

DANCE PROGRAM REVIEW COMMITTEE
February 21, 2017

This report represents the findings of the Dance Program Review Committee consisting of 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) that was charged with reviewing the Dance Program. Our findings are based on a reading of a lengthy Self-Study report produced by the Dance Program and its Director, Professor Jennifer Salk; meetings with faculty members, staff, alums, and undergraduate and graduate students; and class observations conducted during a site visit of the facilities of the Program on October 13-14, 2016. The Dance Program was last reviewed in 2005.

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. Our review also took into consideration the "guiding questions" we were prompted to look into: 1. Are they [Dance Program] doing what they should be doing? 2. Are they doing it well? 3. How can they do things better? 4. How should the University assist them?

UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAM

The BA in Dance at UW offers a well-balanced comprehensive curriculum with course offerings in both the theory and practice of dance. Its degree requirements are aligned with current best practice standards, 21st-century skill development, and instructional and technical innovations in dance.

In the last few years, there has been a surge in undergraduate enrollment to 61 majors, with most students pursuing double majors. This increase in majors and double majors poses both advantages and challenges, as noted below.

Objectives and Goals

The objectives and goals of the Dance Program are clearly identified and serve to meet the needs of the students entering the program and guide students towards reaching their personal and professional goals. The stated curricular goals develop versatility in technical and creative areas; depth of experience in global culture; the development of artistic expression; and cognitive analysis and critical thinking.

Indeed, Dance faculty, in consultation with the Office of Educational Assessment, have compiled an admirable list of learning goals for dance majors:

- 1) Understand dance as a cultural practice that reflects and impacts local communities and global cultures.

- 2) Develop and practice analytic, evaluative, and contextual skills requisite to critical thinking, kinesthetic understanding, and personal growth.
- 3) Develop and practice skills in rhythmic, movement and compositional analysis.
- 4) Develop effective communication and research skills to promote and articulate a deeper understanding of dance practice and theory.
- 5) Engage in personal assessment and reflective practices that encourage self-directed learning.
- 6) Understand how basic principles of dance science and teaching methodologies can be applied to technical and aesthetic development.
- 7) Recognize and expand creative, artistic, and intellectual potentials.

The BA in Dance curricula provides students with the breadth of knowledge necessary to achieve the stated objectives. Course offerings provide students both focus and depth in dance content areas, yet the scope and sequence of classes is not prescriptive allowing students to “build your own program.” This programmatic flexibility encourages students to follow their interests encouraging both in-depth learning in a subject and the blending of disciplines and knowledge domains.

BA in dance

UW dance students are smart, self-disciplined, future-focused, and culturally engaged. The BA program gives them the chance to explore new perspectives and interests, develop versatile thinking and broaden their knowledge base. Students spoke highly of their opportunities to work closely with the MFA students, and the balance between dance technique and theory courses. They appreciate the course options in a variety of dance genres, and the numerous performing opportunities, especially with the Chamber Dance Company but also in the Faculty Dance Concert, the MFA Concert, and the BA Concert.

Dance students seeking double majors are the vast majority of students in the program. The double major is a unique blending of areas of focus offering academic rigor in both areas, which seems to be an ideal fit for UW undergraduate students. Examples of double majors include merging Dance with Engineering and Dance and Nursing, to name a couple of options taken by students. Students graduating with double majors not only meet their educational goals but also increase their marketability upon graduation.

As most BA in Dance students are double majors, looking critically at class scheduling and online offerings may serve to minimize students straining to complete degree requirements while remaining on track for graduation in 4 years.

Faculty / Instruction

The UW Dance Program has a longstanding history of instructional excellence and it is clear that instructional excellence is a priority in the undergraduate curricula. Instructional practices cover a wide range of theoretical and practical approaches from the performance of technical skills to the preparation of dance concerts, from the uses of dance to enhance creative thinking to dance as a form of collaborative social intelligence.

Students have the opportunity to study with renowned faculty and experience dance from multiple perspectives.

After reviewing the scope and sequence of the BA in Dance program curricula and course offerings, observing class and talking to students it is clear why the program has been long identified as a gem in the dance community.

