



University of Hawai'i at Hilo

PERFORMING ARTS

2021 Program Review External Report

Immeasurable Passion

University of Hawai'i, Hilo

Department of Performing Arts

Academic Program Review - External Report

AY2020-2021

Prepared by Brian Harlan, PhD

Associate Provost, Academic Affairs, California Institute of the Arts

April 10, 2021



Contents

Review Process	1
Program Overview	2
Curriculum Relevance	3
Student Experience	7
Program Resources	11
Summary Reflections	14



Overview of the Process

Academic program review for University of Hawai'i at Hilo's Performing Arts program was conducted over approximately 6 weeks within the 2020-2021 academic year. I served as the sole reviewer, and as such, the sole author of this report. Because the review took place during the COVID-19 global pandemic, I was unable to physically visit campus. Accommodations were made by the program to address this issue by extending the length of the review, facilitating additional meetings over that time period, and providing extended supporting documents, images, and videos to supplement documentation.

The program provided a clear and well-written report based on a comprehensive self-study covering the mission and goals of the program, meaning of the degree offered, faculty composition, enrollment and financial data, curriculum requirements and learning outcomes, student achievement, program resources, and future goals. In support of the evidence provided, the program arranged individual meetings for me with Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs Kris Roney, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences Michael Bitter, and Performing Arts Center Manager Lee Barnette-Dombroski. I also had the opportunity to meet multiple times with Program Chair Jean Ippolito and lead program faculty member Justina Mattos, as well as being invited to attend two program faculty meetings. And finally, a student survey was conducted, and I ran a confidential focus group that allowed me to ask direct questions to students and alums from both the major and minor.

In accordance with the university's *2020 Academic Program Review* guidelines, the purpose of this report is to summarize my evaluation of the program's performance with respect to curriculum relevance, student experience, the use of university resources, and to offer recommendations for strengthening student recruitment, learning, and success through short and long-term planning. Over the course of this review I have encountered many strengths in the program as it is currently offered. All of these strengths can be built upon and further developed, and I have summarized my primary suggestions in the final section of this report. It is important to note that these suggestions are offered respectfully and in full recognition that the program is already highly efficient and robust in its functional role despite some considerable constraints and challenges. This efficient functionality is due to a combination of talented students from inside and outside the program, the commitment of a core group of exceptionally-dedicated faculty, and the enduring support of the grater Hilo community.

Context for the Review

According to a 2011 self-study report submitted to the Board of Regents in support of the establishment of the BA in Performing Arts, the purpose of the program within the context of the university was not only to offer the academic major and provide general education courses, but also to “contribute to the cultural life of the university”¹ This purpose is in direct alignment with the university mission, which aims to inspire learning, discovery, and creativity through “many sources”, while improving the quality life for local, regional, and global community through expressions of the “distinctive natural and cultural environments of Hawai’i”.² The program’s mission similarly celebrates the rich diversity of the university *‘ohana* by reflecting it within its curriculum, productions, and program demographic. Productions in particular enhance the university’s connection to the local community by inviting local enthusiasts to collaborate in performances of original Native Hawai’ian material alongside current students and faculty (for instance, the 2019 production of *Hawai’ian Nutcracker*). The program is also active in promoting performing arts and Hawai’ian culture within local K-12 schools, and has recently begun a summer Hawai’ian youth performing arts camp.

That the Performing Arts program is in a unique position to serve the mission and vision of the university was upheld throughout the review by all that I spoke with. Both Vice Chancellor Roney and Dean Bitter, for instance, described the program as central to the university’s strategy toward its goals as a Native Hawaiian Serving Institution, which it has been since 2000, and toward building a strong connection to the local community. Numerous examples of productions and community programs, as well as documentation of community support, and student and faculty testimony, all confirmed that the program serves the university with more than offering a degree program and general education courses. As such, metrics of community impact must be considered alongside enrollment and financial data.

¹ “Change in Status from Provisional to Established for the B.A. Degree in Performing Arts”, September 8, 2011, 2: <https://www.hawaii.edu/offices/bor/regular/materials/201109290000/4. UH Hilo Change in Status from Provisional to Established for the B.A. Degree in Performing Arts.pdf>

² University of Hawai’i at Hilo mission: <https://hilo.hawaii.edu/catalog/mission> and vision: <https://hilo.hawaii.edu/catalog/mission>.

