

From: Performing Arts Department Program Review Team

To: Dean Madonne Miner, College of Humanities and Arts, Weber State University

Re: Weber State University Site Visit

Date: May 4, 2010

This report, prepared by Bradley Carroll, Professor of Physics and Chair, Physics Department, Weber State University; Judy Elsley, Professor of English and Honors Program Director, Weber State University; and Nicholas Morrison, Professor of Music and Associate Dean of the College of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences, Utah State University; presents a summary of the team's findings regarding the Department of Performing Arts at Weber State University and takes into account the self-study provided by Department Chair Larry Dooley and the team's site visit of March 26, 2010, in addition to follow-up materials requested by the team prior to the visit.

The site visit included a tour of the department's physical facilities and opportunities for the team to meet with the following:

Dean Madonne Miner  
Larry Dooley, Professor of Theatre and Department Chair  
Faculty members from Dance Area  
Faculty members from Music Area  
Faculty members from Theatre Area  
Performance Facilities Director  
Students  
Staff  
Program Coordinators for Dance, Music and Theatre

In this report, the team endeavors to evaluate the program in light of the following standards that were provided by the Dean of the College of Humanities and Arts:

1. Mission Statement Standards
2. Curriculum Standards
3. Student Learning Outcomes Standards
4. Academic Advising Standards
5. Faculty Standards
6. Program Support Standards
7. Relationships with External Communities
8. Program Summary Standards

The team concludes the report with several recommendations based on our visit that we present for the consideration of the Dean, Chair, and faculty.

### **Mission Statement Standards**

The visiting team found the mission statement and stated goals of the members of the faculty with whom we spoke to be in line with expectations for a department of performing arts at a regional university. The mission of the department appears to be in line with those of the college and of Weber State University. Faculty members in the three areas of the department (Dance, Music and Theatre) appear to be in support of the mission of the department and of the goals of their disciplinary units. The goals and objectives of the unit, included in the self-study, are appropriate to the three disciplines and appear to be mutually supporting.

### **Curriculum Standards**

The curriculum appears to be consistent with the program's mission. Materials provided with the self-study indicate that a majority of courses are taught either each semester or once per academic year. Several courses are taught in alternating years.

While courses to support the department's programs appear to be offered on a regular basis to ensure students are able to complete graduation requirements in a timely manner, three students reported taking over 200 hours in pursuit of their degrees. Some of this is attributable to factors such as major changes after attaining a significant number of credits in another program or to participation in elective performance classes, but several students expressed concerns regarding advising. One indicated specifically that there were inaccuracies in the catalog regarding courses that were offered in alternating years. (See recommendation #1)

### **Student Learning Outcomes Standards**

The department's self study outlines learning outcomes for each program housed in the department. These learning outcomes appear to be appropriate to the various majors within the disciplines and, in the opinion of the visiting team, support the goals of the programs they serve. The matrix provided does not link the outcomes to specific courses, although numerous linkages can be inferred from course titles and sequencing.

Assessment procedures are present for each learning outcome and consist of both traditional kinds of assessment such as written tests and graduate surveys and of individualized assessment practices such as performance juries and portfolios. The team did not have time to view formal documentation of portfolio reviews or jury examinations, but the members of the faculty with whom we interacted clearly had a firm grasp of the importance of these kinds of assessment tools in the performing arts and of their administration. Provided there is a central repository for formal documentation of these procedures, the portfolio and jury process is an assessment tool appropriate for the activities to which it is linked in the matrix provided.

There appears to be some concern by music students regarding the standards and administration of the piano proficiency preparatory courses and examination. Several students stated that the piano classes did not completely prepare them to complete the examination and that they were then required to enroll in additional piano lessons for which there is an additional course fee. (See recommendation #2)

Several students suggested the inclusion of more popular dance forms (hip-hop, etc.) and seem to be hungry for more collaboration among the three disciplines represented by the department. (See recommendation #3)

### **Academic Advising Standards**

The self-study appears to document fairly the current practices in advising, which rely on a combination of the Cat Tracks system, advising during required classes during the freshman year, and encouraging students to see their faculty advisors for questions. The faculty reports that the hiring of a college advisor to handle advising in general education has been helpful and that they believe that advising in the department, an area identified as lacking in the previous review, had improved. In student interviews, however, the visiting team heard several times that advising remains an issue for students, although there was no comparison made to the situation prior to the previous review. Several students and members of the faculty indicated that the addition of Debby Murphy to the college has made a positive impact on the quality of advising.

The apparent disconnect between student and faculty view of the advising process may stem from the nature of a performing arts department. Since faculty and students often spend a significant amount of time together either in individual lessons or in preparation for productions, there can be the perception that advisors and advisees are in nearly constant contact. In reality, however, it can be the case that formal academic advising rarely occurs in these situations. (See recommendation #1)

### **Faculty Standards**

Faculty members interviewed expressed a real commitment to the teaching enterprise and to the students. Likewise, students were of one voice in praising the quality of the education, richness of the classes, and the talent of the faculty in the Department of Performing Arts.

