

## **SEVEN YEAR PROGRAM REVIEW VISITING EVALUATORS REPORT**

School of Theatre and Dance—Dance Program

East Carolina University

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### **1. Program Overview**

The Dance Program in the East Carolina University (ECU) School of Theatre and Dance (SoTD) offers two degrees: the BFA in Dance Performance and the BFA in Dance Education. The Program sets itself apart from other U.S. academic dance programs in several ways. First, it is one of the few to require of Dance Performance majors advanced training in three disciplines: ballet, jazz and modern dance. Second, the Program, which has a strong relationship with SoTD's Musical Theatre BFA, offers strong training in tap dance. Third, the Program has stronger than usual curricular requirements in theatrical production and design. It is of concern that the Program is not accredited by the National Association of Schools of Dance (NASD), primarily because of facility deficiencies, but accreditation is a stated goal for the Dance faculty and for ECU administration. Limited—or, really, inappropriate—facilities are the single greatest hindrance to Program development.

The Dance Program has three primary functions at East Carolina. First, it prepares Dance Performance and Dance Education majors for careers in their fields. The “triple-track” training is designed to make Dance Performance graduates competitive in the professional dance world. The Dance Education major results in teaching licensure in the State of North Carolina, one of the historical leaders in elementary and high school arts education. Second, the Program is integral to SoTD's mission to serve the local and regional community through professional-quality theatre and dance productions. Community support for the performing arts at ECU is clearly very high. Third, the Program participates in the university's general education program by offering numerous sections of Dance 1000: Introduction to Dance and by occasionally offering beginners' classes in ballet (Dance 1001), modern (Dance 1002), jazz (Dance 1003), tap (Dance 1004) and ballroom / folk (Dance 3703).

The Program's performance opportunities (most of which are open to the public) are particularly notable. There is one mainstage dance concert each year in the McGinnis Auditorium, early in the spring semester. These pieces are faculty-choreographed and usually include the work of a guest artist set on student dancers. In addition, there are numerous dance concerts each year in the Burnette Studio Theatre, choreographed by both faculty and students. The annual Day of Dance is a 35-year-old outreach activity aimed at students age 10

to high school and their teachers; dance faculty, a guest artist and advanced students offer classes in technique, pedagogy and creative process. The Random Acts concert, as its name suggests, is a concatenation of pieces from all genres. Finally, while Dance Education students pursue teaching internships during their senior year, Dance Performance students' curricular capstone experience results in a Senior Choreography concert each semester, with student choreographers setting work on their younger peers.

The Program's student profile is strong for the number of faculty. The Program began auditioning students for program entry in 2007, a decision which has resulted in noticeably higher-quality entering students. Recent years have seen an intentional decline in the number of enrolled majors, as the last of the non-audition students have completed the Program. Before auditions, there were on average 157 majors enrolled each fall. Now that all students have passed through auditions, there are approximately 77 majors each fall. The graduation rate has noticeably improved since auditions became standard; nevertheless, data regarding retention and graduation should be monitored closely in coming years.

The Program employs seven faculty members in 6.5 FTE (3.0 associate, 2.0 assistant, 1.0 full-time fixed-term, 0.5 part-time, fixed-term). There are no full professors. Faculty workload seems unusually high. Advising duties are split among the full-time faculty. The faculty also is expected to set original choreography on student dances for the mainstage and studio theatre concerts. They are also the coordinators for both degree programs, run the annual Day of Dance, supervise Senior Choreography, conduct on-site visitation of teaching interns, facilitate outreach tours to high schools, advise student organizations, serve on School, College and University committees, recruit new students, conduct auditions, develop assessment protocols, and so forth. Except for one fixed-term faculty, who receives a course release for choreographing the SoTD musicals, the faculty members receive no reassigned time for creative activity or administrative duties, nor is choreography integrated into workload as part of their course assignments. Program-related creative activity, though, does accrue credit toward tenure and for purposes of annual evaluation. Faculty members lack the autonomy of an independent department. Annual evaluation is conducted by the School Director whose discipline is theatre; curriculum, budget, personnel, tenure and promotion decisions are made by School committees and/or the School Director. Although faculty report that evaluation and personnel decisions have been fair, dance faculty hold a minority vote in determining their future.

