



GPSS Program Review

School of Drama

Executive Summary – June 17, 2014

On April 17, 2014, the GPSS President and Special Assistant to the President met with graduate students from the School of Drama to conduct a focus group as part of the school's 10-year program review. A survey was not distributed, as a uniform questionnaire was deemed inappropriate for the heterogeneity of sub-programs within the School of Drama. The following themes emerged from the hour-long discussion:

Strengths:

- Faculty are available and honest
- Showcase is partly funded by the School of Drama
- Requirements are straightforward

Weaknesses:

- School of Drama needs extreme renovation
 - o Prop floors need to be replaced
 - o Rooms need to be equipped
 - o Heating system needs to be replaced
 - o There is no accessibility for disabled
- Designers are not allowed to accept work during school
- In terms of retention, no funding makes it difficult for international students
- Little program support in finding career-enhancing opportunities that are standard practice at peer institutions

Academic Program:

Students described an academic program with little flexibility in where the students feel overloaded with classes and without the possibility to explore different academic areas within their school. Acting students in particular noted that there is little to no flexibility in their program to take any courses outside of those prescribed for the degree. The acting students receive very little formal training and are offered only one quarter of singing, yet the majority of positions are in musical theatre, and they receive no improvisation classes, which limits their career possibilities. Designer and PhD students feel that their courses are oriented towards Western theatrical tradition, and feel that they would benefit from diverse courses in Latin American, Asian, and African theatrical traditions. There is a concern between the Designer and PhD students that they are not receiving sufficient education in order to develop teaching skills for their future careers.

Career Preparation:

Students noted that although their program is highly regarded, they receive few opportunities to professionally connect to theater companies and other potential employers. In particular, acting students noted that due to budget cuts, they often have to pay their own way to go to showcases that are the standard in their industry for getting noticed by talent agents and finding employment. Acting students likewise cited little support from faculty in networking or contacting talent agencies, and noted that UW was one of the few programs among its peers to not bring in acting companies to audition students on-site.

Design students (costume, set, lighting) noted problems with career preparation as well. In particular, they are required to take a quarter-long internship/apprenticeship as part of their program, but are not supported by the School of Drama in actually seeking out this opportunity and must do so on their own. Compounding this problem, they are not allowed to take outside work in their field while in the MFA program, which hampers their professional preparation.

Facilities:

Students expressed grave concern over the condition of Hutchinson Hall. Although the building is one of historical significance, it was described as inadequate, and in some cases dangerous for the work done in the School of Drama. The need to replace floors, HVAC systems, renovate studio spaces, and purchase new props were all cited as major impediments to the work of all students, but particularly actors. Another major issue was the lack of ADA access, which is similarly a problem in many buildings across campus that are long overdue for renovation. Overstretched janitorial staff was also cited as a reason for the poor state of facilities; one janitor is responsible for the entirety of Hutchinson Hall and is therefore unable to do more than address emergent maintenance issues.

Department Climate and Diversity:

Students expressed a strong sense of collegiality between their own departments, PATP (Actors), Design, and PhD. Designer and Ph. D students believe that there is an “old Berlin wall” between faculties in where the collegiality problem trickles down to the students. For example, disputes between acting faculty and design faculty leads to students being discouraged from collaborating across their subfields, which seems bizarre as they will be required to do so in their careers. Students expressed “turf issues” amongst faculty, and noted that Ph.D students

are actively discouraged from collaborating with MFA students when the Ph.D students' areas of study could enhance some aspect of the MFA student's work (e.g. historical context expertise for a directing student putting on his or her own production). On the other hand, acting students have found that faculty are very available, honest, responsible, and willing to have a one on one with students. However, funding is a problem for actors and there are few, if any, internship programs or networking possibilities available (see above under "Career Preparation").

In terms of recruitment and retention, students express concern for international students, explaining that they have an extremely difficult time finding financial support and a means to stay in the program. In addition, the students believe that they would benefit from having mentors that can support their individual trajectories.