



Matthew Sheahan
President
Council of Ontario Drama and Dance Educators (CODE)
president@code.on.ca

June 22, 2024

Re. The termination of the University Players by the University of Windsor

Drama and theatre are essential to our culture and progress as human beings. That is a reason why, in a world dominated by social media, streaming and content creation, thousands flock to theatres, festivals and performances all around the world. There is something visceral, human, and necessary in theatre. We need it. We crave it. The stories that bring us together impact us; they shape our view of the world. We are more human with theatre in our lives.

That being said, we need to protect access to training for drama and theatre in Ontario.

In October of 2023, I set foot in the University of Windsor's Jackman Dramatic Arts Centre. CODE was there to set up and run a drama and dance conference for our ongoing series of CODE on the Road one-day conferences. I was blown away by the quality of the space. Being from Eastern Ontario, I had never thought of Windsor as a destination for myself to study theatre. Visiting and exploring the space made me realize how special this program is and how much it needs to be nurtured and protected. If I had known then what I know now, my decisions in life may have been very different.

The University of Windsor's University Players was set to enter their 66th season in 2024/25. The decision to cut the performing arts company of the Universities Drama program, is short sighted and dangerous. It is, as was stated by Stratford Festival artistic director Antoni Cimolino, and University of Windsor alum, "a major blow to theatre training in Canada," and that "this is a central program within Windsor's School of Dramatic Arts that has developed outstanding artists who have worked at the highest levels of achievement across Canada and internationally" (Kotsis 2024).

In the same breath as announcing the termination of the University Players, the University articulated a plan to reimagine its Entrepreneurship, Practice and Innovation



Centre (EPIC). Why was this same reimaging and restructuring not offered to the University Players?

The dollars saved by axing this program will be paid in social and cultural capital now, and actual dollars in the future. Many have already noted that, outside of the students who are impacted by this decision, the broader arts community and commerce in Windsor will be impacted as well. From a purely financial and economic perspective, there will be a trickle down effect that will cost more than was saved from this decision.

The loss of such a program that has graduated several actors, teachers and professors will be felt more keenly when it draws fewer students looking for the practical acting experience to go alongside the theoretical.

The University of Windsor has time to reverse course and reimagine these cuts. For the students in attendance now, those yet to come, and the community that has rallied around them, you need to take action now.

Sincerely,

Matthew Sheahan
President, Council of Ontario Drama and Dance Educators
president@code.on.ca

Kotsis, J. (2024, June 20). 'Awful, just awful' — public outcry follows UWindsor termination of University Players. Windsor Star.
<https://windsorstar.com/news/local-news/awful-just-awful-public-outcry-follows-uwindsor-termination-of-university-players>

Staff, former students chime in on “heartbreaking” University Players closure. (2024, June 20). CBC.



<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/windsor/university-of-windsor-players-closure-1.72401>

53