Curriculum Relevance

According to the self-study report, the Performing Arts program was first conceived in 2003 and confirmed as an undergraduate degree-granting program in 2011. The current curriculum was adopted in 2014 under what was explained during the review as rushed circumstances at a time of faculty transitions. In fact, there are some advocates of the program with whom I spoke that described the current curriculum as incomplete due to the situation under which it was developed. It was also pointed out that there was a sense of urgency in terms of the time frame given to adopt the new curriculum. A new proposal has been developed by faculty to revise the curriculum that was already under consideration at the time of this review. Some of the following observations, therefore, might be accounted for by the time this report is received.

The current 52-unit curriculum integrates what is typically treated as three separate disciplines: music, dance, and theater. The integration is cleverly constructed and offers a distinctive learning opportunity for students that would not otherwise be possible. Students are first introduced to beginning performance practice together with historical perspectives in all three areas. Students are then allowed to concentrate in one of the three areas and to choose from small and large-group ensembles. Further requirements include courses that emphasize content focusing on Hawai'ian/Pacific Island culture, and courses on leadership development within production. The program concludes with a capstone project developed in close collaboration with a faculty mentor. The stated Student Learning Outcomes include performance skills in the student's chosen area, collaboration skills, performance leadership skills, critical analysis of performance works, multicultural perspectives, and an understanding of Hawai'ian and Pacific Island traditions within the performing arts.

The integrated structure of the curriculum is well conceived, and offers exceptional training for students interested in combining skills from music, dance, and theater (for example in musical theater, or in the performance of non-Western traditional musics), yet it does pose some difficulties. Primary among these difficulties are the ability to market and recruit for the program, and the ability to provide enough content in each area in order to prepare students for the demands of professional practice.

With respect to the first difficulty, it is not clear how the university goes about explaining the program to prospective students. Based on feedback gathered at the focus group for students, recruitment is grounded in the university's mission to serve the local community. This is laudable and important, but students also expressed frustration with the integrated major as a singular

choice. Faculty feedback suggests that admissions work is disconnected from the program, and does not engage faculty in the process of speaking directly to prospective students and their families about the merits of what the program has to offer. This is needed precisely because of the uniqueness of the program. Several students described becoming aware of the program by happenstance, rather than specifically searching for and finding it. Marketing for the program is most certainly hampered because it does not fall neatly into a standard category. Public college-search tools such as *Niche*³ and *Princeton Review*⁴ do not include the option to search for performing arts programs, but rather break them into more specific categories.



Other tools such as *US News*⁵, *Petersons Guide*⁶, and *College Navigator*⁷ only offer the option to choose from an even more general category of visual and performing arts, which again breaks down into more specific categories. Indeed, all follow the Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) Codes.⁸ CIP codes go directly

from the broad category of visual and performing arts to specific disciplines, such as technical theater (50.0502), acting (50.0506), piano (50.0907), ballet (50.0302), etc. Prospective students can search broadly for either visual and performing arts, general or other, but not for performing arts. I have little doubt that there are many potential students who would find the curriculum intriguing and would no doubt benefit from the program, but their pathway to finding the program is somewhat constrained. If the university offered several performing arts degrees, the integrated performing arts degree would be easier to market as one option among them. As a single option

³ <https://www.niche.com/colleges/search/all-colleges/>

⁴ <https://www.princetonreview.com/college-search>

⁵ <https://www.usnews.com/best-colleges/college-search>

⁶ <https://www.petersons.com/college-search.aspx>

⁷ <https://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/>

⁸ <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/cipcode/browse.aspx?y=55>

it not only limits student choice on campus, it places the university at a disadvantage to other institutions that offer clear and widely-recognized options.

The second difficulty is a complication of the integration itself. While it is an effective tactic to merge multiple programs into a school or department, the Performing Arts program ostensibly takes the concept of such a merger to an extreme. It is understood that the integration of music, dance, and theater into the Performing Arts program was out of necessity, but anyone sympathetic to the complex ramifications that ensue must wonder if the university would, given low enrollment or faculty retirements, merge philosophy, history, and archeology; or chemistry, biology, and nursing, and so on. Both examples could be logical, multidisciplinary options, but the immediate objection would be raised as to how a student could possibly achieve an adequate undergraduate foundation in all three areas. This difficulty also exists in the Performing Arts program despite the resourceful curricular design that has been developed.

