Stage 1
Dr. O’Connell began the “Theatre Writing Initiative” based on the teachers’ roles and a desire to develop students’ skills in writing in the discipline of theatre.

- **The initial concern:** A critical incident inspired the initiative—a cover letter written by a student revealed a quality of writing that was below standards expected for written communication in the discipline of theatre. Many of the jobs that graduates would be expected to enter after graduation would require a higher level of writing skill. In addition, it is in the character of the discipline of theatre that “we are communicators and it is our responsibility as educators to develop the writing skills of students” (John O’Connell).

- **Strategic expectations:** Students will learn how to write by writing about what interests them, such as concept papers about their design or play analysis. Teachers are the ones who can develop students’ skills in discipline-based writing. And students and teachers will need to know that writing is important in the Department of Theatre.

- **Implementation plan:** Since teachers will develop the writing assignments for their individual courses, they are the ones who must engage in setting the standards for writing.

Stage 2
Categories for describing types of papers were identified for the Department of Theatre and given codes to use in a chart to categorize the types of papers in each course.

- Artistic Analysis (AA);
- Critical Analysis (CA);
- Character Analysis (CHA);
- Critical Response (CR);
- Essay (E);
- Outline (O);
- Response/Report (R);

For each course, teachers identified the course, 1-line description of the writing assignment, estimated number of pages, number of papers to be written in the course, and used one of the codes to categorize the type of paper. This mapping of types of papers was accomplished before developing any writing rubrics.
Results were displayed in two types of charts—one to show clusters of the types of writing assignments across the courses, and another to show courses by level and the type of writing assignment. The first chart, with color coding added to the category labels, made it easy to see the frequency distribution of types of papers. The second chart, also with color coding, made it easy to see the distribution of types of papers across course levels.

Types of courses taught in the Department of Theatre include stagecraft and scenic design, acting, rendering and lighting techniques, theatre appreciation, theatre history, theatrical composition, movement, dance and choreography, costume design, musical theatre, stage and theatre management, and teachers of these courses came into this initiative with different expectations. This stage of work took place over a period of months in multiple departmental meetings involving the teachers and their review of their decisions.

Stage 3
The third stage was conceived of as developing rubrics to use for scoring the different types of papers and was accomplished with consultation from the IPFW Center for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (CELT) over two meetings and follow-up by the team of teachers in the department to elaborate on the final form of the writing rubric to use for these papers.

Initial CELT-Theatre meeting: Review of meaning and functionality of rubrics, introduction of a rubric template, examples of rubrics, and guidance of teachers through a sample exercise for using a rubric to judge the quality of a paper. The action following this meeting would be for each teacher to draft a writing rubric.

Second CELT-Theatre meeting: Review and discuss the qualities of the writing rubrics, what would work, what would not work, areas of agreement and disagreement, and follow-up revisions that would be needed. Teachers were also provided with words of encouragement and additional examples of rubrics that might support their revisions.

Follow-up work: The Department Chair and teachers continued to refine the rubrics, tried them out, made changes, and after several iterations developed the “IPFW Department of Theatre Writing Rubric.” In this rubric, the student’s name, course name and semester are identified.

The emergent categories of evaluation are letter grades of A, B, C, D, or F. The dimensions in which students may earn points are:

- Grammar/Spelling
- Sentence Structure
- Organization of Ideas
- Integration of Course Concepts
- Fulfillment of Content Parameters
- Formatting
- Quality of Writing

The teacher of the individual course sets the points that can be earned in each dimension, identifies the course concepts that must be integrated, and sets all the content parameters.
Stage 4

This stage is ongoing—it involves implementation and ad hoc feedback.

- Teachers map writing assignments to the writing rubric.
- Each student’s file now has a writing portfolio.
- Teachers come to the Chair to reveal a change or innovation made in a writing assignment.
- Anecdotal remarks by teachers suggest that they like using the writing rubric system and some “love it!” Students like getting the writing rubric, having the same rubric in each course, and knowing the expectations of the writing assignments.