

TDT Promotion and Strategic Planning

Below are recommendations I came up with based on all the information I have gathered throughout the semester. I have compiled meaningful opinions from TDT students of all years as well as faculty to create this list of possible improvements to our promotional strategies and general operation. There are 6 main points and recommendations in the summary below, and further explanation of each point follows in the later pages.

Internal / Elon specific changes - pros we should be focusing or expanding upon:

1. Use the BA to our advantage
 - Difference between a tech theater BFA and BA, and how Elon is in this **funky middle range**
 - Ability to **try as many of our concentrations** as we want, have a **life outside** of performing arts, and still produce 9 shows a year for 3 BFA programs.
 - Students can take on as much as we are able to, and our **smaller size** gives **more individual opportunities**
 - Students are not in heavy competition with each other for show positions
 - Our faculty make sure that we aren't biting off more than we can chew
 - Recent push towards **mental health initiatives**
2. Highlight student summer work
 - Importance / effect of **professional work on success and education at Elon**
 - Success at **SETC** and **preparation** for the job conference itself
 - List reputable theaters that students have worked at while still at Elon

Related to other schools:

The "peer program" schools I researched are all of different calibers and the programs themselves may be vastly different than ours. That being said, the schools I chose to research are ones that current TDT students have applied to and other prospective students might be as well. The focus of this research was on their website promotion and what strategies we could learn and grow from, rather than comparing the departments themselves.

3. Updated alumni info
 - UNCSA has a whole page / short articles and interviews with alumni working on exciting projects

- Our most recent alumni highlighted is a 2013 grad
- 4. More photos of spaces
 - JMU and Emerson had 360 degree views of most if not all their spaces
 - A gallery of still photos combined with production shots would do the job
 - Especially with blackbox theaters to show different arrangements
 - Emerson had ground plans of all their spaces too
- 5. Student orgs / research pieces being supported
 - Photos / results from *Bent*, *Elephant Man*, our APO chapter and all of their shows, link to Sydney Dye's Lumen project
 - Show that students can take on more leadership positions in a production if you want more design opportunities, how we support student research / fellows
 - Talk about the benefits of an all student run piece - collaboration through the roof
- 6. TDT Video highlights from shows - like the ones promoting the performances, but focusing on the build or something specific tech wise
 - Mary Flynn's banquette for Damn Yankees would have been a great piece - show her progress throughout the build, how it worked onstage in tech, final show
 - Time-lapse of the drop being painted for the Spring!!
 - It's convenient to have a comm/TDT double major right now, but this shouldn't disappear when Sydney graduates - coordinate with the comm school, maybe students are looking for projects
 - UNCSEA and UMich have a large number of videos showing their projects / processes instead of photo galleries

1. Use the BA to Our Advantage

Whether or not students realize it when they first enter this program, there are very appealing factors to being a BA program, especially one within such a unique and busy Performing Arts department as a whole.

The biggest educational differences between a BFA program and a BA:

- Our classes are more balanced between our major and a general liberal arts degree from Elon - it's possible to double major if you're interested, be a part of a fellows program, or do undergraduate research
- In both BFA and BA programs, the great majority of learning is done by working on shows / the **hands-on experiences**
 - With the number of shows we produce a year, excluding independent student pieces, there are always opportunities outside the classroom
 - Numerous faculty members and students stressed the benefits to this learning style / impact on their overall education
- Within Elon's Performing Arts Department, the Dance, Acting and Music Theater programs are all BFA, which means that we are working with a higher demand for the number and quality of our productions - this puts us in this uncharted **middle ground of bachelor's programs**.
 - Our classes and concentration structure resemble the standard BA more, and our show experiences and projects given to every TDT student - which students and faculty alike have expressed to be critical in this field of education - more reflects that of a BFA.