Of particular note during the site visit, as one member of the Review Committee observed, she became aware of how inquisitive the dancers were and the supportive, generous collaborative environment in the Program that heightened exchanges and interaction between the faculty and students. Students were tuned in and engaged, asked questions, and were hungry to learn. Both at the barre and center floor, teachers encouraged personal investigation asking dancers to consider how a movement feels, the musicality, the breath support, and anatomical underpinnings. An instructional climate of heightened inquiry exists, one that all faculty hope to create. Our conversations with both current students and recent graduates provided us ample evidence of the high quality of instruction in the program, a strength also demonstrated by the numerous teaching awards and superior teaching evaluations earned by faculty members over the years.

How can they do things better?

While the undergraduate students in the Dance Program are satisfied and fully in support of their faculty and staff, class offerings, quality of instruction and mentoring relationships with faculty, the ones we talked to identified the following for consideration and need.

Students seeking double majors expressed concern that they often have limited course selections due to the timing of classes. Could some technique classes be offered earlier or later in the day to align with their schedules? Could more classes be offered online to facilitate the timely completion of graduation requirements.

Students taking classes that require labs struggle with being able to schedule all the classes they need to complete the major. Specifically, students wondered if the choreography classes could rotate when they are being offered so that they are not at the same time every semester.

From the perspective of undergraduate students the BA in dance program is an overwhelming success. Students feel challenged and supported by faculty and staff, and state that they have adequate opportunities to create and share their work. The challenges listed above were limited to conversations with the site visit team and not representative of all the students.

UW graduates are employed locally and nationally. Some are working professionally in the dance community others are establishing new areas of research and community service and the result of a diversity and program, depth and the inclusion of the double major.

Recommendations

The Review Committee encourages the Dance Program to schedule its classes to align with the needs and imperatives of its students and also offer more online classes.

We also suggest additional movement space for both classes and rehearsal in the evening hours (when concerts are happening in Meany theatre and spaces are unavailable) for classes and student rehearsal.

GRADUATE PROGRAM

The Program Review Committee finds the MFA Dance Program at UW to have earned its outstanding national reputation. Three MFA Dance candidates are admitted annually, creating an elite group drawn from a competitive applicant pool. MFA Dance students are attracted to the program for its reputation, financial support, and emphasis on education, two-year time-to-degree, curriculum, and its strong teaching and performing components.

Requisite to admission to the highly selective MFA Dance is a minimum of eight years of professional dance performance experience in a nationally recognized dance company. MFA Dance students (normally) form a six-person cohort of like-minded and experienced professional dancers transitioning to academic careers. Recruitment for the MFA Dance relies on program reputation and personal recruitment by the Chair and faculty. Some graduate students reported that they did not apply to other MFA programs; only the UW MFA met their criteria.

Current MFA students spoke articulately and enthusiastically about their program, and are clearly developing into strong advocates for dance and arts education. They emphasized the intensity of the two-year program. While attractive when they applied, the schedule leaves little time for “digestion” of the rich materials of their studies. Due to course and teaching load density, employment is discouraged. Graduate students said that it is difficult to live on their stipends considering the rising cost of living in Seattle. Each of six MFA Dance students has a tuition waiver and a Teaching Assistantship.

Recommendation:

The Review Committee notes that UW fiscal support is probably predicated on the two-year timing of the degree, and feels it imperative that this support continue.

Curriculum:

The UW MFA Dance curriculum provides a strong foundation in the main curricular areas of university dance study in the U.S. One reason that the MFA Dance program attracts seasoned professionals is its educational focus. Most, if not all, MFA Dance programs are performance and choreography based. UW’s MFA Dance is distinctive in that its mission is to create educators; in many ways, the curriculum reads like a

university tenure-track job description. Graduates have a strong track record of entering tenure-track positions due to the professional requirement for program entry, the program's degree requirements, and the reputation of the MFA Dance at UW.

Teaching:

MFA students enter the program in the summer. This provides a transition period from their previous professional lives to being graduate students before the fall quarter's increased intensity.

MFA candidates teach two dance technique courses per quarter. During their time at UW, they teach in at least two genres at two levels. They are individually mentored by faculty members.

As part of their research and study, each dance graduate student develops and teaches a lecture course. This experience in course creation and implementation is invaluable for a career in university dance. It is part of what makes the UW MFA Dance graduate on the short lists of many of the jobs to which they apply.

Recommendations:

Some students requested a more substantial orientation to the program during the summer period to include, for instance, the mechanics of Canvas. Students also noted the need for a small studio for technique class preparation.

