

## Unit Plan for Assessing and Improving Student Learning in Degree Programs

Unit: Dance

Unit Head approval: yes

Date: May 1, 2008

### SECTION 1: PAST ASSESSMENT RESULTS

#### **Brief description of changes or improvements made in your unit as the result of assessment results since 2000.**

In 2000, the departmental assessment committee decided that our accreditation requirements and mission would serve as the basis for the determination of desired learning outcomes and the development of an assessment plan. The Department of Dance is a charter member of the National Association of Schools of Dance (NASD). An Accreditation review conducted in 2004/2005 served as the architecture for both internal (self review) and external (NASD standard) assessment. At this time, evidence of connection between our stated mission and our curriculum, program activities, and assessment procedures were scrutinized by a panel of outside professional reviewers. Upon completion of this review in 2005, we were granted re-accreditation. Our next evaluation will be in 2014.

At the time of our last assessment plan, The Department of Dance mission stated the following: *“The mission of the BFA and MFA programs in dance is the professional preparation of performers, choreographers, and teachers who possess standards of excellence, a breadth of understanding in the discipline, and the ability to function in a variety of contexts to contribute to the art form and a global society.”*

Although the performance offerings in our unit were reported to “fit the scope of the NASD guidelines”, the unit underwent a more stringent review of this most vital aspect of our activities. We discovered through exit surveys that the students’ assessment of their performance opportunities were mixed. A large majority of students felt procedures for casting roles in productions were unfair or biased. To address this, we revised our casting procedures for departmental productions in order that we could give more students a range of performing experiences before graduation. It was also determined that a faculty or guest choreographer would be assigned to choreograph a piece for the senior class each year that would be performed in one of the main stage concerts, ensuring that every dance major has that experience before graduation.

Other changes that effectively addressed the mission goal of “professional preparation of performers” included hiring a physical therapist to evaluate majors in both programs yearly, tracking postural, muscular and mechanical features and potential weaknesses of every student. Each Fall Term, the departmental physical therapist prescribes a regimen for those students in need and offers each student a report on their progress the following

Fall. These procedures aid in reducing injury and helping students develop disciplined technical practices which are essential for successful completion of our program and for eventual performance in the professional arena.

In order to enhance the “*professional preparation of choreographers*” portion of our mission, we revised the BFA curricular sequencing of courses in Improvisation and Composition and added more structure to the Senior Thesis requirement. Seniors are now mentored closely by faculty and are required to form thesis committees to facilitate feedback and development in their work. The MFA program added two more required courses in choreography and a course specific to mentoring graduate students through the Thesis requirement. The roles of the MFA Thesis committee members and MFA advisors were clarified and are now specified in new documents in the MFA Student Handbook.

In order to address the goal of preparing students to have a “*breadth of understanding in the discipline, and the ability to function in a variety of contexts to contribute to the art form and a global society*” we revised the Dance History sequence to be less biased toward Western viewpoints and to include in depth research and writing projects that encourage theoretical and critical perspectives. This goal was facilitated by the joint hire of Dr. Yutian Wong with Asian Studies and the TOPS hire of Dr. Cynthia Oliver who teaches graduate courses on Trans-nationalism and Feminist Theory as it relates to Dance.

In 2000 it was also determined that we would retain all existing department mechanisms for assessment such as the sophomore review, post production evaluations of concerts, mid-term evaluation meetings and exit surveys.

## **SECTION 2: REVISED ASSESSMENT PLAN**

### **(a) PROCESS: Brief description of the process followed to develop or revise this assessment plan.**

The opportunity to revise our assessment plan serendipitously coordinates with new leadership in the department as well as the hire of three new faculty members. The new head initiated processes for examination and re-definition of our departmental mission, vision, guiding principles, and student objectives. BFA and MFA committees were charged specifically with establishing clear student outcomes objectives and with curricular mapping of these objectives. This research was used to define assessment practices relevant to these specific objectives in each program.

