

WEBER STATE UNIVERSITY DANCE PROGRAM --EVALUATION TEAM REPORT 1/28/15

Evaluation Committee:

Matthew Choberka (Chair of Department of Visual Arts and Design, Weber State)

Brenda Kowalewski (Faculty College of Social and Behavioral Sciences and head of the Center for Community and Engaged Learning)

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Based on interviews with: Dean Miner of the College of Arts and Humanities; Department of Performing Arts Chair Thom Priest, Budget Specialist Melissa Chauvet and Administrative Assistant Georgene Ady; Dance Program students and faculty; a facilities tour; and on the observation of a technique class and Moving Company rehearsal.

Summary: Our assessment is that the faculty of the Dance Program is strong and their curricular offerings and accomplishments quite remarkable given the space and financial resources they are working with. The program is exceptional in the initiative its faculty has shown in generating both community outreach and interdisciplinary projects; both kinds of projects have been pinpointed as being of special value by the university as a whole, and the Department of Performing Arts in particular. However, it is our view that if the Dance Program's current programs are to be sustainable, and if it is to grow, it needs increased and secure support in the area of technical production, and needs to have a stronger voice within the Department of Performing Arts and the college. We have reviewed the following eight aspects of the program's operation: Mission Statement, Curriculum, Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment, Academic Advising, Faculty, Support (Staff, Administration, Facilities, Equipment, and Library), Relationships with the External Communities, and the Results of Previous Program Reviews.

A. Mission Statement

The Dance Program's mission statement is clear. It is in alignment with both the program's own learning outcomes and the mission of the university. It does a good job of articulating the program's focus on developing creativity and skills in critical thinking, communication and collaboration with the goal of preparing its students for the evolving job market and to be engaged, contributing members of their communities.

B. Curriculum

The Dance Program curriculum is strong and consistent in its offerings with other dance programs in the region of comparable size. We applaud the faculty's creativity in interweaving experiences that prepare their students for careers after college into all of their existing courses. These experiences and opportunities include: grant writing; training in lighting and costume design and construction; and writing and public speaking skills. The students in the

program recognize the student centeredness of the program and appreciate being able to design their own projects and pursue undergraduate research. They are grateful for and excited by the opportunities to participate in community outreach and interdisciplinary experiences.

We recognize that the students in the dance program, like all other dance programs in the country, are predominantly female but that because of the surrounding culture in Ogden females frequently drop out of college to start families before completing their degrees. As a result this particular program has an unusual obstacle to retaining majors. In the interest of increasing retention and boosting their numbers we think perhaps the program, with the help of the administration, could benefit by looking into the possibility of creating a two-year certificate and/or Associate Degree. This would fall in line with the goal of the Board of Regents of the Utah System of Higher Education to have 66% of Utahns—men and women ages 25-64 —earn a postsecondary degree or certificate by the year 2020.

C. Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment

We applaud the faculty's work in identifying four clear learning outcomes, which they have articulated on all syllabi: that their students should be proficient in Technique and Performance, Theory and Criticism, Creative Process, and Meaning/Self Discovery. They have made great strides in charting how these outcomes are being addressed in each class in their curriculum. We think assessment of student progress will be the next challenging task because dance is not an inherently quantifiable field. We recommend that they look for more ways to translate student progress into quantifiable measures without compromising the qualitative nature of dance. We applaud the fact that the faculty is already archiving student work by videotaping performances and classroom activity. This will provide the student and faculty with an ongoing portfolio of the student's work.

D. Academic Advising

All three of the full-time faculty are sharing the responsibility for advising by each focusing on a particular group of students within their program: Dance and Dance Education majors, Dance and Dance Teaching Minors, and Dance Honors. They are also drawing on the expertise of the College of Arts and Humanities' academic advisor for help on general education requirements. This is a system they put in place after their last review and it seems to be working well.