The fluency in technology is of increasing importance in dance education, and often a part of dance curriculum. The collaboration with DXARTS is encouraged. Assist MFA Dance students to expand their technological expertise, e.g., fluency in Isadora and Final Cut Pro.

Create a small practice studio to use for class preparation. This might be carved out of ample space in Meany that houses the student lounge.

Composition:

A curricular area of concern is composition. Composition is a pivotal aspect of tertiary dance curricula, and the need for good composition teachers is ever present. Entering MFA candidates have a large differential in dance composition experience with some being professional choreographers and others having virtually no choreographic experience. MFA students create two produced works during their tenure at UW; those creations are not graded. Many, if not most, tenure track job postings require applicants to submit choreographic samples. The degree requirement of produced choreography is therefore vital for tenure-track job applications.

Graduate students reported that they wanted more guidance and time to develop compositional skills. One mentioned that though the program's mission is to create teachers rather than choreographers, more composition work would be optimal. Currently, a single quarter composition class is required, currently taught with a focus on collaboration with other arts.

Recommendations:

Continue offering the collaborative course for MFA students with substantial choreographic experience.

For those with a composition deficit, assist one or two undergraduate composition courses: attend those classes, complete assignments, and work with the teacher to understand course design, and syllabus creation and implementation. Make this available to all MFA students regardless of prior compositional experience.

In addition to the annual MFA dance concert, add an informal studio performance, once annually at minimum, of completed works and works-in-progress that includes a talk back session.

Add a “pre-mortem”—one meeting per quarter for all MFA students to discuss their choreographic work. Incorporate video examples and/or share motifs and phrases. If possible, include collaborators. Allow the students to decide if faculty should attend and the extent of their input.

Academic courses:

Students and faculty agree that the change of Chamber Dance Ensemble rehearsal and performance schedule, implemented since the last program review, enables graduate students more time for research. The students enjoy the ability to study outside of the Dance Program, and would like to seek more collaborative opportunities. They note that their program of study is already full and otherwise satisfying. Several revealed that they were developing, and sometimes remembering, writing skills that had been put on hold during their professional careers. They also reported that theory courses assisted fluency in language and ways of thinking that felt unapproachable prior to their MFA study.

Relationship to BA:

As is true in other graduate dance programs, undergraduate and graduate students take some of the same courses. This intermingling makes budgetary sense, and assists in building a strong dance community that embraces the entire dance population. UW MFA Dance students may take 400-level undergraduate courses for credit, with additional work added to ensure graduate-level course expectations.

Graduate students teach many BA Dance classes. Considering its size, the attention and resources required by the MFA program may seem at odds with the large, and growing, number of BA Dance students. However, current BA Dance students are enthusiastic about the MFA program with no reports of dissatisfaction with how the MFA functions. BA students enjoy the classes provided by the graduate students, and glean much from watching them perform in annual Chamber Dance Ensemble (CDC) concerts.

Performance:

Three of the four members of the review committee saw recent CDC performances. The professionalism of the company is unquestionable, and brings distinction to UW, Seattle, and the profession in general. CDC provides a living laboratory for in-depth exploration

of historically important works. The selection of its repertory is outstanding, and fulfills the educational mission of the MFA Dance program through annual fully produced dances that reveal important historical dance lineages. Published critical response underscores this assessment. Historical context is provided for audiences via pre-show talks and program information. CDC gives its members the opportunity to continue performing and to build their CVs. CDC is a boon to the dance program, the university, and the community-at-large. The program review committee endorses CDC and encourages its continuance.

Post-graduation:

It is often the case that university dance program faculty are generalists, able to teach a variety of courses. The job success rate of UW MFA Dance graduates is exceptional. They are often among the top candidates for tenure-track jobs, and indeed get them. At least two graduates are currently Deans. Some move on to choreographic careers, which invariably include a strong teaching component. The alumni that the review committee met were all extremely proud of their UW experience, and felt that it provided excellent career preparation. One remarked that the UW MFA Dance is a “well-oiled machine.” Another applauded the program’s “culture of ‘yes.’” The review committee wholeheartedly agrees. This is an outstanding MFA program, one that has a gold star reputation well deserving of the support than it is given.

Recommendation:

Reach out to alumni; create or revitalize an alumni organization. These tasks might be added to staff duties and will be of help in building up an endowment for the Program.