**2. Program Strengths**--Note that assessment of strengths considers National Association of Schools of Dance (NASD) threshold accreditation standards.

*Facilities:* Facilities are the most significant deficiency for the dance area in the School of Theater and Dance, but in general, facilities for the Theater Program are quite good. The McGinnis Theatre is of adequate size and well equipped and staffed for high caliber performance events. The production spaces, including scenic, paint, costume and lighting shops, are adequate or beyond adequate for the productions being presented. Although the performance space works well for the SoTD's Program's needs, rehearsal space for all of the School's productions is limited. They currently use the black box dance/theater space for rehearsals for main stage productions. This arrangement, while it works fairly well for the Theater Program as they mount 4 out of the 5 main stage productions each year, leaves the Dance Program with little rehearsal space in the evenings for the creative work of faculty, guest artists and students.

This black box studio, the Burnette Studio Theatre, is a main classroom space during the day for the Dance Program, and although it is the biggest studio they have, it is still under the recommended size for a dance studio or performance space for an accredited dance program (100 square feet per dancer). It is a fairly well-equipped performance space, and all except one of the Dance Program's yearly performance events occurs in this venue. It is slightly undersized for a performance space for dance and the audience capacity is low. In most configurations, the theatre seats 84.

*Curriculum and Teaching:* The Dance Program is blessed with a strong, hard-working and caring faculty with solid preparation and skills in assigned courses. Faculty rapport with students is exemplary, and a positive and productive relationship was evident in the classes observed. The triple track technique philosophy positions the Program as a unique training system with few peers across the country. In addition to courses to the advanced level in ballet, jazz and modern dance, the Program offers Friday jazz repertory, tap, composition, improvisation, pedagogy and dance history.

*Research/Creative Activity:* The visitors viewed an informal showing of student and faculty creative work as well as video recordings of recent concert choreography by dance faculty members. The work viewed demonstrated a strong grasp of choreographic principles with individual artistic voices and breadth of dance genres evidenced. Movement material was appropriate to student skill level, enabling them to perform with confidence, but challenging enough to push their growth as performers.

*Leadership:* Leadership within and above the Dance Program is very strong. Internally, two long-tenured faculty members, Patricia Weeks and Dawn Clark, coordinate the BFAs in Dance Performance and in Dance Education, respectively. Both are well-respected by colleagues and

students, and are seen as strong leaders open to change and progress. The two tenure-track faculty, Teal Darkenwald and John Dixon, are energetic young leaders who have brought a new vitality and professionalism to the Program. The quality of their work is recognized by colleagues within the School and by constituents internal and external to the University. One of the Program's greatest strengths is collegiality among its seven faculty members. It is clear that decisions are made by consensus rather than fiat.

The Program enjoys strong leadership and support at all levels of administration. Provost/Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Marilyn Sheerer, Interim Dean Christopher Buddo, and SoTD Director John Shearin are all rated highly by the faculty. The reviewers believe all of them are interested in seeing the Program progress. They unanimously support program accreditation and understand the importance of the arts in the academy and in the community.

*Students:* The students in general are very positive about their training in the Dance Program. There is a strong professional work ethic among the students driven by the examples set by their faculty. The students noted with much appreciation the dedication and commitment of the faculty towards their training. The technical level of the students is strong and commensurate with accredited BFA dance programs of a similar size and scope. The diversity of the genres of dance taught is a significant, distinguishing aspect of the Program and a selling point for the current students. It was also a draw that caused many to come to ECU to audition in the first place. Few dance programs across the nation have beginning to advanced level training available in modern dance, ballet and jazz. Another aspect of the training many of the students noted is having tap classes available to them. Tap classes are also not usually offered in most college dance programs, and if they are, they almost never get to the advanced level.

