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FROM: Michael Bitter, Interim Dean, College of Arts & Sciences

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SUBJECT: Review of the 2020-2021 Performing Arts Program Self Study

The Performing Arts Department self-study provides an extensive overview of the program's past, current, and future status and contributions to both the University of Hawai'i at Hilo and the local Hilo community. The document recognizes the challenges faced by the Department in recent years and suggests a path forward that promises to revitalize student demand for, and enrollment in, Dance, Drama, and Music classes, and increase the number of students majoring and graduating from the program. The program's importance to the University's place within the Hilo community is a significant theme throughout this self-study.

Assessment

Student assessment within the Performing Arts Program continues to be an issue. The Accreditation Liaison Officer's review summarizes assessment deficiencies and compliance issues and provides recommendations for improving the assessment of student learning within the program.

Recent positive movement with regard to assessment includes the involvement of a few Performing Arts instructors core competency assessment, the development of concise student learning outcomes, and the creation of a curriculum matrix. This recent progress is commendable and should be encouraged to continue as recommended by the ALO with institutional support for these efforts wherever necessary.

Course Scheduling

In the past, upper-level courses in Dance, Drama, and Music have struggled with enrollment, with several of these courses each semester at or below the traditional low enrollment cut-off level of ten students. As the University hired lecturers to teach many 100-level courses at the same time, this situation made it difficult to argue for additional faculty resources.

While the COVID-19 financial crisis and the retirement of some program faculty have resulted in a changed situation, recent historical enrollment data continue to make the justification for additional courses and/or instructional faculty difficult. However, there are several areas related to course scheduling and enrollment that point the way to a brighter future for the department.

In general, 100-level General Education (GE) Performing Arts courses have healthy enrollment, and this is a significant benefit to the College and University in helping students to complete their General Education requirements. In particular, introductory Music and Dance classes are now fully enrolled, with the online Music and choral courses in high demand over an extended period of time.

A recent effort to qualify additional courses for General Education requirements may have helped to increase enrollments in a number of these courses, and the faculty are to be commended for undertaking this initiative. The department's goal of increasing the number of GE and, possibly, online courses will likely continue this positive trend toward higher class enrollments and, perhaps, an increase in majors.

In the face of the forced movement of all classes to online formats beginning in the spring of 2020, student enrollment in Dance, Drama, and Music courses has held steady or actually increased, though in some areas the number of courses offered has decreased due to budgetary restrictions on the hiring of lecturers. This stability or increase in enrollment, particularly when campus-wide enrollment is down, bodes well for the future of the program and its plans to enhance its GE and online offerings.

Financial

As with all CAS departments, most of the expense in this program is personnel. For several years, the program had two or more tenure-track positions, two instructors, and one APT position. Additional courses in Dance and Music were also taught regularly by lecturers. Two recent retirements have decreased the tenure-track and instructor positions to one each. Due to current System-wide hiring restrictions resulting from the COVID-19 budget crisis and a history of low enrollment in several of the upper-level classes, it is unlikely that these lost faculty positions will be replaced anytime soon.

Positive trends in enrollment are evident in a number of areas. The department's goal of increasing the number of GE and, possibly, online courses would likely continue these positive trends toward higher class enrollments and, perhaps, an increase in majors, making the case for hiring full-time replacement faculty stronger on the UH Hilo campus and within the UH System as the post-pandemic financial situation of the University improves.

Decreasing numbers of majors and low enrollments in upper-level courses made this program appear costly in recent years, however, these trends seem to be reversing with increasing enrollment in 100-level GE courses and limited scheduling of courses as a result of the budget restrictions forced on the campus by the pandemic. As this reversal demonstrates, creative and successful adaptation in the face of these challenges holds enormous potential for the Performing Arts Program going forward.

Faculty Service and Productivity

Currently, there is only one tenure-track faculty member who is expected to engage in service and scholarly activity. Based upon the information provided in the self-study, there are no concerns with faculty productivity. As noted, all full- and part-time faculty members are engaged in university and, especially, community service, and this is particularly helpful considering the program's importance within the local community and the unique connection and interaction it provides between the University and the members of the Hilo community in general.

Student Success

Students majoring in Performing Arts are most often passionate about their program and strongly support the faculty and courses that make up their majors. Still, performance data released in the Fall of 2020, indicate that the program generally falls below 40% when compared to other UH Hilo programs with regard to six-year graduation rates of its majors. Part of the explanation may be the large number of credits required to graduate under the current major, something that the department has already moved to address with a revision of the major.

The new major requirements reduce the number of credits needed to complete the degree, a change that may shorten the time to graduation and increase the number of majors able to finish their degrees in six years or fewer. In addition, this reduction in the required number of credits, bringing the Performing Arts requirements closer to those of other CAS majors, may encourage a future growth in the number of student majors, as the major may, once again, be seen as a more competitive option when comparing program requirements.

The data provided in the self-study show that almost two-thirds of students in the department's classes are not Performing Arts majors, and more than one-third of these students have majors in colleges other than the College of Arts & Sciences. This demonstrates the program's substantial contribution to the success of students not only in other Arts & Sciences departments, but to the success of a wide variety of students across the entire University. Given the shrinking number of faculty within the department in recent years, as well as the decrease in the number of majors, this level of service teaching of General Education courses has most likely come at the expense of the major itself.

The proposal to renovate the major, reinstating three tracks and reducing the number of credits required for graduation, is a very positive move on the part of the program faculty and should aid on-time completion of the degree for student majors and, potentially, encourage some students to consider a second major in Performing Arts.

Recommendations

The Performing Arts Department has already recognized many of the issues that have potentially been suppressing its major numbers and course enrollment, and has taken steps toward improving student success and its own fiscal efficiency. The current pandemic and faculty retirements have compounded the challenges faced by the program, as it true of most other programs in the College, yet steps already taken with regard to online instruction, ongoing assessment, and curricular revision demonstrate a way toward a more student-focused and assessable major.

As the ALO review of this self-study outlines, programmatic assessment and continual improvement are some of the most significant issues facing the department at this time. While progress has been made with regard to assessment, the key to creating a genuine culture of assessment within the department will be continued and energetic attention to the recommendations of the ALO regarding the development of programmatic assessments for upper and lower division courses, and particularly for online General Education courses that attract the highest student enrollment.

While some additional program quantitative data has been made available as a result of the COVID-19 budgeting process in the summer and fall of 2020, I agree with the recommendation of the ALO that additional quantitative data would be useful for this and all future program review self-study documents. In fact, greater institutional support for departments completing self-studies as part of program review is necessary in general.

The use of quantitative data for program would be much more valuable to departments and reviewers if it were readily available in a standardized form that the institution could certify was correct and uniform across all units of the University. References within the self-study to disparities within the data, as well as seemingly incorrect information noticed by this reviewer, call into question all reviews and conclusions based upon it. Greater efforts should be made to provide an agreed upon set of quantitative measures for each program as a starting point for the self-study and all subsequent reviews.

In addition, and with regard specifically to assessment, I recommend that the institution provide a centralized mechanism for collecting student artifacts and assessment information for each department and program. It is clear from this self-study and others that assessment at UH Hilo has been progressing slowly, in part due to the fact that each small department is expected to maintain and move its process forward on its own and, essentially, without much institutional support. This decentralized, do-it-yourself mechanism for programmatic assessment has been slow to create a culture of assessment on the UH Hilo campus. Greater institutional support in the form of a centralized mechanism to collect, schedule, interpret, and archive assessment artifacts and results for all programs would help to create this culture on campus and move all programs forward in their assessment engagement and activities.