If a student is more interested in the combination of music, dance, and theater than a deep exploration of the history and practice of one or the other, then the program is well prepared to support that student. For students who wish to focus intently on one discipline, however, there is a risk of graduating those students without fulfilling their intellectual and creative capacities. The National Office of Arts Accreditation, which oversees the National Association of School of Music, National Association of Schools of Dance, and the National Association of Schools of Theater, accredits over 900 institutions between the three associations⁹. Each association has a set of competencies (i.e., student learning outcomes) called a Basic Competency Index for the numerous sub-disciplines under the general rubrics of music, dance, and theater. If one looks at the index for general, liberal arts degrees in each area, the requirements are substantively rigorous. For example, beyond seven outcomes in general education, the expectations for a BA in music include five musicianship outcomes and three performance outcomes¹⁰, expectations for a BA in dance include five dance studies outcomes and three performance outcomes¹¹, and the expectations for a BA in theater include four theater studies outcomes and three performance outcomes¹². In each case the expected outcomes go deep into the social, historical, theoretical, and aesthetic contexts. Put simply, there is no practical way to integrate these three disciplines

⁹ <https://www.arts-accredit.org/national-office-for-arts-accreditation/>

¹⁰ <https://nasm.arts-accredit.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2015/11/BAorBS-Music.pdf>

¹¹ https://nasd.arts-accredit.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2015/11/BA-BS_Dance.pdf

¹² https://nast.arts-accredit.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2015/11/BA_BS-Theatre.pdf

without reducing the total number of learning outcomes that would be required if they were independent degree programs.

In response to issues identified over several years of monitoring enrollment and persistence data together with student feedback on their navigation through the program, program faculty have developed a proposal to revise the current curriculum. The goals of the proposed change include the following:



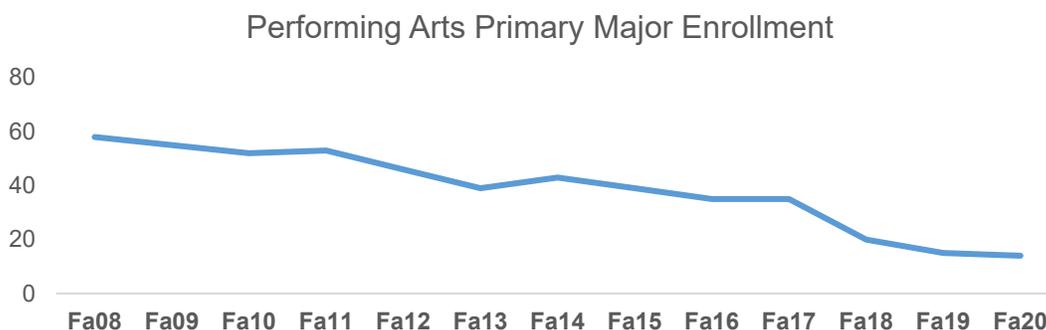
- clarify the specialization
 - and notate the specialization on student transcripts,
- reduce the overall number of credits,
- increase student choice for specializations, electives, and double majors, and
- increase the visibility of imbedded Hawai’ian and indigenous-centered perspectives.

This change is strongly encouraged, not because it eliminates the difficulties I have described entirely, but because it nevertheless moves the program in the right direction. Greater clarification of the specialization options has been raised as an issue by current and past students (see the Student Experience section below). Addressing this would increase student satisfaction, and have several tangential benefits as well. First and foremost, it would aid marketing and recruitment by providing a more transparent pathway for prospective students with differing interests. In addition, having the specialization included on one’s transcript is a significant advantage when alums are seeking further study, and in some cases employment. The clarification of specializations has yet another benefit in that it provides more student choice, allowing students to take ownership of their educational experience (potentially assisting in the development of intrinsic academic motivation). Furthermore, in order to account for the three different disciplines, the number of credits was necessarily increased. If students select a specialization, the program could reduce the number of credits without reducing quality of any given specialization, and thereby support student progress toward timely completion. And finally, increasing the visibility of courses and course content focused on Hawai’ian and indigenous cultures that is already happening would reveal the program’s existing commitment to this aspect

of the university’s mission, and further strengthening marketing by highlighting a distinctive component of studying at UH Hilo.