The cross-over opportunities are another strong point of the Dance and Theater Programs. With a vibrant Musical Theater Program, there are additional opportunities for dance majors to perform outside of their main dance focus area.

Many students noted the Dance Education Program as the main reason for coming to ECU. They spoke of the quality of the training and opportunities to perform while working on their dance education degree as an added strength of the Program.

*Relationship to Internal and External Constituents:* In meetings with internal and external constituents, it was very clear that the work of Dance Program is supported by many individuals, both inside and outside the university. Dance performances are well-attended, and members of the community laud the outreach provided by the Program through its performances around the region and through the graduates who teach in the community.

Representatives from Undergraduate Admissions and University Advancement indicated desire and willingness to cooperate still more fully with the Dance faculty and administration. Representatives from the School of Music and the School of Art and Design expressed eagerness for collaboration, both creative and curricular.

**3. Areas for Improvement or Concern with Recommendations--**Note assessment of areas for improvement reflect National Association of Schools of Dance (NASD) threshold accreditation standards.

*Facilities:* Facilities for the Dance Program are the main obstacle holding the department back from growth and becoming an accredited degree program. These include studio spaces, dressing/locker room facilities and injury prevention and care facilities which have significant deficiencies in meeting NASD threshold accreditation standards.

Currently, the studio spaces for classes and rehearsals are woefully inadequate. There is only one space currently in use that is close to the standards for a BFA dance degree program. That space, the Burnette Studio Theater, is only available to the Dance Program during the day for classes, and approximately one fifth of the year as a rehearsal space in the evenings, because it is used as the primary rehearsal space for all for the theater, dance and musical theater main stage productions. Of the other studios that are currently used by the Dance Program, two are only slightly over 600 square feet, or 25% of the recommended size for a movement studio. The third space is bigger but has five 2 foot by 2 foot, load-bearing pillars in the middle of the room, as well as a load-bearing wall that juts out into the room, making the space less than ideal and potentially dangerous for teaching or participating in a pre-professional level dance classes. This room is used as the primary ballet studio. The space is not a square or rectangle, the normal shape of a dance studio, and it has five pillars in the middle of the room, which severely impedes students training.

Currently there are no locker room facilities for use by the dance students. The men and women each have a small changing room with a couple of benches. There are no showers available and running water only is available from the adjacent restrooms. A BFA program in dance has studio-centered training at its core. Students are often in the department from early morning until late at night. The lack of a dressing/locker room is a major hindrance for this Program moving forward towards accreditation, as well as a significant detriment to student training.

Another facility that an accredited program of this size should have is a conditioning and injury prevention care facility. This facility aids students who are injured or recovering from injury and

provides a place to do physical therapy or targeted conditioning to help them get back to their training as soon as possible. This kind of a space and faculty or staff that are trained in conditioning or injury prevention can help student understand their dance injuries and how better to prevent and treat them. This kind of facility would benefit the entire SoTD, as theater and musical theater actors can receive injuries in their training and rehearsals as well.

Many constituents, internal and external noted how well the Dance Program functions with such limited facilities and resources. This can be attributed to the dedication of the faculty and professionalism of the student body. Most noted the paradox that the Dance Program appears sufficiently resourced because faculty and students perform so well with their inadequate facilities. The visitors believe the Dance Program will have enormous potential to grow further if supported with adequate facilities and resources.

*Curriculum:* The Dance Program is missing several courses that are threshold standard requirements for accreditation. Absent as part of the required, regularly offered curriculum in the Dance Program are the curricular areas of music for dancers, dance production (as opposed to theatre production), kinesiology, somatics/conditioning, movement analysis in both programs, as well as pedagogy for the BFA in Dance Performance. The SoTD has production faculty capable of delivering a production class specific to dance, and visitors recommend that this option be explored. The dance curriculum is also quite heavy in required theatre production coursework, as well as crew hours required, predominantly in theatre productions; some of these courses might become electives, enabling the dance unit to address the other dance-specific curricular deficiencies noted above. The Dance Program might also consider creating a performance course. Such a course could provide much needed assigned load time for faculty as well as enable performance training to be reflected on student transcripts.

