

## **Hamilton Theatre**

### *Mission*

Theatre is at the heart of the liberal arts experience. It gives students not only the tools with which to approach other disciplines with creativity and rigor, but through the process of creating performance it engenders personal responsibility and empowerment; it develops a sense of community both within the creative ensemble and between performer and audience; it teaches students to recognize and honor difference and diversity; it immerses students in unfamiliar cultures through the performance of their arts; and, it helps students to find and develop their own voices and identities.

### *Curriculum*

Hamilton's program reflects the changing nature of theatre in the context of globalism and multiculturalism. Through a balance of theory and practice, students of theatre gain an understanding of Western performance techniques and dramatic literature, non-Western forms and drama, and non text-based genres of performance. They become acquainted with culturally diverse forms of theatre in the United States, and the ways in which Western forms of theatre increasingly blend with and affect non-Western theatre.

We commit ourselves first and foremost to our students, and the vitality of the theatre program testifies to the success of the collaborative relationship between professor and student. Our program focuses on performance, scholarship, and oral communications skills. More than most Hamilton students, theatre concentrators test their own identities and voices in a public forum. As a result, they must think on their feet, exhibit a commitment to rigor, demonstrate courage in the public eye, meet the challenges posed by difficult texts, solve complex group and individual problems, and create art.

### *Enrollment*

Although one of the College's smaller departments in terms of faculty, Theatre lies in the middle of all departments in terms of enrollments, averaging 260 students, with 8 to 15 senior concentrators. Students of different ethnicities and cultural backgrounds are well represented in the Department.

### *Interdisciplinary Elements*

Theatre is by nature a multidisciplinary and inclusive activity, with academic connections to such departments and programs as Asian Studies, Art, Music, Africana Studies, English and Communications. In addition, our productions also frequently involve faculty members and students from outside the Theatre program in both advisory and participatory capacities.

### *Why a New Theatre?*

In theatre, the interaction between professor and student necessitates a third partner--space. Theatre is a temporal and spatial art form and requires appropriate and sufficient laboratory spaces in order to be taught effectively. We currently lack effective teaching and performance spaces.

### *Minor Theater*

Hamilton College's current facilities are technologically outdated, poorly equipped, and overused. Minor Theatre's shortcomings have been amply documented: as far back as 1983 Jules Fisher, the country's leading theatre design consultant, remarked "By almost any standard that might be applied, the Minor Theatre would be deemed inferior." Since that time, the building has further deteriorated, to the point where the lack of adequate facilities holds the department back in many ways, including:

- The lack of adequate wing space and fly space in Minor Theater severely limits the plays we can produce and the manner in which they are staged.
- The cramped and poorly equipped scenery and costume shops make the teaching of technical theatre difficult and limit the kinds of sets and costumes we are able to construct.
- The lack of a smaller teaching theatre makes the teaching of directing and other performance-based classes difficult, as well as making it almost impossible to schedule student performances and senior projects; i.e., the demand for theatre space far outstrips the facilities. Our one classroom does triple duty as a teaching space, rehearsal space and performance space, and is frequently in constant use from 9am to 11pm.
- The lack of a design studio necessitates our sending students to Colgate to study scene design.

### *What Kind of Theatre?*

We envision a facility centered on our students, providing a new locus for creative activity on the campus, enriching the campus culture and enhancing the experience of all Hamilton students, whether or not they are directly involved in making theatre. This facility will reflect both the focus and the pedagogy of the Theatre program.

### *Spaces*

The teaching of theatre requires several different kinds of spaces:

1. A fully-equipped flexible theatre (175 seats) for departmental productions with attached production support spaces (see below) and adequate dressing rooms. In line with the global and multicultural nature of our program, this space must be able to accommodate productions of any type of performance, from any culture and any period. A fixed stage would not permit this flexibility. Seating capacity is deliberately limited in order that productions can run for a full eight performances.

2. A modest “black box” theatre (100 seats) for senior projects, sophomore seminar performances, class projects, guest artists and public performances of class projects and shows. Often, even courses that appear non-performative (such as Introduction to Theatre, African-American theatre and Theatre History) have substantial and uniquely performative requirements. This space is largely student-driven, and safety is a primary consideration.

3. A studio space for the teaching of all courses having a performance element including acting, directing, playwriting, Asian theatre, workshops, sophomore seminars, and proseminars, minimally equipped with seating, theatrical lighting and sound equipment;

4. A seminar space directly connected to the studio space, so that classes with both academic/writing and performance components can move from one type of space to another without disruption.

5. Support spaces: adequate scene and costume shops; costume, props and materials storage space

### *Conclusion*

A new theatre facility would enable the Department to provide our students with the best possible education in the field; it would enable us to expand the kinds of productions we are able to mount; it would provide students with vastly-improved performance and teaching venues; and, it would add immeasurably to the student culture, providing a place for the presentation and discussion of timely cultural, political and social issues.