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Dean Response to NASM review of Music Program

Congratulations and thanks are in order to the Music Program for their successful accrediting review with the National Association of Schools of Music. The Association sets high standards and the Music Program at WSU continues to meet those standards and provide excellent education for its students.

The NASM accreditation review came at a tumultuous time for Music and Performing Arts more generally at WSU. In fall of 2021 the Department Chair had resigned and the Theatre area had asked to separate from the Department of Performing Arts. There were questions about resources, leadership structure, equity and transparency. After much discussion and research, the Provost supported changing the Department of Performing Arts to a School of Performing Arts, which maintained some unity among the three areas (now programs) but allowed for more autonomy in governance and financial planning.

A number of the concerns raised in the NASM review discuss questions of access to information and long-term financial planning. As Dr. Jonas explained in his response, the restructuring of the Department of Performing Arts into the School of Performing Arts has addressed many of these concerns. The restructuring has given Program Directors more authority and autonomy. They have greater access to their budgets and a clearer understanding of how their programs and the school are funded. The untangling of budgets met with initial resistance from university finance officers but they were persuaded of the need and have been working with the Program Directors to clarify information and streamline processes. Additionally, the entire college was required to participate in a Student Fees audit this fall, an arduous process but one that gave all college Chairs and Directors a better understanding of their budgets and helped with long-term planning as well. Finally, the Music Program has a number of gift accounts, many of which went unused during the pandemic. The Dean's office is working with the Program Director and music faculty to make sure they are aware of the funds available to them and using the funds regularly and appropriately.

The NASM review also pointed out that the number of degrees offered in Music was excessive and confusing. As explained in Dr. Jonas' response, the Music Program has successfully reduced the number to three degrees: a Bachelors of the Arts in Music, a Bachelors of Music and a Bachelors of Music Education.

Within these degrees students can choose areas of emphases and still follow a clear path to completion.

The Music Program is working to address other issues that surfaced in the review process. A particular area of emphasis is an examination of its mission and goals within the context of an open enrollment institution. The Program recently made changes to its curriculum to make student credit hours and contact hours matched for a number of courses. This gives students a more accurate picture of their requirements and eliminates some of the “hidden” requirements in the curriculum. The theory entrance exam was also eliminated, which will help students move through the program more quickly. Continued conversations are happening with members of the string faculty to clarify what ensembles students need to participate in and to ensure that students fully understand the expectations and requirements for all ensembles.

Cognizant of WSU’s efforts to becoming an emerging Hispanic Serving Institution, the Music Program recently created a course on Latin American music and is exploring the potential for creating a Mariachi program that would be in line with recent developments in several of Ogden’s elementary, middle and high school music programs. Additionally, they are considering an alternative proficiency in guitar for students majoring in Music Education, which would make that pathway more accessible and again be in line with music instruction in area K-12 schools.

The NASM review and the structural changes in the School of Performing Arts have offered the WSU Music Program support and opportunities to make some valuable changes. Led by Program Director Dr. Dan Jonas, the music faculty have risen to the occasion and tackled a number of challenging issues. The Music Program is in a stronger place than it was when the review began. While it’s important to take some time to assess the outcomes of these changes, the members of the program will continue to review its mission and that of the university and adapt as needed.

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