*Leadership:* Imminent turnover in leadership is a concern. Dawn Clark, coordinator of Dance Education, retires this year; a search for her replacement is underway. Ms. Clarine Powell, tap instructor, also retires this year; her replacement has been hired. The current Dean is an interim appointment; an internal search for a permanent dean is underway. It is unclear how much longer the Dance Performance coordinator (Weeks) and School director (Shearin) will be in place. The Program enjoys two dynamic young leaders in Darkenwald and Dixon, but good future hires and stable leadership during this period of transition are vital.

Within SoTD, Shearin's leadership is sure-handed and visionary, but the reviewers see opportunities for developing faculty leadership. We suggest the formation of an executive committee, comprising the area coordinators of Dance Performance, Dance Education, Professional Acting, Musical Theatre, Production & Design and Theatre Education, to meet with

the Director regularly and serve as an advisory board in matters affecting the School. Such a committee will give each area greater input into decisions that impact them and will improve each area's knowledge of what takes place across the School.

*Number and diversity of faculty:* For a BFA program of the size and scope of ECU's, the Dance Program needs an additional faculty line to address additional curricular areas mentioned above and to enable current faculty to focus their work in fewer areas of study. Gender diversity, often a problem in dance, as well as ethnic diversity, which is completely absent, need to be aggressively addressed in recruitment when searching for replacements and new faculty. Such a shift in faculty would aid in the recruitment and retention of male students and students of color.

*Scholarships:* The Dance Program possesses three dedicated annual scholarships and share with the other SoTD programs funds from a Scholarship Pool and from the Friends of Theatre and Dance. Dance students are also eligible for two College-level scholarships. In 2012–13, 13 scholarships were awarded, amounting to \$14,850. While this amount has increased significantly since the middle of the last decade, both the number and amount of scholarships are very small for a dance program of this size. Scholarship deficiency is a major hindrance to recruitment.

Major SoTD fundraising efforts are underway, but much more is necessary. SoTD faculty and staff need to work closely with University Advancement staff to ensure that the arts at ECU are endowed as fully as possible. Scholarship distribution is controlled centrally within SoTD. While it does seem that scholarships are allocated fairly across the various disciplines in the School, greater transparency may be desirable.

*Recruitment/Retention:* Currently the recruitment and retention efforts of the dance area are supporting the Program as well as can be expected given the heavy faculty workloads. Since the area began requiring an audition for admittance to the Program, the technical and professional level of the entering student has risen. Unfortunately, there is little targeted recruitment for the Dance Program and publicity materials are inadequate. Retention has improved since auditions were implemented, but are below standards for accredited programs of equal size. There appears to be a lack of funding for recruitment and lack of budget oversight for the dance unit by its faculty. Scholarship funds for incoming students also seem low in proportion to the size of the Program and in relation to comparable programs in the field.

The Dance Program could implement many strategies for improved recruitment that are not overly costly. Some examples include:

- Travel by faculty to regional High School Dance Festivals to teach and recruit and audition students from out of state.
- Create Dance Unit specific publicity materials to target incoming students to the Dance Program. This should include print materials and online or website upgrades.
- Create an alumni-tracking system that helps the department keep in touch with alumni, and help them channel prospective student back to the Program.
- Continue the strong tradition of community outreach to get the name and students of the Program performing in venues across the region, to help raise the Program's profile.
- Start a college dance day, similar to the current "Day of Dance," targeting specific high school and studio dance programs in the region to come to campus for a day of class's performances and information on the programs available. This can dovetail with professional development workshops for high school dance teachers if there are resources available to offer these kinds of workshops. Often, public school administrators are looking for professional development activities for their teachers and they are not always so readily available in the arts.
- Start a student performing Dance Company that tours in the spring semester to high schools and middle schools to generate interest in the arts programs from the university. Frequently, schools will have a mandated number of programs they must offer their students, and these performances can also raise some funds for the dance program. These funds can be in turn used to hire more guest artists to work with the students or for scholarships.

