



# DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE & DANCE PROGRAM REVIEW Feb 24-25, 2022

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## **INTRODUCTION**

To prepare this report the review team was provided a thorough self-study compiled by Chair Donna Jewell of the Department of Theatre & Dance and then visited the UNM campus in February of 2022. During that time, the team met with department, college, and university leaders, faculty of all ranks, staff, graduate students, and undergraduate students. The team also toured various facilities.

The review team appreciates the hospitality and candor experienced throughout the visit, and wish to especially thank Ms. Donna Jewell and Ms. Amanda DiMercurio, Academic Program Review Specialist, for orchestrating everything so smoothly.

At the conclusion of our visit, we presented our initial findings to department, college, and university leaders, following the criteria we had been given. In the pages that follow, we expand on those initial findings.

## **TEACHING & LEARNING: CURRICULUM**

The Department provides multiple majors including a world-renowned BA in Flamenco Dance. It also offers the only MFA in Dance and MFA in Dramatic Literature in the state of New Mexico.

Fulfilling the requirements for such a multiplicity of programs, is challenging. The Department must offer a wide variety of courses to support the majors. It places a big demand on the faculty who must provide this variety of courses on a regular basis. The curriculum is organized such that several courses are only offered in the fall or the spring and sometimes in either even or odd years. This can lead to students having to take classes that are not at their level of expertise. They must carefully track their progress to complete courses sequentially and complete graduation requirements. Some students feel that advising is uneven and inadequate. Ironically, others desire more comprehensive learning that BFA options in Dance and Theatre might provide.

Production is an essential educational tool in both Theatre and Dance adding to the responsibilities of both students and faculty. While enrollment in the Design & Technology BFA is currently solid, it will be necessary to find funding to acquire new equipment. It does not serve students learning to deal with obsolete equipment.

As discussed in the student section, the Department needs to address greater integration with the Film and Digital Arts Department. This might include curricular and program adjustments.

Curricularly, the Department should be recognized for its commitment to students of mixed abilities. But this requires additional faculty support, development of methodologies and University subsidy of accessible environs.

## **TEACHING & LEARNING: ASSESSMENT**

Assessment within the department is compliant with required assessment protocols, using varied assessment tools, including reviews. There is a sense from faculty that learning assessments are busy work and not useful to the growth of the program. Maybe if such assessments were linked to funding growth there would be a greater interest in participating in the process.

The nature of this department means that students are constantly assessed in environments outside the regular classroom. That is rehearsals, production work

in areas of design and technology, and performances are under constant scrutiny by faculty and staff.

## **STUDENTS**

The faculty and administration are rightfully proud of the diversity of the undergraduate student body. It was noted that there has been some drop-off in diversity which everyone concludes to be the result of COVID and the added impositions of working online and needing equipment to support that.

It is a very small department with just over 100 undergrads. The ratio of students to faculty is 7:1 which is really fortunate for such a small department.

The faculty spoke appreciatively of the tenacity, the openness and the eagerness of their students. An unexpectedly large number of undergraduates attended the meeting with the reviewers. They expressed enthusiasm for the program but also frustration with curriculum availability. Dance majors asked why students involved in athletics have the trainers and physical therapy but they don't. Theatre BFA's in Design asked for upgraded/updated facilities that will prepare them better for careers. They asked for a maker space where they could work on projects not associated with productions. This should be taken into consideration in the plans for the proposed new building. In the meantime, the College should develop a small interdepartmental and interdisciplinary maker space. Perhaps at ARTS Lab.

Given the burgeoning film industry in New Mexico, students in all areas asked for better integration between the Department and the Film & Digital Arts Department. The student organizations in each department have worked together to support cross disciplinary projects. Ongoing integration should be supported at the Department and College level, however limited Department funding makes it impractical to support interdepartmental projects. The small number of students in the Department requires students to focus on Theater and Dance productions rather than on film projects.

Graduate students also show some diversity with the majority white but a high number of Hispanic and Native Americans. Students in Dramatic Writing spoke of frustrations with production of their plays. All grad students wished for classes that are exclusively graduate level, not combined with undergraduate sections. It is extraordinary that Graduate Assistantships cannot be guaranteed from year to year. Several students complained of completing the academic year with no assurance of funding for the next year and having to scramble to find sources for themselves! This lack of assured funding from year to year certainly has an impact

on recruiting. Why commit to a graduate program that you cannot afford to continue?

There was also frustration that answers to administrative and academic progress questions are difficult to find. Part of this currently stems from limited grad faculty available due to sabbaticals. There also seems to be a lack of communication between the Department and the Office of Graduate Studies although a look at the Graduate Studies website certainly indicates that lack is mutual. The Theatre Handbook needs to be reworked. We recommend enlisting students for the project and creating peer mentoring structure to assist students in finding a path to retention and graduation.

The graduate students in dramatic writing were also interested in greater integration with the Department of Film and Digital Arts. They were concerned that classes in screenwriting have been replaced with additional coursework in playwriting.

Students were dissatisfied with marketing for both productions and for recruiting. These areas seem to be overseen by the College of Fine Arts Office, with the Department having little control.

## **FACULTY**

The Department is to be commended for its diversity. While better than half the faculty are White, 33% are Hispanic with 1 Asian and 1 Black faculty member. Women outnumber men. Their combined resume brings decades of experience and a vast range of knowledge to the Department. This is a scrappy bunch: proud to do a lot of excellent work without much support.

