

WSU Department of Performing Arts: Dance Program

Dance Program's Response to Review Team Report
April 30, 2022

Evaluation Committee

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Introduction

This document provides a response from the Dance Program faculty to the Evaluation Committee Report. The dance faculty would like to express our appreciation to the committee for their time and attention to detail.

Evaluation Committee Summary

Our assessment supports that the diverse faculty body of the Weber State Dance Department is populated by accomplished scholars and working professionals with remarkable achievements in their fields of study. The program maintains a strong vision for future growth with its ongoing development of a Dance Film Certificate and Dance Movement Therapy initiative, which strongly complements current degree offerings in BA in Dance, BA/BS in Dance Education K-12, an AA in Dance, a Dance Minor, and a Dance Teaching Minor Degrees. However, it is our view that if the Dance Program's current programs are to be sustainable, they need additional support in building facilities. In addition, per our discussion with dance students and Dean Deborah Uman, we recommend that the Dance Department better align its courses with USHE Standards by increasing some of the technique course offerings from one credit a class to two credits a class. Finally, although students were overwhelmingly complimentary and appreciative of the dedication and opportunities provided by the faculty, we recommend that the Department addresses student concerns about inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and advisement. We have reviewed the following eight aspects of the program's operation: Mission Statement; Curriculum; Student Learning Outcomes & Assessment; Academic Advising; Faculty, Support (Staff, Administration, Facilities, Equipment, and Library); Relationships with the External Communities, as well as the Results of Previous Program Reviews.

A. Mission Statement

Commendations

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.

Recommendations

Nevertheless, we also assert that it does not sufficiently reflect the unique vision of the Weber State Dance Department, especially as it pertains to community engagement, professional

dance opportunities for students, the diversity of degree offerings as well as the continuing practice and scholarly research of its faculty members.

Response

We appreciate the team's comments. Their recommendations clearly articulate the work we value and strive to maintain.

Action Plan

- The Dance Program will embark on crafting an updated mission statement in fall 2022. Our goal is to re-write the statement with a focus on our values, inspiration, and purpose.

B. Curriculum

Commendations

Weber State Dance Department's curriculum is both consistent with USHE requirements and unique in the scope of its degree offerings ranging from BA in Dance to BA/BS in Dance Education K-12. The dance department is also unique in its accessibility to students of all backgrounds and abilities. Dance department students develop their own electronic portfolios prior to graduation facilitating their transition to professional work and/or graduate studies.

Recommendations

We feel that the development of the Dance Film Certificate and Dance Movement Therapy initiative will further strengthen the program. We recommend that the Department considers changing credit hours for all Modern and Ballet courses to two per course in order to better align with USHE standards and other UT dance programs and in order to better retain its students. We also recommend that the department takes advantage of the diversity of its dance faculty by eventually offering more classes in non-western dance techniques including, but not limited to, social dance, flamenco, and Latin dance thus supporting the university's strategic plan of becoming an emerging HIS.

Response

We agree that moving forward with a Dance Film Certificate and Dance Movement Therapy/Therapeutic Dance initiative would add value to our program and serve students that are actively seeking these areas of emphases. Currently, we have been in discussions with the director of WSU Film Studies to identify coursework that would satisfy foundation-level skill building for both artistic and industry standards of movement composition, capture, editing, and distribution. Recent developments in a Dance Movement Therapy/Therapeutic Dance initiative are supported by a private donor with a passion for the use of creative movement to increase physical, emotional, and behavioral health. We also agree that a change of credit hours for our technique classes is long overdue. As we create space in our required coursework, we will be able to increase Ballet and Modern technique credit hours and provide opportunities for students to experience additional non-western dance forms.

Action Plan

- Begin curricular changes over summer 2022 so that we may be ready to submit proposals in September.

C. Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment

Commendations

We applaud the Dance Department's clearly defined Measurable Learning Outcomes as well as Target Performance and Actual Performance rubrics.

Response

The dance program faculty continually share resources between full-time and adjunct faculty. We hold weekly dance meetings, conduct sophomore juries, and work to advise and mentor our students regularly. We believe students excel when we meet them where they are at, listen closely, and respond to their needs.

