

On November 17th, 2005 the University of Washington Graduate and Professional Student Senate (GPSS) Special Assistant to the President (SPA) facilitated a 90 minute meeting with eight students from the Dance Program. The purpose of this focus group was to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the program from the perspective of Dance students. This report summarizes students' feedback for consideration in the Graduate Council's decennial review of the Dance Program. All students were invited (through department email and through GPSS senators) and the eight students in attendance represented the entirety of the graduate dance program. Additionally, the SPA attended meetings between Dance students and the Graduate School's visiting team to enrich the focus group discussion with topics outlined in the on site visit.

Program Strengths

The assessment provided by students was, on the whole, extremely positive with very specified and limited comments on possible improvements. The degree of attendance was also beneficial in that the opinions gathered comprehensively represent the program.

- One of the most prevalent strengths of the program from the student perspective was the abundance of opportunities for Teaching Assistant (TA) positions. Although only eight students comprise the graduate program, each of them has been awarded TA positions working with undergraduates in Dance, furnishing both significant educational funding as well as invaluable teaching experience. Additional comments on the strengths of the Dance Program's TA program included:
 - TA positions within the Dance Program allow unique discretion in determining substantive content of courses and determining the schedule of syllabi. While this is often challenging, most students were pleased that they are allowed opportunities to develop their teaching skills under the supervision of experienced faculty.
 - Through the TA program, students are able to mentor and develop relationships with undergraduates in entry dance courses. As expressed by students, these relationships and opportunities develop not only their professional teaching capacities but also significantly contribute to a sense of departmental community and a collegial atmosphere. One specific example provided was the concert being developed in conjunction with the Digital Arts (DX) department which heavily involves undergraduate input.
 - Students were extremely pleased with the funding for tuition and other expenses afforded under universally granted TA positions.
- Students agreed that central to the success of the Dance program and the quality of its educational atmosphere are dedicated and concerned faculty who consistently offer accommodations for professional training and advice. There is a degree of trust shared between the graduate students and the faculty, as witnessed

- in the degree of freedom granted to graduate students in framing the presentation and selection of course material.
- Students praised the programs ability to develop professional training and skills relevant to finding employment opportunities subsequent to graduation. Due to the small and tightly knit community experienced at the Dance Program, students felt that faculty and staff were helpfully involved in developing Curriculum Vitae as well as providing opportunities including Mock Interviews, auditions, and frequent exposure to job openings through departmental email. On the whole, students felt well prepared to enter the job market confident in the skills and experiences provided while at the Program.
 - Facilities and equipment were regarded as being of sufficient and high quality, which is of special consideration given the uniquely physical component of academic dance.
 - One of the strongest advantages expressed by students in Dance was the collegial and cooperative atmosphere. Students rely heavily on one another for support and assistance in planning and carrying out studies and teaching responsibilities, which makes for a healthy educational environment. While most students focus on a particular area of study, from Theory to Anatomy, this overriding sense of community is seen as an important outlet for frustration and airing any potential grievances.

Suggested Program Improvements

The overall impression from the meeting held with Dance students was overwhelmingly positive as students seemed satisfied and fulfilled in the program. Suggestions for possible improvements were limited and specific, which attests to the overall quality of the atmosphere at the school of dance.

- Students noted that although the relatively small student body was helpful in some respects, that a more broadly marketed and larger school size could enhance the quality and reputation of the dance program. Additionally, students said that expanding the undergraduate program would facilitate this goal as well as providing access to a more broad range of subjects (i.e. Jazz) and curriculum.
- While students were pleased overall with what was being taught in the program, increased opportunities for a more diverse and non-western curriculum (i.e. African and Chinese Classical Dance) would both attract a more diverse student body as well as enhancing the education received in the program.
- Given the large amount of requisite courses in the program, student stated that they would prefer increased opportunities for unique and different elective courses to both specialize their degrees as well as gain exposure to different subjects.
- Students were on the whole extremely pleased with the TA program (All students work as TA's) and noted that the only room that they saw for improvement would be in the range and scope of course available for Teaching Assistant positions. Students felt that their experience and knowledge, particularly in reference to technique, would work well in upper division courses, and expressed some concern that they typically are limited to positions in 100 and 200 level courses.

- Students praised the relationship between the program and the Digital Arts, which culminates in a collaborative concert with undergraduates. Most students felt that this relationship could be enhanced and expanded, providing fresh and unique opportunities for experimentation with digital technology in fusion with dance.

Overview

The Dance Program, from the perspective of students, appears to be a complete success, with students expressing feelings of adequate support from faculty, the department and the administration as a whole. Those criticisms mentioned were limited and not representative of any general negative sentiment. Through continuing to inspire an educational and collegial atmosphere the Dance Program at Washington promises to continue its reputation for excellence and quality.