton said that there was "maybe one day of instruction" and then the students just did labor for PRC shows. Halleck added that they received standard course credit for "12 hours of slave labor a week. They should call it Sweeping 101." She explained that not all the students swept, but "those who are already talented get good jobs, and the others are forgotten."

Jean Freedman, another freshman prospective drama major, also condemned

the "slave labor" of Drama 64 and dubbed the introduction to drama course (Drama 15) "a colossal bore."

But Freedman, unlike Clayton and Halleck, said that she was not especially concerned that the drama department was not offering either Dramatic Interpretation (Drama 25) or the first acting course for majors (Drama 50) next semester. She said that she trusted the judgments made by the faculty to be the best for the students.

Freedman is not alone in her trust of the drama faculty. Nathan Hinkle, a junior majoring in dramatic art and member of the undergraduate curriculum study committee, said that though a survey was given to drama majors asking for opinions about three new proposed curricula, only one response was returned.

Hinkle said that he was "very disappointed" in the drama majors. He said, "They have no right to complain when they were given a choice — when they're asked to give their opinions and they don't make an effort to respond."

Laura Walker, a sophomore dramatic art major who was among those who did not send in a survey response, admitted, "Too many of us are willing to stand around in corners and gripe but are not willing to be open with our objections."

Freedman, who also did not return the survey, said, "It's not really that we lack interest; it's just that we are confused." Many of the other students interviewed were likewise perplexed about department operations — not only about curriculum decisions but also about the laboratory theatre program.

Denise Ford, a drama faculty member and director of the lab theatre, explained that for the lab shows some slots are assigned to MFA directing students and some are open to bids by both majors and non-majors. She said that though priority is usually given to the drama department members, this year shows were done in the lab by both the French and Slavic languages departments.

Ford said that she believes that the lab theatre program provides "good solid roles for undergraduates." Nathan Hinkle agreed, saying that he felt the lab theatre had improved since last year. "The whole department is getting a lot better."

But Laura Walker said that she didn't believe that the lab theatre was "stretching us (the undergraduate majors) to the limit." In addition, she criticized the PRC program

saying, "For all the money and all the time that is poured in (to PRC), we get very little educational benefit."

Department head Houseman said, "We think always in terms of education. We will have as good models as we can afford (in PRC) who have something to give, to teach. The best modern education in drama involves interaction with working professionals."

The undergraduates produce their shows through the lab program, rather than in a professional capacity with PRC, he said. He compared the policy with that of the medical school: "You don't let a first year medical student perform open heart surgery — we don't let a freshman play Hamlet."

Nathan Hinkle also defended the PRC and graduate programs saying that students should understand that "a degree in drama here does not mean one is ready to go out and do professional theatre. It is a liberal arts education with emphasis in dramatic art. By coming here we have a basis to start on."

With such scarce opportunities for majors, non-drama majors are faced with still greater frustrations when looking for the chance to either learn or perform in the UNC drama department. But Hinkle observed that in a university with a student body of 20,000 there could never be enough theatre opportunities to suit everyone.

Patricia Barnett, a drama faculty member, said that an important distinction to make when discussing University departments was between general college "service departments" and "departments for majors." The Carolina drama department is one for majors, she said. "When our funds are limited, our priority is to serve members."

She said that that is why they work with the Carolina Union productions which are cast from the entire University and community. Plus, she said that there is "a lot more opportunity in the community theatre these days."

Lynn McClure, a fifth-year pharmacy student who became interested in drama in

high school, said that she has auditioned for the lab theatre without success. She has, however, been in the Reader's Theatre, and this year she ran sound for the Carolina Union production of *In the Boom Boom Room*. She, like many others, has found that technical work is nearly always available if acting roles are scarce.

McClure said that since PRC took over the Carolina Playmakers, people can't really get involved in the drama department. But she said she realized that drama majors should get priority. "Otherwise, they wouldn't get any experience," she said. "But we ought to get to participate too."

Michael Davis, a freshman who plans to major in either journalism or music, worked with theatre in high school and has participated in the lab theatre program this year. But he added, "A lot of the talent on this campus is going to waste. It is difficult for a non-major to accomplish much within the drama department."

Davis said that next year he will work to encourage more Carolina Union shows like this year's *Boom Boom Room* and *The Good Doctor*. "I hope there'll be more shows done next year in cooperation with the drama department," he said.

Houseman was optimistic about opportunities for student actors and technicians next fall. "We are limited only by how much we can do." He said that already two undergraduate productions are in the planning stages for presentation in the new Paul Green Theatre: a Paul Green play and Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*.

"Next year and every year our intent is to serve the students as well as possible and to increase the number of student productions," he said.

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