Student Experience

As the data below shows, Performing Arts majors have been steadily decreasing since fall 2008. It is noteworthy to state that institutional data on first-time, full-time undergraduates reveals, while applications and acceptances have increased (except during the COVID-19 pandemic), university yield has also decreased from 56.4% in fall 2008, to 35.4% in fall 2019.¹³ These data imply that there is more at play in the Performing Arts program’s declining enrollment than the marketing and curricular difficulties identified, but whatever the perspective, the impact on the size of the program is troubling. Importantly, not all programs at the university have had enrollment dips over this period, and small programs are especially vulnerable to fluctuations in enrollment. This was recently seen during COVID-related budget reductions that threatened to eliminate as many as 15 small programs, Performing Arts being one. Faculty Congress’s support for student choice made it clear that, regardless of the size of the program, reducing the breadth of educational opportunities is antithetical to the mission of UH Hilo.¹⁴ The support from Faculty Congress, which was equally emphatic in the case of Performing Arts from current students, alumni, the community at large, as well as reaffirmed in my interviews with Vice Chancellor Roney and Dean Bitter, eases immediate concerns that the program’s future might be in jeopardy. At the same time, historic enrollment trends present a depiction of a once thriving program that is now struggling. Low enrollment exacerbates funding, of course, and ultimately impacts the student experience.



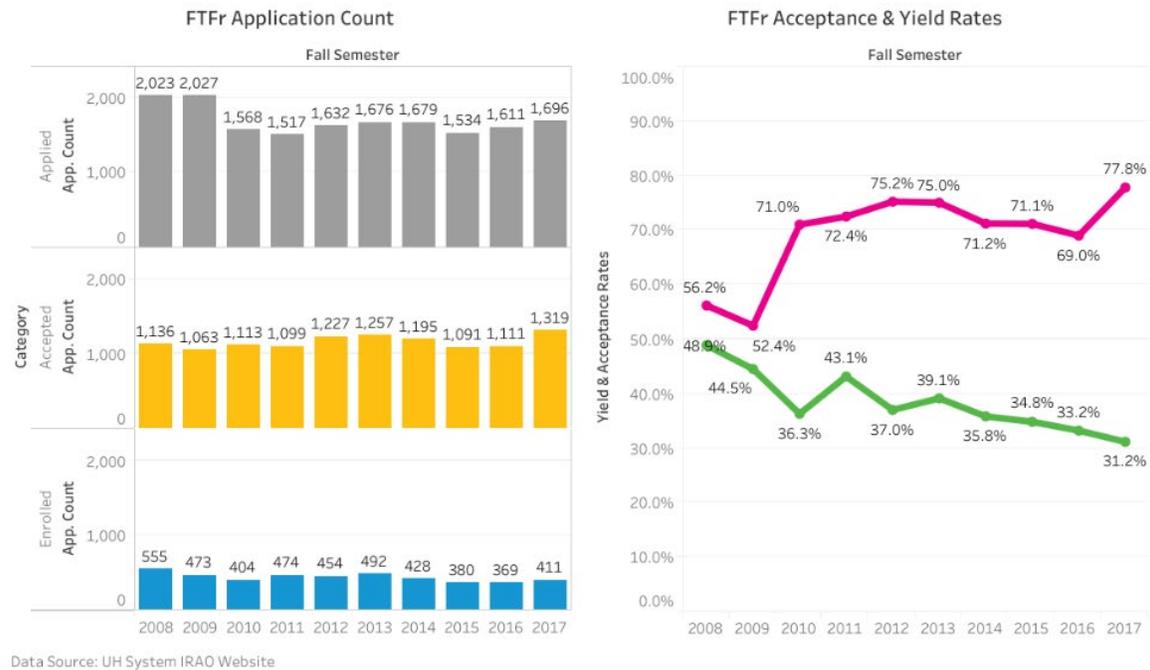
¹³ <https://hilo.hawaii.edu/uhh/iro/UHHiloAdmissions.php>

¹⁴ See: “University of Hawai’i at Hilo (UHH) Faculty Congress Statement on the Budget Cuts” adopted, January 4, 2021.

