

Community tells LTCC board theater is a must



Nearly 70 people listen Nov. 29 to why Lake Tahoe Community College may disband the theater arts program. Photo/LTN

By Kathryn Reed

The drama that was staged before the Lake Tahoe Community College trustees Tuesday night was complex, passionate, sorrowful and heartfelt.

It's like today is intermission and the audience is left not knowing how many acts there will be in the future. That's because the script is not finished.

This production of sorts was actually the college administration's opportunity to present to the board and public why the theater department may be disbanded following this academic year. It was also the public's first chance to speak directly to the board.

“This program does great work. That has never been the question for us. We know the productions are of high quality,” Michelle Risdon, interim vice president of Academic Affairs, said. “We are looking for change in this program. Whether the program is discontinued or not it has to change.”

Most people were unaware until **last month** that the college was even considering doing away with theater arts as a credit program. Not enough people are taking the classes to make it a viable program, according college officials. They stressed how few people actually get a degree.

Many of those who spoke Tuesday during the 2½ hour special board meeting pointed out that getting a degree is not satisfactory criteria. Many shared their experience of taking courses that have benefitted them despite having no desire to act. Actors spoke of how they have been able to hone their craft.

Susan Boulanger, head of the department, was repeatedly praised for her teaching acumen. She sat in the audience, near the back. While she showed emotion as various people spoke, she remained silent, unable to direct this spectacle.

All of the 21 people who gave testimony Nov. 29 want theater in some form to exist at LTCC. Administrators also want the college to have theater, but as a true community theater model and not an academic model.

Stephanie Arrigoth, professor at Western Nevada College and producer-director of the Western Nevada Musical Theatre Company, suggested LTCC’s program would be viable with fewer productions, developing online courses and having fewer sections of classes so enrollment would increase. She also suggested the possibility of renting the theater out to other groups in a hybrid model.

What the board wants is still unknown.

A task force of community members will be assembled to hash out options. Enrollment numbers from winter and spring quarters will be evaluated. The president – who will be new and has yet to be hired – will make a recommendation to the board, then the board will make the ultimate decision.