Dear Friends of Drama,

This past year has been an especially challenging one. Like the rest of the country and world, the UW School of Drama has been upended by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the suffering and sadness that it has produced. Moreover, in recent weeks, the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and others at the hands of police and white supremacists have further laid bare the tremendous racial inequalities that structure American society. It has been a time of grief and justified outrage.

Amid these dual crises, I have been impressed by the School's resilience and openness to deep reflection. In the space of a few days in mid-March, we pivoted from learning, teaching, and working in-person to being entirely remote. School productions, sadly, were cancelled but instruction continued. Amazingly, we only withdrew one course in spring. All others – from the history of Broadway to intermediate acting – took place online. That shift required flexibility, creativity, and a lot of hard work. I am so proud and appreciative of what students, faculty, and staff accomplished amid unexpected and stressful circumstances.

The anti-racist protests of recent weeks have prompted honest and difficult conversations about structural racism – in the past and present – at the University of Washington and in the School of Drama. In response, School leadership has developed an Anti-Racist Action Plan. I encourage you to read it to see how, moving forward, the School will work to dismantle racism in its classrooms, offices, and shops, and on its stages.

Without doubt, the School is in a period of transition. It's a time when students, faculty, and staff are rethinking how to make our Drama community more equitable and more interconnected, and how best to develop artists and scholars who are innovative, courageous, and ready to lead theatre through the 21st century. This rethinking has entailed expanding our undergraduate curriculum to include new courses in visual thinking, creative leadership, and collaboration and inclusion, and realigning the learning
goals in already-existing courses. It has also meant revisiting the structure of our MFA programs and PhD program with the aim of enhancing cross-fertilization between them. We have also been working to enhance communication and transparency by involving a broader range of stakeholders in curriculum, season selection, production, and hiring decisions.

Another feature of this transition period is faculty and staff departures and new appointments. In spring, esteemed faculty members Professor Tim Bond (also an MFA directing alum) and Senior Lecturer L. Zane Jones departed UW to pursue new professional opportunities in California and New Mexico. We will miss their many contributions but wish them the very best in their new endeavors. This month renowned scenic designer Professor Tom Lynch retired after teaching in the School for 15 years. We look forward to next year when we will be able to celebrate his many professional achievements in-person. Three long-serving and much appreciated staff members also retired this year: Production Manager Anne Stewart, Costume Shop Manager Josie Gardner, and Scenic Carpenter Alan Weldin. We had a memorable send off for them in December in the Scene Shop, and were very grateful that many of you could join us.

Five new staff members hired over the past two years have brought new energy and fresh ideas to the School. They are Administrative Assistant Maritza Ogarro, Constituent Relations Officer Caroline Rensel, Sound Technician MuTTT, Administrator Tina Swenson, and Production Manager Ryan Gastelum. Next year, we are very excited to welcome two new faculty members in acting, directing, and design: Assistant Professor Libby King and Assistant Professor Adrienne Mackey. Libby joins us from the TEAM in New York City while Adrienne is the founding artistic director of Swim Pony in Philadelphia.

This summer my two-year term as Interim Executive Director will come to end and I’ll be returning to my regular faculty position in the Department of History. Serving in Drama connected me to a new community of wonderful people at the University of Washington. Beyond making new friends, one of the real pleasures of this position has been witnessing the months of imagination, rehearsal, and skilled labor – especially in the costume and scene shops – that enable dazzling opening nights. Another pleasure has been learning that many theatre artists and scholars share with historians a commitment to delving into the injustices and complexities of the past in order to better understand the problems and possibilities of the present.

The UW School of Drama has a bright future ahead. Drama’s students, faculty, and staff are resilient, dedicated, and enormously creative while its alumni and friends are engaged and generous. Working with all of you has been deeply inspiring for me.

In gratitude,

Lynn M. Thomas

Interim Executive Director, UW School of Drama
Email: uwdrama@uw.edu

Source URL: https://drama.washington.edu/news/2020/06/23/end-year-letter-director