First Time Freshmen (FTFr) Applications Processed

Color Legend

Enrolled Accepted Applied Acceptance Rate Yield Rate



A student survey conducted as a component of the program’s self-study showed that majors are greatly satisfied with their faculty and the quality of their courses, and non-majors appreciate the opportunities for creative expression and social bonding that engagement with the performing arts affords. “I wanted something more out of my college experience than just a diploma”, one student wrote, “I wanted real experiences that would change my life”.¹⁵ Another student explained that the program “creates well rounded individuals who better the community”, and still another said, “I have gained so much self-awareness, patience, determination, poise, confidence, and rigor that push me to succeed that much more in everything I do.” These sentiments around the value, importance, and meaning of the Performing Arts program for students were amplified in the student focus group, with particularly accentuation on their deep connection with the faculty, and with one another.

When asked directly about their satisfaction with the integrated curriculum several students were conflicted between the benefits and challenges. Non-majors did not experience some of the

¹⁵ All student quotes from: “Analysis of Student Survey Responses”, spring 2021, prepared by Seri Luangphinit.

frustrations that majors articulated, and focused more on the opportunities that the program offered for them to take them out of their “comfort zone”, and become more “well-rounded” individuals. Some of the majors who participated in the survey agreed, stating that the exploration outside their primary artistic focus helped them to learn more about themselves and “discover new possibilities about what they are capable of”.

By contrast, in the focus group, which consisted primarily of majors and alums from the program, students voiced almost unanimous dissatisfaction with the integrated curriculum for several reasons. The most frequently cited concern was the minimal number of courses offered in their interest. Actors, for example, don’t just explore dance, they take extensive courses in dance mainly because there are not enough acting courses. According to several students, they are often required to repeat the same foundational courses or take an independent study because advanced courses are not available. The students expressed appreciation toward faculty for making independent studies possible, but said they feel awkward about asking for this option as they suspect it places a burden on the faculty member. It was said that such tactics also make navigating the program more difficult than simply choosing one’s classes. For instance, one student described how they were once forced to choose between staying in Hilo and moving to Oahu due to the lack of courses they needed, and another student explained that it even lengthened their time to degree completion. These are serious claims, and just as serious, the students seemed to agree that their concerns are not heard by the administration, and from their perspective the administration views Performing Arts as a “hobby major”.

Performing Arts 2021 Student Survey

“The instructors in this department are incredibly knowledgeable and hold a passion that is immeasurable and equally contagious.

Every class pushes you to test your limits without discouraging you so that you grow in every way. You are unconditionally accepted, regardless of major, identity, or any factor of identification, and the intimacy of the department makes for a close-knit environment, as the arts should be.”

Despite these reported challenges and enrollment declines, the program's self-study report noted that students have graduated at a steady pace of about 9 students per year since the program began. Performing Arts has only recently developed program learning outcomes, so no program assessment has been conducted. Core Competency assessments have been made, however, including assessments of written communication and information literacy. Low score on written communication prompted the program to revise its senior project paper, and require more frequent draft submissions for faculty review. Students performed better on the information literacy assessment, yet the results still inspired the program to revise its current special topics course addressing information literacy into a required course (MUS 465 *The World and the Composer*). Assessment of critical thinking, oral communication, and quantitative reasoning will follow, and the program will implement its program-specific learning outcomes along with the curriculum changes currently being proposed. The new learning outcomes will need to be accounted for in a full assessment plan that explains how and when program learning outcomes will be assessed. The curriculum map should also designate where core competencies occur (as applicable), and indicate how the program's outcomes are aligned with the university's emphasis on learning by doing and the exploration of Hawai'iian culture. Based on the curriculum map provided, students might need more opportunities to be introduced to all learning outcomes in introductory courses. The program can also consider how its courses enable affective learning and psycho-motor learning as well as cognitive learning.