E. Faculty

The faculty is the great strength of this program. The members are talented, thoughtful, enterprising and energized. They go to great lengths to get feedback on how they're doing from students in the form of course evaluations and exit interviews. The program employs several adjuncts in addition to the three full-time faculty members. The full-time members are careful to integrate the adjuncts thoroughly into the program so that all teachers are aware of the learning outcomes that are their collective goals.

At this time, however, the faculty has a huge hole. They have recently lost the help of the design technical faculty in the theater department. This has crippled the dance program's ability to carry out a central function of their program: to train their students for performance. To be competitive after graduation their students need: the opportunity to present their choreographic work in fully produced concerts; they need the experience gained from collaborating with lighting, costume and set designers; they need to be able to show, through archived video, their own fully produced choreographic work; they need the opportunity to train, themselves, with technical designers, who are ideally specifically trained in working with dance, so the students can add these skills to their toolbox for possible future employment. The loss of design technical support has had another impact as well. In an effort to continue to serve their students the dance program is now hiring external designers to help with their concerts. To do this they are diverting funds from other areas, which are equally important, for example, from money for travel to student festivals, for hiring guest artists and for undergraduate research. The committee feels the loss of design technical support is an urgent matter that needs to be addressed by the administration immediately if the dance program is to survive and grow.

We think it would be wise for the dance program faculty to articulate a long-term strategic plan. This would help them to outline their needs and be more persuasive in their arguments for additional support and faculty lines, by enabling them to tie the additional support to their curricular goals and plans for growth.

F. Support (Staff, Administration, Facilities, Equipment, and Library)

Currently the dance program clearly needs greater support in the design technical area. The department's administrative assistant and budget specialist noted that they especially enjoy working with the dance program faculty in part because they rarely ask for help. We wondered whether the dance faculty does this because it is more efficient or because another squeakier wheel is getting more attention.

The evaluation committee recommends that the Department of Performing Arts consider selecting one of the dance faculty to an administrative position in the department, perhaps as department chair or assistant to the chair. Because the dance program is the smallest of the three programs housed in the Department of Performing Arts it is easy for its voice to be lost and perhaps for the needs of the larger programs to take precedence.

The studio space is sufficient though tight, so the dance faculty needs to book studio spaces in the residential complex and gymnasium for student rehearsals. The Committee recommends the dance program look into levying course fees to help pay for equipment needs. The library support is good.

G. Relationships with the External Communities

Community outreach is another great strength of the dance program. Their student Moving Company does numerous performances in the schools in a multi-county area, providing a

great service to its audiences and valuable experience to the company's members. The Moving Company's performances are participatory and actively engage elementary, junior high and high school students in learning core curricular concepts in math, science and English through dance. The dance program is to be applauded for their commitment to teaching through community-engaged learning. Additionally, their Dance Education majors regularly teach in local schools as part of their classroom requirements. This experience not only provides a service to the schools but paves the way to future employment for dance program graduates.

The dance faculty is also unusually enterprising about generating interdisciplinary projects with other faculty on campus and with community entities. Erik Stern is currently collaborating with a Weber State professor in physics and with a school for math and science in Salt Lake City. Amanda Sowerby has initiated projects collaborating with the music program faculty as well as with the School for the Deaf and Blind. Joanne Lawrence has worked with faculty in Women and Gender Studies and the Geography Department at Weber State and with Repertory Dance Theatre, a professional performing company in Salt Lake City. Their projects have recently taken dance students as far afield as San Francisco and Mozambique, putting Weber State's name out into the world.

H. Results of Previous Program Reviews

It is important to note that this program review is the first that is for the dance program alone. The previous review was for the entire performing arts department. However, the dance program has actively tackled recommendations from the previous review. They have followed the request that they spread out the workload of advising and internal administration, and are now sharing both duties evenly among the three full-time faculty members. And they have wholeheartedly taken on the recommendation that the department pursue more interdisciplinary collaborations. In fact, they appear to have taken the lead in this area.