The self-study documents the size, composition, qualifications and professional development activities of the current faculty. The self-study also makes the point, and the visiting team agrees, that the number of faculty in each discipline is generally only one deep and at the very edge of fulfilling the standard that “the program maintains a core of full-time faculty sufficient to provide stability and ongoing quality improvement for the degree programs offered.” In particular, the theatre area faculty is stretched to the limit, since two of them have assumed administrative roles (one as department chair and another as associate dean) since the last review. (See recommendation #4)

Contract and adjunct faculty who provide instruction to students appear to be academically and professionally qualified. In addition, those who responded to a survey regarding the quality of communication with the department indicated that they were satisfied. The members of the faculty appear to be well-connected with professional artists in the institution’s service area and, therefore, have been able to identify excellent opportunities to hire talented performers as adjuncts. Since, however, many of these adjuncts are in the area purely by happenstance (The wife of an employee at Hill AFB, for example, teaches oboe.), this may be an unreliable long-term strategy.

The program is to be congratulated on its 2007 opportunity hire of a faculty member from an underrepresented group. It appears that the faculty is committed to further diversifying its membership.

Faculty members interviewed appear to support the department's workload policy as being fair and transparent. They also appear to support the current policy of providing travel and professional development funding based on proposal. Although there is no question that an "open line of communication between members of the faculty" as cited in the self-study is an essential ingredient for mentoring, it may be wise for the senior faculty to consider how they might put more conscious and direct mentoring procedures in place for their junior colleagues. University-sponsored workshops, also cited in the self-study, are doubtlessly important, but the differences in culture between a performing arts department and the general university community make it more critical that artists who are senior members of the academy actively engage in mentoring their junior colleagues. (See recommendation #4)

In addition to individual efforts to document effective teaching, the faculty from each performance area report that they meet regularly to consider curricula, productions and other issues involving the department and students. Although these meetings are helpful to the individual areas, there is little evidence of regular, formal communication or coordination among the areas. (See recommendation #5)

### **Program Support Standards**

#### **Administration**

Students and members of the faculty were unanimous in their praise of the current chair and dean for their support and effective administration of the program. It is also clear that the positive relationship the faculty and current chair have with the past chair is a great strength for the department.

#### **Support Staff**

Members of the department's support staff appear to be knowledgeable and hardworking in their assignments. They were unanimous in their expressed commitment to the students and faculty of the department and in their opinion that the chair and dean are good people to work for. They appreciate the opportunity to attend faculty meetings, but feel that there is no formal forum for sharing information amongst themselves or for talking about the needs of the staff as separate from the faculty. The staff stated that there could be a potential easing of workflow if they had a regular opportunity to communicate amongst themselves. (See recommendation #5)

One additional concern that the staff expressed was an understandable apprehension regarding the future, given the current budgetary climate for the state. The fear of being the victim of a reduction in force is a concern for staff members who have seen several of their colleagues lose their jobs, and it is perhaps magnified since their faculty colleagues are protected by tenure from such actions. It is the impression of the visiting team that the chair and dean are sensitive to this

situation and are doing what they can to support the staff members and make the process a humane and transparent one.

## Budget

Approximately half of the department's budget comes from student fees. Because these fees are voted on and appropriated by the students, the visiting team views overreliance on this source of income as risky. One obvious potential weakness is that the department may feel constrained by student taste in choosing productions, creating a potential issue for academic freedom for department majors and faculty members. (See recommendation #6)

Although the department has one state-appropriated budget, it is split into separate allocations for the three program areas of dance, music and theatre. The chair stated that he doesn't feel that it would be wise to use funds from one program to support another. While the chair and budget officer have a clear understanding of the budget, this does not appear to be the general situation for faculty and staff. For example, one party interviewed expressed concern that in spite of several years' experience in the department, the specific budget allocation for their program is still an unknown. Again, in these times of ever-tightening budgets, the more open and transparent the budgeting process can be, the less chance there will be for misinformation and guessing. (See recommendation #7)

## Facilities

The self-study contains a complete inventory of spaces available to the department. The general impression from the faculty and staff and from the tour provided to the visiting team is that the facilities are well-maintained and cared for. Members of the faculty with whom the visiting team spoke were also complimentary of the facilities director, Herb Garman. The visiting team also found Mr. Garman to be knowledgeable, organized, and a strong advocate for the students and faculty. His relationship with other campus service entities, such as the fire marshal, seems to help head off problems for students and faculty members.

While most of the facilities appear adequate to the needs of the program, there is a lack of set building and storage space, and a stated need for a music recital venue. There is a plan in the early stages of development to expand the area behind the current scene shop into a new shop in order to require fewer days of set building on the stage of the theatre. Although the visiting team saw no written plans, Mr. Garman seemed to have put significant thought into how this would improve the situation both for performers and for designers and builders. The new scene shop might allow for more rental income for the theatre, which would, in turn, support the academic programs.