One final aspect of the student experience that was brought forward from the students has to do with career readiness. This is a complicated issue, in part because not all students enter into the arts in order to pursue a career, and because the mission of the program is to develop artists without respect to prior training. Given the wide variance of socio-economic groups attending the university, it is not possible to assume that all could afford the luxury of training from an early age. Thus, students enter at all levels of training, and even when students are at the same level, the expressive nature of the performing arts does not provide a singular metric for artistic achievement. According to comments made in the student survey, there are a number of students who do not allow themselves to think of a career in the arts—either for personal reasons or because they do not see performing arts as a viable career. The second belief, although ostensibly widely held, is unfounded, as the strength of the creative economy can easily be demonstrated. For instance, according to the state's research and economic analysis of Hawai'i's creative sector, in 2018 there were 53,464 jobs reported in the creative economy; 11,072 in either performing arts or music (acting was not broken out, but the film and television industries are

thriving).¹⁶ Students mentioned, and faculty confirmed, that the university's career center does not include specialized counseling for the arts. One possible area of growth would be to establish a community-based industry council that could advise the program on how to connect students to internships, or a community-based arts-education council that could assist in placing students who want to teach youth. Many institutions also offer online request services for when community members want to hire a performer, which has the double benefit of offering employment and building one's resume with their discipline.



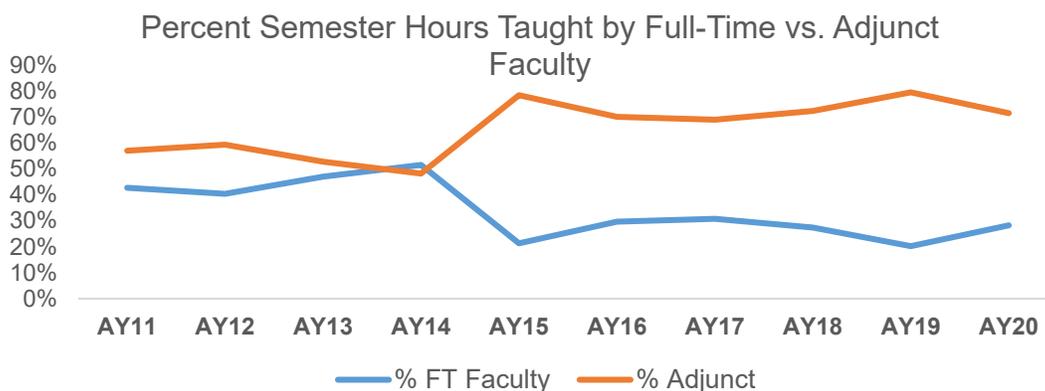
Program Resources

Future planning for the program must take into account its current resources. I am unable to confirm from a distance as to the adequacy of learning, practice, rehearsal, and performance facilities, but based on student and faculty comments the program is well equipped. There were some comments about piano's needing to be tuned, and actors forced to rehearse lines outdoors, but these are typical issues at most institutions, and with systematic attention are usually possible to address within existing resources. Similarly, the operations budget appears to cover the needed costs, although it should not go unnoticed that this is mainly through creative resource sharing with other departments such as Graphic Design and the Performing Arts Center.

¹⁶ https://files.hawaii.gov/dbedt/economic/data_reports/hawaii-creative-report/HI_Creative_Ind_2019.pdf

Increased access to facilities and increased funding are always important components to support the growth of a small program, and carry the additional benefit of a visible commitment from the university, but these are not the main concern of students and faculty at present. The primary resource issue for the Performing Arts community is the need for expanded learning opportunities, and therefore, to increase the number of full-time, tenured faculty.

At the time of the program review the program was comprised of 1 full-time assistant professor. Faculty retirements and transitions have not been fully replaced in recent years, with the overall FTE dropping from 4.75 to 2.75 from the program’s inception to fall 2020. A full-time instructor, technical staff, and adjunct faculty supplement for this, and although deserving of their status as university instructors, these members of the program do not have all the rights and responsibilities of regular faculty. They also potentially cost the university more by missing out on state subsidies provide with tenured faculty. According to the program review data portfolio provided through the university’s Institutional Research Office, the percentage of semester hours taught by full-time, tenured faculty versus adjunct faculty has move further apart over the last ten years.¹⁷ Compared to most peer programs within the College of Arts and Sciences, the ratio between full-time, tenured faculty and adjunct faculty in Performing Arts is less balanced, adding additional costs for fringe benefits to the program’s budget, and making it appear more expensive to run than other small programs.