In the Fall of 07 the head appointed an assessment coordinator to work closely with the program committees and to oversee the design of the assessment plan. This individual attended three Assessment Workshops presented by John C. Ory and the Center for Teaching Excellence. The assessment coordinator developed charges for the MFA and BFA committees in consultation with the Head asking the committees to review and revise assessment mechanisms and exit surveys and to create an alumni survey. The coordinator gathered assignments from each program committee and made sure that the

programs' efforts were compatible and that the assessment mechanisms were designed in a full loop with efficient follow-through procedures in place.

**(b) STUDENT OUTCOMES: List Unit's student learning outcomes (knowledge, skills, and attitudes).**

**Student Outcomes for the MFA in Dance Program:**

The Dance Department expects MFA candidates to conduct a creative inquiry that leads to the development of a sophisticated sense of self-definition. Individual research and analysis should culminate in the development of a personal artistic process and mission and should be evident in the following contexts:

Choreography- Candidates will develop a distinctive choreographic research methodology and demonstrate its skillful application in a performative context. This ideology must establish solid foundation for ongoing research and engagement that contributes to the global dialogue about dance and contemporary culture.

Communication- Candidates will develop the ability to express their choreographic vision and process in verbal and written language that is clear, cogent, and convincing and demonstrates clear analytic skill, critical thinking, awareness of historical context, and knowledge of contemporary culture.

Movement- Candidates will demonstrate a commitment to movement investigation and practice that defines, advances, and sustains their choreographic vision.

Teaching- Candidates will apply their research vision in clear pedagogic principles while fostering a stimulating teaching/ learning environment.

Development of a Career Plan- Candidates will devise bold and innovative career strategies in order to advance their artistic mission in the field and demonstrate the capacity to implement these plans with professionalism in all the above contexts.

**Student Outcomes for the BFA in Dance Program:**

The students will be able to:

- dance with substantial physical, technical and performative skills.
- utilize knowledge of anatomical and somatic approaches in theory and practice.

- engage in creative processes, conduct choreographic inquiries, collaborate across domains, and produce a dance work for a performance event.
- teach a well-structured movement class with an understanding of pedagogical principles.
- employ diverse modes of thinking, both verbally and in writing, to communicate ideas relating to dance.
- understand basic technology and its application to dance making, teaching, research, and the creation of promotional materials.
- engage in critical self-reflection and move into the world with curiosity, self-motivation, and entrepreneurial spirit.

**(c) MEASURES AND METHODS USED TO MEASURE OUTCOMES:**

Curricular Mapping of these objectives was performed in both BFA and MFA programs. Results of this activity are being used to form the architecture for current curricular revisions.

Assessing the efficacy of these objectives in our students will be performed in the following contexts:

**BFA and MFA Exit Surveys-** Exit surveys were revised to more accurately reflect the new student objectives developed by MFA and MFA committees. It was also determined that the language used in prior surveys was too leading and that the surveys were too long. We have increased percentage of survey completion by requesting that the students bring their completed surveys with them to the Senior Thesis Feedback Sessions and to the Graduate Next Phase Presentations respectively. As these are required events for graduation, we have found that our request is being met and we have a near 100% turn in rate of exit surveys. Results of these surveys will be compiled and presented at the end of the year faculty retreat. The results of the surveys will be reviewed again every Fall at the First meeting of the BFA and MFA Committees in order that there is an opportunity for this data to affect the committee agendas.

**BFA and MFA Alumni Surveys-**New alumni surveys have been created and will be put on the web by May 1, 2008. We will send out an invitation to Alumni to complete these surveys on June 1, 2008 and again on Sept. 1, 2008. On Dec. 1, 2008, results of returned surveys will be compiled. There will be a presentation of results to faculty during the end of Fall 2008 semester Retreat.