Unfortunately, the trend noted in the last review of not being able to fill vacant faculty positions continues. At the moment, two faculty are simultaneously on sabbatical making it even more challenging.

Most faculty are teaching a 3/3 load while many of them also hold administrative or production jobs as well. This is a heavy load for which they are underpaid. While these teaching loads may be commensurate with Film and Digital Arts, they are too high to appropriately support the level of research needed at an R1 institution.

The Flamenco Program is exceptional and should be recognized as such. Because of its uniqueness, faculty are limited in traditional forms of salary increase and

other pressures that outline the special nature of a program. The University should develop metrics that recognize and support such unique “jewels” and reward them for their representation and success.

Adjunct faculty expressed appreciation for the opportunity to work in such a strong and diverse Department. Some have been employed by the Department for over a decade, one even 18 years! This leads to frustration about petrified pay scales and lack of advancement opportunity. Several most recently hired complained about insufficient on-boarding. Some also desired a stronger relationship with the Department of Film and Digital Arts.

### **RESEARCH, SCHOLARSHIP & SERVICE**

Faculty are active with research and creative activity. The film industry provides opportunity for production faculty to exercise their craft. Flamenco faculty participate internationally with other choreographers and performers.

Funding to support research has decreased substantially.

As noted above, many faculty provide service to the Department administratively or through production activity.

### **PEER COMPARISON**

The review team felt that the peer institutions selected by the Department were inappropriate. While their ambitions are admirable it is difficult to compare a combined Theatre & Dance Department of 100 undergraduates with Departments that are at the least twice as large and singular Theatre or Dance Departments.

### **RESOURCES & PLANNING**

Resources begin with money. This small Department is underfunded at all levels: personnel, facilities, production, student support, etc. The budget is incomprehensible and woefully inadequate. Students actually believed that ticket revenues from their performances went to Athletics rather than to the Department!

The Department offers several lower-level courses with unrestricted access to nonmajors. While this exposes a broader community to the arts, it is not entirely altruistic. These courses all have course fees attached and those fees provide a substantial boost to the Department’s operating budget. Sadly, academia has

learned the lesson of fees from top to bottom. Every university loads up the tuition bill with fees, from athletics to technology.

Unfortunately for this Department the enrollment in these courses has diminished in the last years, particularly technique classes (dance, acting, etc.) during COVID. Losing these course fees creates its own budget crisis.

It is also difficult to plan ahead when one can't even fill empty faculty lines. It is an embarrassment that there are instructors who have been adjunct for 18+ years.

## **FACILITIES**

The joke is that the Department's facilities were amazing when built in the '70's. Since then, updating has been sporadic and basic. Much of the equipment in the Rodey Theatre, for example, is hand-me-down from Popejoy Hall. As the moneymaking roadhouse, Popejoy has received significant capital from federal COVID funds. Faculty and students understand the rationale, are grateful for the castoffs but wish to occasionally be the beneficiaries of new stuff of their own.

For example, the sound design studio in Rodey Theater is comprehensive but is running on an old Mac Pro Tower with an OS that can't be updated. To prevent accidental upgrades that would crash the whole system, the computer is not connected to the internet. This precludes collaborative work requiring online connectivity. Especially, the pandemic accelerated the development of systems designed for remote collaboration in professional settings but students are unable to take advantage of these developing technologies.

The Carlisle Gym which houses the Elizabeth Waters Center for Dance is the oldest building on campus and is registered as a National Historic Place. The Department treasures the building and the clever adaptation to house studios, offices and a performance space. While charming, it needs upgrades to plumbing, heating, etc. It was joked that the best collaboration between Theatre & Dance and Film & Digital Arts would be shooting a horror movie in the bathroom facilities in Carlisle.

ADA accessibility is mandated federally and statewide. This Department has made a concerted commitment to mixed abilities students but should not be expected to foot the bill for upgrades this requires. And is this the answer at

UNM: you make the renovations only if a department or unit asks for it? This is a state and University issue that should not be billed against a Department.

Many lecture courses offered by the Department have small enrollments and struggle to find lecture spaces of an appropriate size. Priority in capacity determines room assignments. One issue that faculty acknowledged is that they frequently schedule classes ignoring University canonical times thereby making class assignments even more problematic. It is recommended that the Department get on the University's schedule if they want to use general classroom spaces. Remember, a class that overlaps two regular times also prohibits students from creating their most flexible and efficient schedules.

## **STRATEGIC PLANNING**

It's all about the money, isn't it?

- Vacated faculty positions need to be filled.
- Salaries need to be increased to be competitive and reflect actual efforts.
- Startup and research funding needs to be increased.
- Budgeting needs to be regularized and guaranteed by the University.
- Graduate funding needs to be increased and guaranteed for the number of credits required.
- The Office of Graduate Studies needs to provide greater support to the Department and to graduate students.
- Facilities need to be upgraded to meet ADA requirements.
- Facilities and equipment need to be repaired and upgraded to meet current standards so as to provide leading-edge training
- Dance students need access to physical trainers and therapists.
- Undergraduate recruiting needs to be energized. This includes better support from the College and Recruitment/Admissions.
- The College and the Department need to support greater integration with the Film & Digital Arts Department.
- A better set of peer institutions need to be found. This may not be easy.
- Communication pathways need to be evaluated and enhanced.