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Report of the Academic Program Review Committee for DXARTS: DXARTS response

DXARTS appreciates the invaluable feedback provided by the Academic Program Review Committee, and the faculty strongly agree with the recommendations brought forward in their report. This response addresses some of the concerns expressed by the committee and some inaccuracies present in their report. Comments and clarifications about the committee's recommendations are also included at the end of this document.

Concerns

This section addresses the concerns brought up by the committee. The DXARTS faculty found these comments extremely valuable but wanted to respond to some inaccuracies presented in the report. For clarity, each of the concerns is listed below followed by the response.

Faculty and Staff

"While no department can serve all needs, it is notable that DXARTS does not have any current faculty with a departmental connection to visual arts nor any faculty who specialize in theoretical/critical discourse."

This statement is inaccurate, both Professors James Coupe and Afroditi Psarra have a visual arts background and their work is fully related to the visual arts. This means that half of our current faculty are visual artists. It is important to note that while DXARTS doesn't have faculty who specialize in theoretical/critical discourse, that's not the main focus of its PhD program which is a practice-based degree (not a Theory/History degree). It should be also noted that one of DXARTS' Adjunct Faculty, Prof. Phillip Thurtle from CHID, is a theorist and has been part of many PhD committees.

"With faculty having their primary appointments in diverse departments, academic processes including tenure, promotion, merit, and other evaluations are difficult to oversee and guide. This is also a challenge with two DXARTS faculty holding administrative positions: Professor Juan Pampin as Director of DXARTS and Professor Richard Karpen as Director of the School of Music. This leaves few faculty to serve as mentors and/or to guide evaluations, assessments, and promotions. The two DXARTS administrative appointments also have a negative impact on the number and variety of classes that can be taught by the core faculty."

This is a fair concern and it was addressed in Part B section 4 of the Self Study. Both Professors Richard Karpen (Director of the School of Music) and Juan Pampin (Director of DXARTS) have limited capacity to teach and supervise students. The committee's

recommendation to add two (and ideally 3) 100% FTE faculty lines to the program could help mitigate this situation.

“The number of DXARTS alumni hired by the program is also concerning. The self-study remarks on the successful employment of PhD alumni. While this is true, 25% of the Center’s PhD alumni are employed by DXARTS itself, including one of the faculty and two staff members. This employment pattern may be internally useful to the Center, but unfortunately limits the growth of its national and international reputation.”

This statement is inaccurate. The Self Study refers to PhD students, and only one of our current staff members, Ewa Trębacz, is a PhD alumna. DXARTS is a young program and only has granted thirteen (13) PhD’s, using percentages is really not the best way to look at this issue. And even so, only two of these alumni, James Coupe and Ewa Trębacz, are currently working at DXARTS, that’s only two alumni out of thirteen (15%). Of the rest of DXARTS’ alumni, 90% of them have jobs in academia and, as stated in the Self Study, many students from our PhD program are offered academic positions in national and international universities even before graduation (that is the case of several of our current PhD candidates who have recently been hired as faculty). It is also important to note that DXARTS’ most recent hire, Afroditi Psarra, is not an alumni of the program.

Finally, the DXARTS’ staff are highly qualified and are required to have professional training in a variety of media. For instance, Ewa Trębacz has expertise both in video and audio, she is also a professional web developer and a programmer. Having a PhD, she can also teach DXARTS courses. Ewa takes care of DXARTS’ Raitt Hall facilities and equipment, for which she has programmed an online catalog and reservation system. It is hard to imagine finding someone with this kind of profile who is also an active artist with an international career (her work “things lost things invisible” for Ambisonic space and orchestra, produced at DXARTS, was recognized by the 56th UNESCO International Rostrum of Composers in Paris).

“Finally, while DXARTS adjunct faculty expressed enthusiasm about their relationship and partnerships with the program, the faculty within DXARTS was not always as strongly spirited when describing its adjuncts and partnerships.”

It is hard to understand what the concern is here. The DXARTS faculty work hard to establish connections across campus and to bring collaborators as adjunct faculty into the program. As shown on Appendix H of the Self Study these connections are wide and diverse and were all initiated by our faculty and PhD students.

Research and Dissemination of Knowledge

“A nuanced challenge for the Center is its stated vision of sustaining research on the leading edge of the intersection of art and technology. To remain on this leading edge DXARTS will need to continue to evolve and articulate their practice of research and the goals toward which they strive. This articulation is critical as part of future interdisciplinary collaborations.”

This is a fair concern, it was addressed in the DXARTS Research section of the Self Study.

“During conversations with DXARTS faculty about the nature of their research, productivity, and the dissemination of their work, the Committee sometimes encountered defensiveness that appears to stem from years of being asked to defend the program. We heard a similar defensiveness from some students that appeared to echo that of the faculty. The Committee’s intent was to clarify how DXARTS defines research, not to question the value of their work or methods. While it is natural to assert the value of one’s work, that expression of value is best interpreted as an opportunity to educate potential collaborators, sponsors, and allies, rather than a challenge to the quality of one’s endeavors. The Committee is concerned that such defensiveness may generate missed opportunities in the future.”