**Guest Artist Surveys-**In previous exit surveys and in the 2004 NASD Review, it was reported that our guest artist program is one of our most valued and successful departmental activities. In the New Assessment Plan, we decided to take advantage of

the presence of professional guest artists to get feedback on how our program and our students compare in the larger context of the national collegiate scene. We asked guest artists to fill out surveys that evaluate our program and our students' skill level and artistry, our departmental culture, and our departmental standing in relationship to other dance programs in peer institutions. Results of these surveys have been compiled and will be reported on at the end-of-year faculty retreat on Friday May 2, 2008.

**Surveys of Student Experience of Guest artists**-After every guest artist residency, students are asked to fill out surveys that evaluate the student experience of the guest and gives the student the opportunity to evaluate the guest's teaching and communication skills. The Head and the Guest Artist Committee will use the results of these surveys to help determine the guest artist roster for ensuing years.

**Video Viewing of audition tapes and senior solos**-Every spring, the BFA director compiles videos that juxtapose the graduating seniors' solo audition tape from four years prior with the current performance tape of their thesis solos. All faculty and students review this compiled video providing an excellent opportunity to make an assessment of student progress. Faculty use this experience to assess program success and over-all teaching effectiveness. Students' use this experience as an opportunity for self-review.

**Mid term evaluation**- Dance majors are evaluated throughout the four-year program. At the mid-term of each semester the faculty meet to review students' progress. Advisors take notes at these mid-term discussions and then meet with their advisees individually to report feedback. Students are evaluated on technique, performance, creativity, scholarship, and over all attitude. If the faculty determines that a student is not meeting expectations, the student's advisor will convey this during the meeting with the student and discuss the issue thoroughly. If the concern warrants further action, the student will receive a letter from the head of the department alerting the student to the gravity of the situation. A student who is "not scheduled" for review may be evaluated anytime during the academic year if a problem is identified.

**Sophomore review**- The sophomore review process was significantly streamlined in this new assessment plan after garnering feedback from students and faculty who complained that the process was unnecessarily long and in some cases characterized as threatening. The new process is outlined below.

Students in their sophomore year will be evaluated at the mid-term of the second semester. Students will be evaluated on their individual potential to pursue a professional career as a performer, choreographer, or teacher based on the following criteria:

- 1) Demonstration of technical and artistic skill, creativity, and significant development in all studio classes (technique, improvisation, composition)
- 2) Performance involvement and an aptitude for performing
- 3) Maintenance of good health (the ability to remain free of major injury), and consistency of effort and motivation.

The Sophomore Review is considered the pivotal assessment to determine whether a student will continue in the BFA program. The Sophomore Review will take place as follows:

**Personal Assessment Essay:** (The specific guidelines for this essay are published in the Student Handbook *Appendix A*)

**Evaluation of Technique:** Students will be observed in modern technique class by a panel composed of faculty members.

**Evaluation of Creative and Performance Work:**

Improvisation and composition faculty will evaluate the student's creative class work to date. Performance work (in departmental productions and end of semester showings) will be evaluated by all faculty.

Following this review period, each student will be given written notification of the faculty's response to their work, as well as their eligibility to continue in the major program. The student will meet with their advisor to discuss the contents of the written evaluation

**MFA First, Second, and Third Year reviews-** Each year MFA candidates are subject to an evaluative review of their work in direct relation to the MFA Program Objectives.

#### Review First Year

First Semester: At the midterm of the first semester, the student meets with his/her academic advisor for a general evaluation of work to date. In addition, students have individual evaluative conferences with instructors of studio courses (technique and composition).

Second Semester: The MFA Committee will evaluate the **candidate's potential** for successfully fulfilling the MFA Program Objectives. A decision is made regarding continuation in the program. Each candidate meets with the MFA Committee after providing them with a written statement directly relating the following questions to each of the MFA Program Objectives:

1. Self- Evaluation of work in the MFA program to date.
2. Professional plans after graduation, and the relationship of the individual's program of study to those pursuits.
3. Elaborated statement of goals and how the student is utilizing this program and the greater university to support the individual's specific creative and scholarly research.

Candidates will submit current resume and video portfolio in-progress/draft to the committee. Students must be prepared to speak about their work and to engage in a dialogue with the review committee.

