

Dance Program Review, 2017
Graduate School Council Overview
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Overview

This overview summarizes the Dance Program's self-study, the review committee's report, and the unit's response to the report. We concur with the review committee's recommendation that the Dance Program be continued and the next review of the Program occur in 10 years. The Dance Program should be commended for its multifaceted approach to education, professional service, and its core role as arts ambassador to the extended UW and public community. Several additional recommendations are provided below.

This report is based primarily upon the Dance Program Review Committee's assessment. This committee included two University of Washington (UW) faculty members (Anand A. Yang, Committee Chair, History and Jackson School; Jeffrey Frace, School of Drama) and two external members (Elizabeth Fisher, University of Hawaii at Manoa; Mila Parrish, University of North Carolina, Greensboro). As per the request of the Graduate School, the Review Committee focused on assessing the quality of the Dance Program's undergraduate and graduate programs, its educational value and role in the discipline and at UW and the wider community, and its resources for fulfilling its mission. The review also took into consideration "guiding questions:" 1) Is the Dance Program doing what it should be doing? 2) Are they doing it well? 3) How can they do things better? And 4) How should the University assist them?

Dance Program Review Summary

Programs reviewed include the BA in Dance and the MFA in Dance. Overall, the Dance program has a very strong local, regional, national, and global reputation, with specific strengths in dance performances and dance faculty development. The review team noted intense student engagement demonstrated throughout the site visit, reflecting a warm, welcoming, yet critical learning environment. This high-quality teaching has been reflected by awards, high student evaluative scores, and a strong student body that go on to an impressive range of post-graduate activities that reflect the diversified curricular and pedagogical approaches (including working professionally in the dance community, establishing new areas of research and community service, and becoming faculty members).

Program Strengths

In regards to the BA in Dance, several unique strengths arose during this review. The first is the strength of the faculty, which embody the scholar-practitioner required for theoretical depth and hands-on practical excellence in dance performance. The faculty includes renowned scholars, performers, directors, and provides students with opportunities to learn and experience dance from multiple perspectives. This faculty in turn has fostered a curricular flexibility and depth that reflects the program goals to provide critical thinking, recognition of cultural practices related to dance, and a range of dance performance.

The second strength of the BA program is curricular flexibility to encourage in-depth student learning within the subject while blending disciplines and knowledge domains. Most students are thus also double majors, and have opportunities to study dance while also participating in public performances. The third strength is the alignment with MFA students, who provide mentoring roles while in their own program development.

The two-year MFA program has an outstanding national reputation. Just three students per year are admitted, and admission into the elite program requires a minimum of eight years of professional dance performance experience in a nationally recognized dance company. Operating in very small cohorts (of up to six), students are mentored closely by faculty, and have opportunities to teach and mentor undergraduate students as well. The focus of the curriculum is to create educators, and the primary strength of this program is its effectiveness in preparing graduates for entering tenure-track faculty positions.

Challenges & Risks

Most Dance undergraduates are completing two majors. The Dance Program's flexibility helps students accomplish these goals, but students nevertheless encounter scheduling difficulty slowing graduations in 4 years. Scheduling has become a potential barrier, exacerbated by limited instructional, performance, and practice spaces.

For graduate students, funding is increasingly insufficient to support living in Seattle. Given that funding is so essential to MFA student participation in this program, ensuring funding rises with the cost of living increase in Seattle seems essential, but likely outside the realm of the Dance Program.

A curricular need appears to have arisen in that some MFA students require additional supports for composition. The review suggests several mechanisms to meet this need, including an orientation to teaching technologies and class preparatory performance spaces.

A seemingly perpetual challenge is the need for additional performance spaces, particularly for informal, practice, and preparatory work. This need will presumably grow with the increased demand for undergraduate majors, and long-term, increased attention to shared spaces that work for multiple performative programs is warranted.

There are some concerns about staffing and faculty lines, particularly given the need both to coordinate large public performances and support a range of undergraduate and graduate students. Given the substantial increase in numbers of undergraduate majors (from 35 to 65 in the past year alone), the nuances associated with teaching, scholarship, and public performances, the strain on current staff and faculty workload appears noticeable (and growing).

Areas of Concurrence

The Dance Program in its response to the Review Committee's report agreed "with the overall nature of the report." Dance is continually adjusting class schedules in hopes of better accommodating students. They are planning to offer graduate students more access to training in technology and skills for teaching prior to entry into the Program. Dance agrees that there is a need for more robust and fruitful relationships with alumni and has created a new

Marketing/Communications position to address this need. They are actively seeking expansion of studio space, and ways of providing composition classes. They have already put into place a plan for Dance and Drama to collaborate on use of shops for props and costumes. Most enthusiastically, the Dance Program agrees with the Review Committee that there is a strong need for an additional faculty line. Finally, the Director has processed the necessary paperwork to begin the process of transitioning from Program to Department, and report that the College of Arts and Sciences is supportive of this move.

Areas of Difference

On several points the Dance Program differed with the Review Committee's observations and recommendations.

- 1) Decreased offerings of on-line courses is a reflection of recent funding cuts, and not a lack of interest by the faculty.
- 2) A correction was offered by Dance stating that graduate students are expected to develop and teach a course, but this is never a lecture course. Instead graduate students produce a seminar, or a combination of lecture, discussion and experiential learning.
- 3) While accepting the sentiment of the recommendation to develop space in Meany, Dance prefers not to compete with Music's needs in Meany. Instead Dance is looking forward to using their better relationship with Drama to find efficiencies in space use between them.

Graduate School Council Recommendations

The Dance Program should be commended for its efforts and approaches to create and sustain an outstanding, nationally recognized BA and MFA. In addition, several recommendations are provided to support and encourage the Dance Program:

- 1) Full continuance of the Dance Program, with the next scheduled review in 10 years.
- 2) Transition from a Program to a Department providing this reorganization will address staff FTE, increase faculty lines, and provide support for improving course scheduling and availability of collaborative space.
- 3) Maintain tuition waivers and teaching assistantships for MFA students, and consider augmenting with additional funds to continue to recruit at the elite levels.