Shop Support for Productions

Nearly every faculty member and some MFA students brought up the undefined and therefore increasingly problematic relationship between the Dance Program and where their costumes (and sometimes sets) come from. The costume shop and the scene shop at UW are housed within the School of Drama. Historically there has been a handshake agreement that the shops would make time around Drama productions to take care of Dance productions. In recent years, under a new Executive Director, the School of Drama has increased its number of productions, stretching the shop resources very thin and leaving little to no room for Dance productions. Shop support, especially from the costume shop, is crucial to Dance productions because of the MFA candidates need for their work to look professional in their reels so that they are competitive in the job market. The same applies to the Faculty productions in terms of their competitiveness for grants and openings at professional venues.

Ideally, there should be a clear and formal agreement between Dance and Drama regarding use of the shops. The Committee does not know who would broker that agreement, perhaps the Dean’s office? Increasing financial resources for production materials is both a short-term solution and long-term investment.

Studio Space

One more small-sized studio with a sprung floor would allow the Dance Program to increase its curriculum offerings. There is tremendous demand for more dance forms to be taught, especially hip hop, but currently there is not enough studio space available. One solution is to make an arrangement between the Dance Program and the School of Music to share the large room (Meany 268) currently used primarily by the latter unit. This is another potentially sticky agreement that would need to be brokered. A more permanent solution, and an excellent investment in the building infrastructure, would be to build a new small studio in the basement of Meany Hall. The exact location requires some study, but it seems there is room where the underutilized lounge is. In addition to offering extra classroom space, this small space would provide warm-up space for faculty, and space for special projects and independent studies.

Recommendation:

The committee recommends that resources be committed to increase the amount of studio space in Meany Hall available to the Dance Program.

Faculty and Staff

As already noted in the sections above about the undergraduate and graduate programs, students at all levels and alumni have nothing but the highest praise for the Dance Program faculty and curriculum and the training they have received at UW.

Most classes in the Dance Program are taught by faculty members. Currently, they consist of five tenure-stream professors (one professor, two associate professors, and two associate professors); several lecturers (two part time and two full time); and one artist in residence. Their credentials are impressive, ranging from one member who is a PhD and actively involved in research as well as a practitioner to others with advanced degrees (MFAs) and extensive performance experience, precisely the kind of training and background that the Program's graduate students seek to prepare themselves for the job market. Graduate students also attain that valuable training because they serve as much needed TAs.

The teaching load in the Dance Program is unusually heavy, typically ranging from a six- to eight-class load for most faculty members and five to seven in the case of recent hires. In part the faculty shoulder this teaching burden because their numbers are small and in part they do because of rising demand for their classes from majors and non-majors alike. Furthermore, the faculty always have to offer a wide range of classes to provide their undergraduate and graduate students the breadth and depth they necessarily have to have across dance idioms/genres, levels, techniques, composition, etc.

The Dance Program is also understaffed in another respect: its small staff is stretched thin. As the following job descriptions of its five-person staff reveal—Administrator (100%, 12 months), Adviser/Program Manager (75%, 11 months), Marketing and Communications Manager (75%, 12 months), Music Director (80%, 10 months), and Technical Director (50%, 10 months)—they assist the faculty in serving the needs and interests of its students, as staff members do in any unit, but more so than in most units

they are also involved in organizing and managing the many public events that performance-oriented units invariably engage in. No wonder the staff, as many faculty members and students observed, work far beyond their actual hours to keep up with the work of the unit.

Finally, a word about the leadership of the Dance Program. Everyone lauded the current director/chair and her leadership but also recognized that she cannot continue indefinitely in that role and lamented the seeming absence of a successor. The Program does not appear to have anyone among the other senior professors to step into that role and the other members are either too junior or non-tenure stream.

Recommendations

The Review Committee recommends the authorization of an additional faculty line—preferably someone senior enough to be considered for the chair position—to meet the growing enrollment demands at the undergraduate level and to maintain and enhance the excellence of the graduate program.

We also urge the Program and UW to consider more effective ways to use its current staff and to increase their FTEs, if necessary, to better serve the workload of the Program.

The Review Committee would also like to see UW consider granting the Dance Program department status. We did not see any reason why it is classified as a program and not a department.

In conclusion, the Dance Program Review Committee is very pleased to assess the Dance Program as outstanding in every respect: the caliber of its faculty and staff as well as of its students at the undergraduate and graduate levels, an excellence that is also demonstrated by the many distinguished alumni it has produced.

We **recommend** that the next review be conducted **ten years from now**—we see no need to do one sooner than that.