During the site visit some of the DXARTS faculty and students reported an adversarial attitude from one of the committee members. The DXARTS faculty and students are really proud of their PhD program and are fervent proponents of it, it is important they are not taxed as defensive when they were actually responding to highly aggressive questioning by this committee member in several different meetings.

It is hard to see a concern related to the dissemination of the faculty and student work. The DXARTS faculty and students use every single opportunity to present and disseminate their work, Appendix F and Appendix G of the Self Study as well as our online news feed (<https://dxarts.washington.edu/news/archive>) speak to this.

Resources and Facilities

“DXARTS rents a considerable facility in Ballard that requires substantial care and maintenance and no longer has the support of an essential full time staff member. The Committee noted that travel time between campus and the Ballard Lab routinely approaches or exceeds 30 minutes. While the off-site location of the Ballard facility does have many benefits, we believe that they may be outweighed by the disadvantages of the distant location.”

This is a fair concern, it was addressed in multiple sections of the Self Study. While the remote location of the Ballard FabLab is problematic, this is certainly not the main issue. As stated in the Part B, section 4 of the Self Study, the Ballard FabLab is key to DXARTS’ operations and it currently costs the department about 10% of its annual budget. The rental agreement for the space times out in a year (June 2019) and at that time it is expected for the rent to have a significant increase, so this situation is time sensitive. There is also an issue of unfairness in this situation: DXARTS is the only art unit that has to pay for its space needs, while the other art units have their own buildings and a large amount of space on and off campus.

Budget and Finances

“Contributing to the concern above is the Ballard facility’s rental and utilities expense, which places a significant burden on the DXARTS budget. This cost may not be sustainable long term.”

As expressed above, this is an important concern, the sustainability of DXARTS is also at stake as this facility is key to its operations.

“Another budgetary concern is the cost of graduate student funding (including tuition and stipends), which has increased without an increase in the Center’s budgetary allocation. This cost presents an ongoing challenge for sustaining the Center’s ongoing efforts to maintain a high level of productivity and recruit outstanding students.”

This is a fair concern, the Self Study proposes to address this issue by teaming-up with the College to fund an extra ASE position every year, that way DXARTS could increase its PhD cohort to twelve students allowing to offer more foundations courses.

Governance

“An overwhelming number of constituents interviewed during the site visit expressed a strong desire for DXARTS to become a department. One concern as this venture moves forward is the challenge of retaining and sustaining nimbleness in terms of interactions with a wide variety of units on campus. Faculty lines residing in whole or in part in other departments can foster long-term collaboration and appears to have benefitted the program in multiple ways. Related to this concern is the potential challenge of not becoming another silo as a department. The Center’s faculty’s must remain diligent and continue actively seeking partnerships with other units in ways that foster robust collaborations and deeply interdisciplinary projects.”

This concern is understandable, but we won't know how departmental status could affect our program until it is granted. This is probably something to be assessed by the Dean and DXARTS in the 5-year interim report recommended by the committee.

Recommendations

This section addresses the recommendations presented by the committee. The DXARTS faculty strongly agrees with these recommendations. Some comments and clarifications are included below.

Departmental Status

As stated in the Self Study (and the report), DXARTS departmental status was already recommended by the 2008 program review committee and we hope this issue will finally be addressed by the College. Dean Bob Stacey and Divisional Dean of the Arts Catherine Cole expressed their optimism in getting this situation solved especially in light of the recent departmental promotions of Dance and Comparative History of Ideas (CHID).

Faculty

DXARTS desperately needs more faculty, both to cover for faculty with administrative appointments (Karpen and Pampin) but these new lines are also crucial for a generational renovation of DXARTS, as in ten years from now most of our faculty will be senior and our most senior faculty will be approaching retirement (there is also a matter

of gender balance in our faculty which could be addressed with the appointment of at least two new faculty). 0% appointments (or non-voting faculty appointments) are already in place for all DXARTS adjunct faculty, but what DXARTS needs are more voting faculty, this is particularly critical for promotion cases to Full Professor, as currently only two DXARTS faculty have this rank and at least three would be needed to form a promotion committee.

Fab Lab Facility

As stated above, this is a critical and time-sensitive issue. DXARTS will be working in conjunction with Divisional Dean Catherine Cole and Steve Majeski, Associate Dean for Research Administration and Infrastructure of the College of Arts & Sciences, to find a sustainable solution to its space needs.

Staffing

DXARTS already takes full advantage of resources offered by the College. Unfortunately these resources are limited and don't cover full support for grant writing and application. Our recent success in obtaining a large grant from the NEA was extremely taxing on the time of our faculty and administrative staff. The bureaucratic demands of the federal granting entities and the internal ones presented by OSP make it impossible for a small unit like DXARTS to regularly apply for grants. What was proposed in the Self Study is that with the help of the College, DXARTS could fund a 50% FTE position dedicated to grant writing and administration and this way manage to apply for more grants and "alternative funding streams" (as recommended by the report under "Other Considerations")

Conclusion

The program review process has been extremely enriching for DXARTS. The faculty appreciate the work of the committee and its thorough review and recommendations for the program. DXARTS expects these recommendations to be addressed and implemented by the College as soon as possible.

Sincerely,



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Professor / Director
Center for Digital Arts and
Experimental Media (DXARTS)