Retention efforts are hampered by the lack of quality facilities. Students who come to the school have good experiences but are faced with many challenges that students in other programs do not. If the facilities issue can be adequately addressed and appropriate resources are put into the Program, retention would increase. Some issues mentioned by current students included:

- Lack of studio space and amenities like mirrors or even having the floors cleaned.
- Access to spaces for rehearsals at night and on the weekends.
- Placement classes for technique by ability rather than by year might be considered. This is important to keep students challenged as they progress through the curriculum, but is very hard to do if there is not adequate studio space, so that multiple levels of courses could be offered concurrently.
- Other curricular issues included access to injury prevention and care, more world dance forms like African dance or Hip Hop and potentially high level summer training courses.



*Assessment rubrics and then analysis of results:* The Dance Program has begun the ground work to adopt a consistent assessment plan to guide program improvement. The faculty has identified clear Program goals and objectives. Most recently, they created a rubric for use as part of the audition process and they report that this tool has aided in the consistent assessment of incoming students. The next task is to identify what achievements will demonstrate that the Program is meeting its goals and objectives and develop rubrics and a regular review of the results of the data generated.

*Alumni relations and tracking:* Improvement in the area of alumni relations and tracking has the potential to provide valuable information in the assessment of the Program. Suggestions include:

- Use of social media to connect alumni with current students.
- Regular survey of alumni regarding career accomplishments and feedback on the training they received.
- Social activities to bring alumni back to campus.
- Social activities for alumni in cities when faculty are visiting.

*Faculty and staff hiring and promotion:* When meeting with the tenure track faculty, it became apparent that there is no mentoring plan in place to help young faculty to address issues of promotion and tenure. One positive aspect of the tenure process at ECU is that the administration accepts the unit's creative work done at the university on the student body as valid for promotion to tenure. Many programs in the country do not place a high value on this level of creative research, which makes it much harder for individuals to attain tenure and draws faculty energies away from the university to pursue high levels of outside creative research.

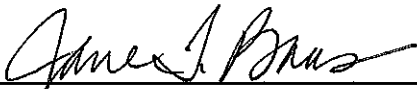
This policy, which encourages work at the university and can discourages work outside the university on a regional or national scale, comes into conflict with the requirements for promotion to full professor as stated in the units code. For promotion to full professor the criteria is almost exclusively creative/research on a national scale. The criteria for promotion to the different levels associate and full professor are in conflict with each other. It would help tenure track faculty if these criteria could be more closely aligned. If some support for outside research and creative work could given during the tenure process it would lay a good foundation for continued work in the field at a national level and translate into more faculty having the ability to reach the level of full professor.

The creation of a faculty handbook to give new faculty some guidelines for the tenure and promotion process would be a positive step in the support of new hires.

#### 4. Summary

In summary, the Dance Program in the School of Theater and Dance at East Carolina University is accomplishing remarkable things with a strong faculty in an inadequate, and in some cases, dangerous set of facilities. The Program is ripe for growth. North Carolina has only one dance program accredited by the National Association of Schools of Dance (University of North Carolina-Greensboro), and there are only a handful of NASD accredited programs in surrounding states. The goal of accreditation seems achievable if major facility issues and minor faculty, curricular and governance concerns cited in this report can be addressed. Such changes would position the Dance Program to be a premiere program in the Southeast.

Respectfully submitted,



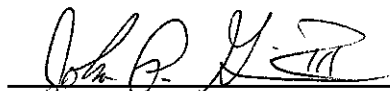
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