

To the selection committee, 1

I am pleased to submit this application for the Director of the Undergraduate Acting Program at the University of Southern California.

For the past 14 years I have been dedication to the training, creation and support of new work, new spaces, new artists and new audiences for the American theatre. That work has ranged from an educator of professional artists from across the country to the conservatory training of high school seniors in Los Angeles county; my role as Associate Producer of New Play Development for Center Theatre Group where I supported the development of over 100 new works for the theatre; my role as an independent creative producer and arts administrator helping to foster the work of young playwrights, directors and institutions; to my role trying to provide context and criticism while generating a broader audience for the theatre as KCRW's theatre critic.

That work and connection to the field and specifically Los Angeles has inspired my teaching and helped me to share not only my passion and inspiration but also context with my students. Those experiences have reinforced my dedication to the professional rigor that must be the backbone of any professional training program.

I have forged a successful independent career but candidly I am happiest, and I believe most valuable to the broader field, when I am fostering excellence within an institution. Which draws me to this position within the School of Theatre and the challenge of fostering excellence across the entire department.

My strength is having an intimate, structural understanding of how the building blocks of an actor training program come together [better word-fit?]. My understanding comes not from a surface understanding [repeat] of style or aesthetics but an elemental, formal, at times anatomical grasp of how our unique disciplines and discourse come together to forge a trained actor.

This understanding combined with a dramaturg's understanding of structure, a director's gift for guiding work towards excellence, a producer's ability to create the circumstance, sustenance, and institutional framework to keep the work alive; a critic's ability to provide context and feedback; and an educator's ability to inspire.

This understanding and these skills lead me, like a wise director doing table work on a new play, to ask of my collaborators the tough questions:

[THIS SECTION NEEDS REFINEMENT PARING - THIS IS JUST THE WHOLE LIST]  
What is required for an institution to be excellent? How do we even know if an institution is excellent? I believe it begins by asking tough questions. [Double intro]

Are we instilling the professional rigor and discipline that our students will need to craft meaningful careers in the arts?

Are we inspiring these young artists?

How is our teaching evolving?  
 Is the curriculum telling the story we think it is?  
 Is that curriculum taking advantage of our faculty resources?  
 Is that curriculum clearly and practically connected to the field?  
 Is my teaching excellent? Inspired?  
 Is our curriculum embodied by our faculty, graduates, our literature and collateral materials, our reputation?  
 Do I know where my voice fits into the larger curriculum?

The candor and commitment with which an institution can be inspired to answer and tackle these questions is, I believe, the first step towards creation a common language that fosters [better word] excellence both individually and collectively.

My background equips me to not only pose these questions but also guide the resulting conversation in a collaborative, inclusive way [awk.] I believe that this conversation is a critical step because the success of a training program is contingent on a common shared language - not to create a homogenous single voice or method of instruction but to provide a rosetta stone to integrate and help navigate between a varied, dynamic curriculum.

*A moment of context: I imagine that much of what I am suggesting is already occurring within the undergraduate acting program. My intention is not to be presumptuous or redundant but to share with you how I would approach a collaboration with the faculty and hope to formalize these existing processes (for more information please see my accompanying vision statement).*

This common language is acutely necessary in a program with the size and scope of USC's with so many adjunct voices - the more voices the greater the need for an underlying structure to make that complexity audible. It's precisely that complexity, the energy possible with so many talented collaborators that makes the challenge of USC so exciting.

I believe that a culture of excellence is the result of this common language coupled with an ongoing dialogue that I feel confident the breadth of my background and the depth of my inquiry would make possible.

I believe my experience would also help me to buttress the work of the Artistic Director selecting, staffing, and producing the season. My connection to and appreciation of the local and visiting professional talent pool (not only from my years of new play development but also my current role at KCRW) is a ready resource that I've already brought to bear and collaborated with key faculty during the production of the Under Construction/New Works 3 Festival. That partnership has resulted in finding directors that are best suited to each piece and integrating them meaningfully with students to create a supporting structure that provides the most productive and collaborative environment. I trust that I could have a similar impact through collaborating with the Artistic Director and faculty on not only directors but posing the questions: Are we

connecting the students to the work that serves them best pedagogically?  
 Professionally? Are we connecting them with the most compelling voices nationally?  
 Locally? Internationally? Is our work articulating our vision of the program? Is it  
 connecting the students to the field? To Los Angeles?

Which begs the perennial Los Angeles question: what is theatre's relationship to Hollywood? Unapologetically, I believe that a world-class training in the theatre not only has integrity on its own but is the best foundation for a meaningful career as an actor in America. That said, I would encourage the same holistic questioning of the faculty and curriculum to ensure that we are mentoring our students not only artistically but professionally. A connection to acting in other media must be an institutional commitment that extends beyond specialized classes and becomes a part of the institutional dna - but this commitment cannot in any way jeopardize or water down the integrity of the existing training. This conundrum, I believe, must be shared by not only USC's graduates but by the curriculum itself.

I believe it is the culmination of these elements: personal excellence and inspiration, institutional excellence fostered by a common language and a rigorous faculty-wide collaboration informed by the difficult and salient questions, a deep connection to the field and specifically Los Angeles both artistically and professionally that will lead to the visibility and support that USC richly deserves.

I believe that I can help USC's acting faculty and students take the next step in that process. I believe I can create the culture of excellence, a rigorous but compassionate critical dialogue, and encourage the institutional buy-in necessary to foster the shifts that result in institutional transformation.

I also appreciate that institutional excellence and change take time (see my 5 year plan attached). I believe my previous experience with USC and collaborative experience with the faculty I've had the pleasure of working with will lessen the learning curve while still preserving a fresh set of eyes and ears on the program.

As my 14 years of training with SITI Company emphasizes and my perseverance following the Kirk Douglas Theatre from the conceptual phase in 1997 through producing the inaugural season in 2004 demonstrates, I am deeply committed and will continue to evolve, adapt, and revise in collaboration with the many voices of an institution without losing focus or dedication.

I trust that if you find my qualifications and vision compelling we will have the opportunity to discuss both further. In service of your deliberations I have included a description of my vision for a mentorship program and a 5-year plan. If you need any further information or have any further questions please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

AJB