After this meeting, students will receive a written evaluation of work to date, incorporating evaluations from all of the student's course instructors. A copy will be placed in the student's file.

Review Second Year- For this new assessment plan, it was determined that we needed to add a second year review. This determination was made in order to more fully comply with NASD standards and to ensure that faculty have the formal opportunity to cope with under performing students. This review is conducted exactly as described in the First Year but instead of evaluating the candidate's **potential** to meet the MFA Program Objectives, the MFA Committee will evaluate the **candidate's current achievement** in the MFA Program Objectives.

Last Semester in Residence: A Post Production Thesis Evaluation Meeting is scheduled with the graduating candidate, graduate choreographic advisors, thesis committee members, and the dance production director. Successful completion of the thesis requirement is determined by the thesis committee members in coordination with the thesis advisors.

Next Phase Presentations must be successfully completed by the end of the spring term. Graduating MFA candidates present post graduation career plans, video portfolio of work to date, artistic statements, teaching philosophies, and resume documents to the MFA Committee for review.

**MFA Teaching Assistant Evaluation-** The MFA Committee determined that evaluation of graduate teaching assistants was too anecdotal and informal and that there had been too little follow-through on TA assessment. An evaluation mechanism was devised. The Head now either observes every TA in two classes per semester, or assigns this observation to a senior faculty member. The head or faculty who observe fill out a newly created evaluation form. The form includes assessment of the TA's ability to create a positive classroom environment, to encourage student engagement, to clearly establish objectives, to structure a sound warm up, to pace activities, and most of all to demonstrate the TA's choreographic values in the teaching context. These completed forms will be given to the student's advisor. The Head will also review the TA's ICES Scores. These scores and the evaluations of the TA's performance in the classroom will be used by the Head to determine class assignments and will be reviewed by the MFA Committee as part of the First and Second Year Review Process.

**Physical Therapy Screening-** This is described in Section One

**Evaluation of Faculty Teaching-** ICES will be used in every course. The Head reviews ICES scores and uses this information to help determine class assignment. ICES are part of the evidence that the Head uses to make recommendations for Tenure and Promotion and raises.

**Student engagement in the on-going assessment** of departmental function is actively promoted by offering monthly brown bag luncheon meetings with the head and by the

creation and support of **undergraduate and graduate student boards** that meet regularly and directly report issues/feedback to the Head.

### SECTION 3 : PLANS FOR USING RESULTS

(a) **PLANS: Brief description of plans to use assessment results for program improvement.**

Ongoing procedures for reporting results from each separate assessment mechanism are outlined above. All results will be addressed at bi-annual faculty retreats to determine if there are program revisions that should be initiated.

As this new Assessment plan dovetails with the departmental effort to significantly revise and improve curriculum, results will directly affect the new curricular plan. We anticipate organic interlace between results of this new assessment plan and impetus for curricular change. For instance, it has already been determined through our rigorous re-examination of the sophomore review process that our curriculum is not sufficiently supporting the students' growth in choreography and writing by the spring of the sophomore year. Because these are clearly important student outcomes objectives of our BFA Program, we now recognize the need to offer courses in choreography and dance scholarship much earlier in the sequencing of core requirements. This will provide encouragement of these outcomes and offer us the ability to more fairly evaluate students on these objectives by the spring of their sophomore year.

(b) **TIMELINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION:**

The above mentioned new assessment procedures are already in place and currently being implemented. Departmental assessment procedures will continually be reviewed by the Dept. Head, Assessment Coordinator, and BFA and MFA Program Directors. Faculty, staff, and student recommendations are welcome at any time and specific observations of assessment procedures will be addressed at faculty meetings throughout the year.

Curricular Revisions based on results of this assessment plan are currently being discussed in extensive end of the year faculty retreats. It is expected that new MFA and BFA curriculums will be proposed to the Courses and Curricular committee by Fall 2009 and that the new curriculum will be in place by Fall 2010.