Creighton Theater Department Still Growing

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Before Creighton’s Performing Arts Department moved to the Interim Performing Arts Center (IPAC), it was housed in the bottom floor of the Eppley Business Administration Building, the current location of the University College. And it was more than a little cramped.

“One room acted as a classroom, scene shop and theater,” said Alan Klem, assistant professor of Fine and Performing Arts. “When shows were put on, the scenery had to be arranged to hide all the power tools.”

But then the university decided to do some renovations and add the University College in the Theater Department’s spot.

Coincidentally, at the same time the university was moving the performing arts department out, Omaha’s bus system was selling their repair garage, located at 30th and Burt streets. Creighton bought the building and moved the performing arts department in. Although the facilities left a bit to be desired, it served the department for 12 years — perhaps pushing the definition of “interim” a little too far.

“We certainly didn’t expect to be in that building for so long,” said Klem, “and we were very happy to have a place of our own.”

However, Klem is thankful that the department was given a building at all.

“If it hadn’t been for the IPAC, the theater department probably would have been done away with,” said Klem. “Besides, there were things we could do in that building that we simply can’t do in the Lied Center. For instance, for one show, we needed a hole in the wall behind the stage for a projector. Since the building was basically expendable, we just picked up a sledge hammer and whacked away. That’s not something you can do in a nice, new building.”

Of course, that doesn’t mean that Klem wasn’t ecstatic to find a new home for the theater program.

“It’s like our new toy,” he said. “We’re still exploring the uses of the building. It’s a real step in the right direction. The arts departments feel like we’re wanted and appreciated.”

Klem does have one small complaint.

“It’s nice space, but there’s not much extra space. I don’t expect a huge explosion in the size of the program in the next few years, but this building doesn’t give us much room to grow.”

Klem attributes the lack of space to fitting all the programs under one roof, but said he was glad that all the arts departments were finally under one roof.

Klem said the Lied Center will almost certainly help with enticing theater majors to come to Creighton.

“We already have 10 incoming freshmen who are interested in majoring in theater,” said Klem. “That’s just an outstanding number. And I’m sure that the Lied Center is part of the reason.”

There are currently about 10 theater majors and 10 co-majors in the program. Creighton offers a Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) in performance and technical theater. The BFA is a more advanced degree requiring more hours. Klem said he hopes to eventually add a graduate program.

Creighton has been criticized in the past for putting more of an emphasis on science and business than the arts. Although Klem agreed that Creighton is not an arts-oriented school, he said he understood the motivations behind it.

“A lack of emphasis on the arts is not just a Creighton or Jesuit thing,” said Klem. “Creighton supports arts as much as anywhere else, especially since the Jesuit philosophy teaches a well-rounded education. But the emphasis will probably continue to be science and business. It’s just a matter of producing students who are trained in medicine as opposed to acting.”

Klem emphasized the importance of supporting arts.

“Without art, what is the value of life?”

The first theater production on the main stage will be As You Like It in October.