## Equipment

A lack of steady income streams dedicated to replacing equipment has placed the department in the position of reacting to equipment problems rather than enabling them to retire and replace equipment on schedule. Specific needs pointed out by members of the faculty and staff include:

- An aging collection of instruments used by music education majors in techniques classes
- Shop equipment that must be billed to a specific show in order to be replaced
- Inadequate ventilation for painting in the scene shop
- Inadequate lighting for the computer lab
- Aging and inadequate washing machines in the costume shop
- An aging collection of marching band uniforms and instruments
- No regular resource allocation to replace computers and other lab equipment (Such items are currently only replaced by successful internal grant proposals.)

Doubtlessly, had the visiting team chosen to do so, the entire visit could have been taken up responding to concerns regarding equipment. As in other areas of the report, the team found that the faculty and staff are resourceful and flexible in dealing with less-than-ideal resources. Faculty and staff responses to problems with equipment and the current replacement strategy, however, are tactical rather than strategic in nature. Current budgeting rules are seen as not allowing the flexibility to provide a schedule for retirement and replacement of equipment. (See recommendation #8)

## **Relationships with External Communities**

Most external relationships involve outside entities renting the performance spaces. Such groups are an important source of revenue for the department venues, and the funds generated are used to support the academic programs. The facilities manager reported that such activities are appropriately documented and handled according to WSU policies.

It appears that the department has been creative in forging relationships with community partners both to further the education of students and to garner additional resources. The recent refurbishment of the dance floor, provided for by College of Humanities and Arts and Wells Fargo funding, is one example of such a success, as is the department's relationship with Kimber Kable that has resulted in an exciting recording partnership. Several partnerships such as these are listed in the self-study document. The faculty, department chair, dean and development team are to be commended for their creativity in forging such mutually beneficial partnerships. In addition to the obvious financial advantages, such partnerships provide excellent modeling to DPA students of how arts programs are supported in the real world.

## **Program Summary Standards**

The self-study mentions several curricular changes adopted in response to the 2005 self-study and review process.

Although the institution of the Cat Tracks system for tracking student progress to completion has helped in some ways, advising appears to continue to be a challenge in this diverse department.

While faculty report that they are open to student questions and available to provide academic advising, students report that they do not feel like their advising needs are being met. (See recommendation #1)

## **Recommendations**

The members of the visiting team wish to thank the department chair, faculty, students, staff, and dean for their assistance during the visit. The spirit of openness, teamwork, and collegiality that was apparent during the visit certainly is a large factor in the success of the department. We offer the following recommendations in the spirit of building on current strengths in the department while trying to address apparent areas of concern in three areas: Curriculum and Advising, Personnel, and Budget.

### **Curriculum and Advising Recommendations**

1. Based on discussions with the faculty, students and chair, the team recommends the following options for the faculty to consider as they continue to strive to improve academic advising in the department:
  - a) Consider inviting the college academic advisor, Debby Murphy, to be a part of staff meetings.
  - b) Consider identifying a strong upper division student in each program to serve as a paid peer advisor.
  - c) Consider improving accountability in advising by tracking student advising and progress to degree completion (including determining an average time to completion and reasons for significant deviation from the average) and rewarding faculty for their participation in the process.
  - d) Consider offering training sessions to all faculty for the cat tracks system.
  - e) Consider using a social networking site such as Facebook as a clearinghouse for student advising announcements.
  - f) Consider providing a dedicated, full time, academic advisor for the Department of Performing Arts.
2. The team recommends that the music faculty consider the current practice in administering the piano proficiency and the consequences for students who do not pass the examination on the first attempt. In particular, we recommend that they discuss the option of completing the examination in modules so that failing one component does not require a student to retake the entire exam. It would be appropriate for the faculty to discuss this requirement in light of the national norms for this practice in preparation for the department's upcoming National Association of Schools of Music (NASM) self-study and site visit.
3. The team recommends that the faculty consider how being part of a department of performing arts can enrich the curriculum and intellectual/artistic environment by crossing the boundaries of the individual disciplines. To the extent possible, we recommend that the faculty consider providing appropriate opportunities, formal and/or informal, for student collaboration across disciplines.

## Personnel Recommendations

4. As full time faculty lines become available to the college, the team recommends that the dean engage the chair and faculty in a discussion of where new hires would fit in their priorities for the future, considering, in particular, the administrative roles of two members of the theatre faculty. As these new hires are made, it may be wise to consider putting into place a more formal mentoring structure for junior faculty in the department.
5. The team recommends that the chair consider attending the meetings of each of the areas of dance, music and theatre and staff meetings for the department. In addition, we recommend that he consider sponsoring informal meetings for faculty from the various programs for an exchange of ideas, and regularly-scheduled meetings for the staff, separate from faculty meetings.

## Budget Recommendations

6. As budgets allow, the team recommends that the college and department work away from reliance on student fees for such a large percentage of the budget. Replacing student fee income with state-appropriated funds would provide a more stable base for planning and for making artistic decisions.
7. The team recommends that the chair and dean review budgetary processes and allocations for the department and share more detailed information regarding the budget with faculty and staff in their specific areas of responsibility.
8. The team recommends that the chair, dean, and facility director engage in a discussion of ways to systematize the process of budgeting for equipment replacement (computers, instruments, lab equipment, etc.) involving other members of the faculty and staff as necessary in setting priorities.