What makes Elon stand out:

- We don't have to commit to one concentration right off the bat
 - Gives students the opportunity to try new areas of tech theater they may not have known about or had the access to in high school
 - Encourages students to work with each other and collaborate more since individuals are more well rounded with pieces of knowledge from all concentrations

- After your first year or two when looking for an entry-level job, it can be very helpful to have that wide range of knowledge and experience
- The smaller size of the BA as a whole gives more individuals opportunities
 - With 9 BFA performance-level shows every year and grade sizes ranging from 4-10 students, there are always plenty of beneficial opportunities for students to work on shows
 - Fewer people per concentration allows for less competition between individuals, and a sense of comradery across the board to help and support each other
 - The tasks we are given can be large, so we often work as a unit
 - Teaches students how to successfully collaborate with peers and with superiors (with other students vs. professors, directors and designers)
- Despite the numerous opportunities presented to us, our faculty have taken the initiative to make sure students aren't biting off more than they can chew
 - Recent department push towards better mental health initiatives is trying to make sure students aren't burnt out and their work / school balance stays healthy
 - Unlike most conservatory programs, the TDT BA allows students to get involved with other campus organizations - you can make your whole college career about these shows but you don't have to.

How we can expand upon this:

- Include this information above when describing the structure of TDT
 - All of this information is what makes Elon stand out against other BA and BFA programs alike
 - Since we are in this middle ground and the general structure has had so many positive impacts on our students, we want to advertise that as much as possible on our website
- Have video interviews of students
 - Describing daily life or typical schedule for students
- Encourage updates to our wellness page since it is such a hot topic

2. Highlighting Student Summer Work

Sticking to our primary educational theme of hands-on learning, every interviewed student who had participated in professional summer work emphasized the benefits and positive impact on their Elon experience - faculty also stressed the importance of students landing summer work.

Why summer work is important:

- Working at a summer stock is the best opportunity to see how professional theaters run.
 - Gives you a taste of how *that one theater* operates, and how it compares to Elon
 - Every theater in the world will have different standards or techniques or schedules so the more styles a student learns during their 4 years at undergrad, **the more prepared they will feel post-grad**
- The atmosphere of a summer stock is unlike anything that any college program can give, and that's just the nature of having to take classes and be a student alongside working on shows
 - The non-stop work-driven world makes students more confident in their technical abilities since they have the chance to really develop them over and over again for three straight months
- The ability of students to take what they learned over the summer and **apply it to work on Elon shows**
 - This is a field that is always growing and changing - it can be very helpful to have students who are working out in the field along with our faculty to keep Elon TDT growing and changing along with this industry
- It's never too early to **start making connections**
 - Some faculty stressed the connections that you make in your career will follow you everywhere
 - Those summer connections could also help you with landing jobs in the future

What makes Elon stand out:

- What makes Elon students so successful at these theaters are the communication skills and driven mindsets that this program fosters
 - Because of TDT's size and student experience level coming in, not all of our students are incredibly well-versed in every technical skill.

- Instead, student workers have been praised for their **mindset going into the job** and thinking positively, making them a desirable worker despite skill level
- Because of our **small size**, students get opportunities to work on shows sooner and are therefore more prepared to work at a summer stock earlier in their college career.
- We send a solid caravan of students to SETC every year, and those that participate in the job fair are most always successful!
 - Over the years as our numbers in general and at the conference have grown, we've been able to **make a name for ourselves** outside the MT program through colleagues we see there / peers we recommend to work for them
 - Our recent representation / success in the design competition doesn't hurt either
- Preparation we offer pre-job fair / application season
 - The resume and portfolio building workshops we offer to all students in departmental meetings are very beneficial
 - We should bring back more mock interview prep

How we can improve this overall experience:

- Advertising the **success of our students** working in the summers on the website
 - Theaters students have worked with great name recognition
 - Share design competition displays - photos of the physical presentation boards students used at SETC or another digital version.
- Students have greatly benefited from the **pre-SETC workshops** that were provided in previous years
 - According to interviews with upperclassmen, students felt that there was more in-depth preparation in previous years past the portfolio workshop for the Juniors and one resume day we had this year
 - These are important days for all students to be a part of, even underclassmen who may not have a portfolio together
 - Mock interviews are very helpful
 - Time to talk about what SETC is and how the job fair / conference itself work, and a post-conference discussion
- Pepperdine's "Theater Careers" page with career center services:
<https://seaver.pepperdine.edu/fine-arts/undergraduate/theatre/careers.htm>

3. Updated Alumni Info

Why alumni information is important:

- Having solid alumni references are very beneficial and eye-catching, especially when we have alum like we do who have very successful professional careers
 - Shows prospective students just some possibilities of life after college, *especially* in an industry that is surrounded by the **stigma of “you’ll never find work”**
 - As the industry keeps moving, so do people’s careers
 - Our most recent alumni highlighted is a 2013 graduate

