

Speech department boasts larger-than-expected growth

By John C. Curry
Reporter

Listen closely. You just might hear the roar of one of the fastest growing speech communication departments in the nation right here at Texas A&M. Chances are, even the roar will sound professional and crystal clear.

From the first 50 students who enrolled in Fall 1985, the speech communication program of the Department of Speech Communication and Theatre Arts has witnessed an explosion of growth beyond its planners' wildest dreams.

Bill Owen, assistant professor of speech communication and one of the five original architects of the program, said he did not expect the overwhelming success that the department has experienced.

"We predicted that at the end of four years there would be about 200 majors in the department," Owen said.

Owen, however, underestimated the numbers. The program now has 546 majors. It has the

fifth-largest enrollment in the College of Liberal Arts.

Susan J. Vernon, coordinator of advising in the department, said the department has experienced massive growth because of its flexibility and the current popularity of liberal arts majors in the business world.

"The department has a wide appeal because our students have a variety of options for careers," Vernon said.

She said speech communication students typically end up in one of four business areas: traditional business, supportive business, teaching or professional careers.

Traditional business careers are those that start in sales, advance to marketing and eventually graduate to management, she said. Supportive business careers are those such as public relations, advertising and labor relations.

The only drawback to a liberal arts degree in a business world is that the liberal arts major initially may have to be more assertive than business majors in seeking a job with certain companies, Vernon said.

"The department has a wide appeal because our students have a variety of options for careers."

Susan J. Vernon

"Once they get their foot in the door, they are at least as successful as business majors," she said.

Denise Wilfon, senior speech communication major and social coordinator of the Speech Communication Association, said she plans to make a mark on the business world.

"I have a marketing minor and plan on going into sales first, then move up the corporate ladder and become CEO (chief executive officer)," Wilfon said.

On the other hand, Michele DeHoyos, president of SCA, plans to make a career of international relations.

"Speech communication is a well-rounded degree," deHoyos said. "I would like to use my management and organizational-communication skills with my fluent Spanish and work in international relations."

Vernon said the teaching and professional avenues are further examples of the flexibility of a speech communication degree.

Owen agreed. "I'm extremely pleased with the number of speech communication majors attending law school," he said.

Vernon said the flexibility of the degree is the product of the department's curriculum.

"We require five basic courses that offer a blend of the different aspects of speech communication," she said. "Students also take five electives and can use these with their minor to focus themselves toward a career."

The department's curriculum includes instruction in all divisions of speech communication,

including public speaking, group communication, persuasion, technical speaking, argument and debate, and interpersonal communication.

The department also offers a special topics class featuring classes such as "Rhetoric of the Cold War" and "Cross Cultural Communications."

She said the curriculum is geared toward creating a balance of analytical and speech communication skills, which will help to maximize thought and production, she said.

In addition to pursuing law and master's degrees, Vernon said recent graduates have found positions with Continental Airlines, Embassy Suites Hotels, Capitol Records, First City National Bank, Neiman-Marcus and many other large corporations.

Wilfon attributes the success of the department to its originality.

"The broad spectrum of classes is appealing," she said. "Your whole outlook on life is so different and you see things differently than business majors, who are too focused."

'Mikki Maus' has debut in Soviet Union festival

MOSCOW (AP) — Here he's called "Mikki Maus," and the 60-year-old American has surprisingly good rapport with Soviet youngsters for his first live appearance in the Soviet Union.

Sunday evening at Moscow's 2,500-seat Rossiya Theater, with a police cordon worthy of a minor head of state outside, the first Soviet festival of Walt Disney animated classics opened with a showing of "Fantasia" and a visit by Mickey Mouse himself.

Standing about 5 feet 6 inches in his clunky black patent leather shoes, Mickey, played by Gabriella Spieth from Walt Disney's West German office, strolled waving down the theater aisle to the strains of "Heigh Ho, Heigh Ho, It's Off to Work We Go."

In a juvenile version of the Moscow superpower summit, Mickey was given a big hug and a keg of honey by Misha the Bear, mascot of the 1980 Moscow Olympics.

The lights dimmed and the Rossiya's screen filled with the image of Donald Duck in the 1941 short subject "Donald's Crime," in which he purloins the contents of a piggy bank

to finance a nightclub outing with Daisy, then suffers pangs of conscience.

In a Russian-language voiceover, minus the squawking tones in which Donald usually speaks in English, French and other Western languages, the duck concluded: "Crime does not pay."