In addition to increasing expenses, the lack of full capacity for teaching has reportedly had the result of sometimes forcing faculty to teach multiple levels of a course at the same time—effectively teaching two courses at one. It was also revealed in the report, and confirmed through

¹⁷ <https://hilo.hawaii.edu/uhh/iro/ProgramReview.php>

interviews, that there are staff in other departments who are qualified to teach, and instructors and adjuncts within the program, who have taught courses without pay in order provided needed curricular requirements for students. Class sizes appear to have remained consistent during the reductions in faculty, and the program's contributions to general education have increased. Furthermore, given the program's praiseworthy inclusion of the high-impact practice of a faculty-guided capstone project, there is a structural need to ensure that students have access to both the knowledge base and the prestige of a full-time, tenured faculty mentor in each discipline of the program. The impact of minimal faculty on student success, while not directly evident, should be evaluated, but without question it was clearly noticed and remarked upon by the students I spoke with in the focus group.

One of the program's most important assets is its close working relationship with the Performing Arts Center, which serves as the largest indoor performance theater on the island. While an independent unit, the synergy enjoyed between the center and the program is critical to the success of both. The center offers not only a venue for performance and staff with highly-skilled technical theater expertise, it also offers core curricular experiences that connect the disciplines together.

As a 501c3, the center can also raise funds through donations and grants, thus enhancing the program's connection to the community through both open-audition performances, and individual, foundation, and corporate philanthropy. In these ways the Performing Arts Center facilitates the bond within the program between dancers,



musicians, actors, as well as theatrical designers and producers, while simultaneously delivering the kind of experiential, learning by doing opportunities that the university strives to ensure. With an average number of audience attendees generated by the program of well over 5,000 each year, the impact of the relationship between the program and the center cannot be overstated. Like the program, the center also operates with a lean staff who serve several functions. I believe that this relationship could be further strengthened while expanding learning opportunities with the addition of a full-time faculty in theatrical design and production.

Summary Reflections

The following recommendations are based on my observations and reflections of the materials and conversations I experienced throughout the review. Some of these items are critical, to my mind, for the health of the program, while others are more long-term considerations. Additionally, I recognize that some of these items are within the program's locus of control, and that others are dependent upon university approval and the availability of resources. During my engagement with the program's students, faculty, and staff I was frequently struck by the level of commitment and care that every individual had for the program's community as a whole. I wish to thank each member of this community for their hospitality and warmth through the process. I hope my insights will make a positive contribution to the stability of the program and the experience of current and future students.

Recommendations

- 1) Adopt the curriculum revision proposed by faculty beginning in the 2021-2022 academic year.
- 2) Engage with the university's strategic planning process in support of its mission to ensure "learning, discovery and creativity inside and outside the classroom" as well as to "improve the quality of life of the people of Hawai'i".
- 3) Align continued program-level planning with the university's strategic goals; including a reaffirmation of the program's mission and program learning outcomes, external scanning and peer benchmarking, student and faculty focus groups, and other components that will lead to deep insights about the future growth of the program.
- 4) Using data collected through planning, set a strategic goal to reach faculty capacity with 4 full-time, tenured faculty in these core areas: music, dance, acting, and technical theater.
- 5) Establish a comprehensive learning outcomes-based Assessment Plan in alignment with standard disciplinary skills, general education learning outcomes, university learning goals, and WSCUC Core Competencies; and begin conducting, analyzing, interpreting, and reporting annual assessments in order to demonstrate student achievement.
- 6) Continue to actively pursue collaborative certificates with other university programs (such as Hawaiian language, teacher education program, etc.), alternative on-campus or online educational offerings (such as summer youth programs, continuing education and extension

programs), and potential new majors and minors (such as theater design and production, experience design, creative technology, musical theater, music production, Hawaiian dance, Hawaiian-language playwriting, arts education, arts management, etc.).

7) Continue to enhance the quality of courses contributed to general education in order to expand access to performing arts opportunities to non-majors.

8) Establish one or more community councils to build relations for the university, explore community needs that could be achieved through partnership with the program, and understand local industry connections that could be aligned with (or create revisions to) the program's learning outcomes.

9) Collaborate with Admissions to involve faculty more within the process of marketing and recruitment, continue to work with local high schools to develop pathways into the major, and develop articulation agreements with local community colleges to facilitate transfer.

10) Ensure that the program is represented in local performance festivals in order to increase the awareness of the program, and the university.