How we can improve this:

- Bios should **stay updated** - maybe a check in once a year asking for career updates if they have any
 - Apply these updated bios to the physical alumni wall in the CFA as well
 - A living document acting as an alumni database would be very beneficial for the future / help current and graduated students make further connections
 - Take advantage of D&P Facebook page
- This quarantine time is a good time to reach out, as the world has shut down and people have some more time to give updated bios / other info
 - As shown through the virtual departmental meetings we’ve had since school moved online, alum are happy to give us input
- UNCSCA has a whole page of short articles and interviews with alumni working on exciting projects
 - <https://www.uncsa.edu/design-production/alumni-stories/index.aspx>

4. More Photos of Spaces

- Not only do we have a fairly large number of spaces and studios to use, but they're very versatile - specifically the blackboxes
 - Having a combination of **blank-stage shots** as well as various **production shots** with some ambitious tech elements will show all the different ways we can and have used our spaces for performance
 - Also another opportunity to show off our work - two birds one stone
- Especially now when travelling to visit colleges has become limited, **prospective students might never get to see Elon's campus or our CFA facilities**
 - Team up with admissions technology - they might have plans to create virtual tours for this same reason

How we can improve this:

- **Expand photos online** of individual spaces and add production shots
 - Maybe 360 degree shots with help from Admissions?
- JMU and Emerson had 360 degree views of most if not all their spaces
 - JMU: <https://www.jmu.edu/theatredance/spaces/performance-spaces.shtml>
 - Emerson:
<https://www.emerson.edu/academics/academic-departments/performing-arts/performance-and-production-spaces>
 - Emerson had ground plans of all their spaces too... not sure if that's necessary, but we have all the spaces already drafted out for scenery purposes and it might mean something to someone who knows a lot about tech theater!!

5. Student Orgs / Research Pieces

Elon's student theater organizations and opportunities:

- **Leadership opportunities** are offered to students early in their Elon careers with various student productions
 - Alpha Psi Omega (APO) is the National Theater Honors society, which we have a chapter here and produces one production a year which gets a level of support by faculty / department as a whole while still being totally student-run
 - Renegade Productions is newer student run production group which has focused on smaller productions and musical staged readings
- With a smaller production level, APO and Renegade shows are great starting points for new designers, stage managers, and directors
 - Ability for students to work from the ground up for the first time building a show
 - Students interviewed described student productions as the best kind of environment to **grow and learn with and from your peers** - production teams are always so respectful, supportive, and willing to help each other through obstacles and mistakes
 - The step back from faculty allows students to hold more authority and really have the final say on their work
- Students have applied **outside research** work to the theater, and used APO and Renegade as outlets to put these shows on
 - Successes from *Bent*, *Elephant Man*, Sydney Dye's upcoming *#Silenced*
 - Supported by fellows and other campus scholarships such as Lumen

How we can improve this:

- Create a page on the website highlighting student organizations
 - Descriptions of each org with production shots
 - Images and blurbs about research pieces that have come to fruition
 - Advertising upcoming events
- JMU's student organization page:
<https://www.jmu.edu/theatredance/experiences/student-organizations.shtml>

6. TDT Video Highlights

Our current video promotion:

- Videos are **quick and engaging** ways to draw people's attention to a subject
 - Easy to advertise on social media and for students to share
 - The highlights we do promoting the shows are very successful, showing just enough of the rehearsal process to engage people

How we can improve this:

- Create similar video highlights to these show promotion ones, but focusing on the build process, one designers work, or another **specific tech element**
 - Mary Flynn's banquette for Damn Yankees would have been a great piece - show her progress throughout the build, how it worked onstage in tech, final show
 - Encourages students to take production shots
 - Great elements for students to put on their websites if they have them
- **Time lapse videos** are easy and very successful
 - For text spring's painted drop!
 - Set up during strike
 - Rent a Go-Pro or another camera from Media Services
- Think about pairing up with the comm school / students interested in these kinds of projects or work
- UNCSA link to their Design and Production youtube channel:
<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLuhWCJuM-hZh8htr9oq-SYNnePQBExRIq>
- UMich has videos on the bottom of their homepage and a link to their youtube channel:
<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLVy2jdQD7GRxr5FpVKNfnEI0L3frxdoEI>