Action Plan

- Consistently apply and share Ballet and Modern technique evaluation rubrics each semester.
- Increase group advising sessions.
- Continue to revise course offerings to keep content current with the field and relevant to dance students.

D. Academic Advising

All full-time faculty members are sharing the responsibility for student advising. Students expressed concerns with the inconsistent quality of advising that they receive across faculty, in some cases lacking and in others high quality. They also expressed frustration with the lack of predictability and consistency in when the courses are offered each semester which impacts the timing of graduation.

Commendations

We applaud the number of students in the program who receive scholarships.

Recommendations

We recommend providing a regular schedule of course offerings and perhaps summer offerings as well to help address this issue.

Response

The dance faculty agree that our advising efforts and scheduling consistency require improvement. For context, we struggle to accommodate adjunct instructors' availability as they often travel from SLC and hold additional adjunct positions at other institutions. Regarding scholarships, we believe the review team is referring to activity waivers. The dance faculty are grateful for the activity waivers we are allotted annually. Dance is a time-intensive discipline, often requiring late afternoon, evening, and weekend rehearsals, performances, and community

outreach (residential centers, after-school programs, etc.). Activity waivers allow the students (majors and non-majors) that participate in our program the additional financial support needed to teach and perform on campus and throughout the community.

Action Plan

- A four-year schedule is currently being created to bring clarity and consistency to scheduled course offerings. This schedule will be published on the dance web page.
- The dance faculty will consistently employ group advising sessions twice per year. This will be in addition to our individual advising meetings. We hope this will assist students with goal-setting, decision making, peer engagement, knowledge of resources, and scheduling clarity.

D. Faculty

We observed and participated in a number of dance classes and were impressed by the quality of instruction and student engagement in each session.

Commendations

We commend the more recent hiring of BIPOC faculty and hope that this continues as the opportunity to hire new faculty arises. We applaud the hiring of new faculty member Juan Carlos Claudio who brings a movement therapy expertise in addition to an individualized approach to dance training.

Recommendations

Juan Carlos Claudio is currently a full-time instructor and we recommend that his position be changed to a tenure-track one followed by a hiring of another full-time instructor in order to help share the teaching load of full-time faculty and diminish the number of Adjunct Faculty required to offer the necessary courses so that students are able to graduate in a timely manner. We also recommend an increase in instructional wages for part-time faculty who often commute from SLC and beyond. In our meeting with dance department students, they expressed their appreciation of the dedication and high-quality instruction of some faculty members but their discontent with the deficient instruction by other faculty members. We recommended that the department address how to improve the consistency of high-quality teaching of all faculty members.

Response

The dance program is experiencing new growth and revitalization with the addition of diverse faculty members. Students are engaging with a greater range of course content, teaching methods, and creative and scholarly ideas. There is a clear increase in the building of positive relationships amongst faculty, staff, and students. Because our adjuncts tend to commute from SLC and beyond, we attempt to stack their courses into a two-day schedule (T/Th or M/W). In this way, we hope to make more efficient use of their time. In addition, we think it would make good sense for all faculty to have regular class observations and informal feedback. Both

formative and summative assessments of teaching can build a more straightforward path to excellence in education throughout our program.

Action Plan

- Develop systematic teacher evaluations. Employ rubrics for classroom observations to gather teaching effectiveness and student success information.
- Adjust recruitment and hiring policies to improve the potential effectiveness of adjunct instructors and offer them more initial support.

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

The dance department needs more classroom spaces: currently, only two studios are available for classes, one of which is located under a swimming pool and needs updating and repair, which also are shared with other departments making it challenging to have the needed space for all departmental activities. Having more spaces and more full-time faculty members will help with course scheduling and student retention.

Commendations

N/A

Recommendations

We advocate for more access to dance spaces for students with disabilities. In our conversation with the Dance Technical Director who is hired on a part-time basis, it became apparent for the need for additional part-time tech support during dance concert production.