There was delighted laughter and applause from the audience, which included Foreign Ministry spokesman Gennadi I. Gerasimov and many other Soviet VIPs and their families.

As well as "Fantasia," which was first released in 1940, the Disney animated films "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs," "Bambi" and "101 Dalmatians" will be shown to children and their parents in Moscow, Leningrad and Tallinn.

Mickey is accompanied by a contingent of executives from The Walt Disney Co. here to investigate the business possibilities created by President Mikhail S. Gorbachev's economic and social reforms, which have also loosened controls on the media and the movies.

Roy E. Disney, vice chairman of the Disney company and nephew of its founder, pioneer animator Walt

Disney, said to the audience, "Fantasia" is almost 50 years overdue in coming to the Soviet Union.

"Through the universal language of animation . . . I feel we are taking one more step toward bringing our countries together."

Disney and other company executives played down the business end of their trip.

But the Tass news agency said they were talking with the Soviets about cooperation in making and distributing films.

Tass said also there was talk about jointly building a "Wonderland," a Disneyland-style theme park already planned for Moscow.

According to Sovetskaya Rossiya, a Communist party organ, the first Disney cartoons were shown in the Soviet Union at the first Moscow film festival in 1935. The cartoons, which included "The Three Little Pigs" won an award.

Sovetskaya Rossiya, which commonly devotes its news columns to weighty matters like the national grain harvest, said, "Disney is a remarkable master and a genius second to none."

A&M speaker: Racism threatens U.S. theater

By Richard Tizerina
Staff Writer

Racism can only be solved if people confront each other instead of trying to solve problems separately, Woody King, a New York director, said.

King spoke of the differences between white and black theater and stressed the need for both to work together to find answers about racism in theater in a speech at Rudder Theater Friday.

"What is needed is a coming together," King said. "We need a confronting of each other and to solve our problems through confrontation, instead of trying to solve them separately."

King said there were many examples of racism in American theater, especially in New York, where he is currently directing a Broadway play called "Checkmates," starring Denzel Washington, Paul Winfield and Ruby Dee.

He said the media has much to do with the racism evident in theater. He criticized newspaper critics who do not give black plays a chance at success.

"These people at the newspapers have no knowledge what black writers or black audiences are feeling when they come into this line of work," King said. "It doesn't matter if they get standing ovations every night. It doesn't matter

that 60 percent of the audience is black and everyone is laughing. This is just the beginning. That negative impacts on future generations."

King explained two types of racism existing in theater today: institutionalized racism and economic racism. Institutionalized racism deals with hardships the black actor or playwright may deal with while trying to receive recognition.

Economic racism occurs when large production companies force the director or playwright to waive his or her hold on the play in exchange for the funding necessary to put the play on.

King said institutionalized racism is a major threat in American theater right now that should be addressed immediately.

"I see a certain type of institutionalized racism hovering above (American theater)," he said. "If you don't change it, it's going to strike you down late at night and you'll wonder why. Only ideas can change anything. Only ideas can make you respected among a group of millionaires. Ideas are respected because ideas can change things."

A&M distinguished lecturer Charles Gordone, who hosted the lecture, said the best hope for change in American theater is coming from young actors and playwrights who are still in college.

"I really believe the answers are coming from the university systems where actors are coming out better trained," Gordone said. "The question we must ask ourselves is, 'Where do we go from here?' We can do nontraditional casting until kingdom come, but it all comes down to who the writers are."

"The writers, whether they are black, white, blue, green, orange or whatever, have to start writing about who and what we are. We come out of an educational system that pulls us together in four years, and after that four years we have a common denominator. What we do with that common denominator determines the future of America."

King agreed with Gordone's statement and said changes in American theater will not only work to erase institutionalized racism, but will help improve the overall quality of theater as well.

"In the end, good literature is good literature," he said. "Bad literature is bad literature. Good acting is good acting. Bad acting is bad acting. Once you get beyond that, you start to answer the basic questions. 'Am I learning something from this? Is this meaningful to me?' It's then that you start to learn something from good theater."

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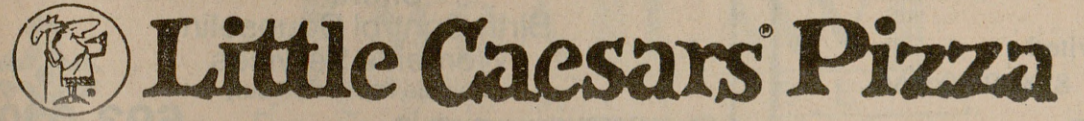
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