Response

The dance program has struggled for decades with a lack of studio space. But, until new space is constructed, we must make due. Without exaggeration, 75% of northern Utah area high schools have better dance facilities than our university. This impacts retention. When high school students come to dance with us on campus (auditions, workshops, masterclasses, etc.), they leave behind their spacious studios with sprung floors and windows that allow for natural light.

The dance faculty are tremendously grateful for the studio space that we continue to have access to in the Swensen Gym, SW233. This is the space that the dance program resided in before we became part of the Department of Performing Arts over 30 years ago. SW233 has suffered leaks from the ceiling that soaked and splintered a portion of the wooden floor. Occasionally, the smell of chlorine will be strong in the studio. Similar to our basement studio in the Browning Center (BC38), there are no windows. SW233 is ADA compliant. BC38 is not. BC38 does have a 15-year-old sprung floor; SW233 does not. The lack of a sprung floor in SW233 means that we cannot incorporate jumping in technique classes or rehearsals without risking student injuries. BC38 is the one space entirely dedicated to our dance program.

Action Plan

- Space is tight for all Performing Arts programs residing within the Browning Center. Without newly constructed space, our hands are tied.
- Our Dance Technical Director, Christopher Philion, is on a half-time contract. The dance program continues to hire additional Browning Center technical and production help as needed during concert runs as part of our theatre rental contract. These costs come out of our dance production budget. Dance students consistently participate in the production side of our concerts under Chris' direction. They assist with installing and removing the dance floor, hanging lights, setting cues, operating the light and soundboards, projection operation, stage crewing, stage managing, and costume crewing. In any given concert, we may have 20-35 students participating. This student activity is essential skill building for all who envision a career in the performing arts. Additionally, the activity serves to keep production costs manageable. However, this is a large amount of supervisory work for Chris' half-time staff position. The dance area will investigate increasing Dance Technical Director support.

F. Relationships with the External Communities

We agree with previous reviewers that community outreach is the unique strength of the Weber State Dance Department. We support Moving Company's continuing performances in the schools in a multicounty area and their collaborations with a diverse group of educators and dance-makers.

Commendations

We learned that the students in the department are particularly excited by the new professional opportunities in SLC and beyond offered by faculty members Jo Blake and Juan Carlos Claudio. We support faculty member Erik Stern's continuing interdisciplinary collaboration and co-teaching with a professor in physics. Finally, we support the Dance Department's continuing involvement with the ACDA Conference including the possibility of co-hosting in collaboration with Westminster College.

Recommendations

N/A

Response

The dance faculty are grateful for the recognition of our outreach efforts. We believe that this is how our program truly differentiates itself from other dance programs within the state and throughout the region. The students attracted to our program understand that we prioritize dance as an agent of personal and social change.

Action Plan

- Juan Carlos Claudio and Amanda Sowerby recently received an RS&PG Presidential Teaching Innovation Award for constructing an international dance outreach experience (Panama City, Panama) for Moving Company 2022-2023. The dance program will be partnering with Movement Exchange, a non-profit organization that unites dance and

service through its network of university chapters, international dance exchanges, and year-round programs in underserved communities. Our goal is to participate with Movement Exchange annually, highlighting global dance outreach as a feature of our program.

- The dance program is confirmed to be hosting the American College Dance Association's Northwest Region Conference in 2024.
- The dance faculty must coordinate with our college public relations and marketing team to better brand our program, highlighting our genuinely unique offerings.

G. Results of Previous Program Reviews

Commendations

We applaud the dance department's proactive response to previous program reviews resulting in the creation of a strategic plan, a two-year dance degree, and improvement in dance assessment measures and reporting.

Recommendations

We recommend continuing improvement in the scheduling of courses and credit allocation for a more efficient graduation timeline and student retention.

Response

The dance program faculty appreciate the recognition of our continuing efforts to improve vision and planning.

Action Plan

- A four-year course schedule is almost complete and will be posted on the dance website by the fall of 2022.
- The dance program faculty will initiate curricular changes and credit allocation to support student retention and a timely path to graduation. Curriculum proposals are scheduled to be submitted in early fall 2022.