

Introduction

The college appreciates the opportunity to take stock of our graduate programs at this midpoint in the implementation of the plans that departments submitted 2.5 years ago. In the academic departments of the college, Art and Design, Music, and Theatre Arts, the five-year plans represented the collective hopes, dreams, and aspirations of the faculty for our graduate programs. As plans created within the first two years of the college, this collective wisdom of the faculty still holds and informs our long-term goals for the enhancement of graduate study in the Caine College of the Arts.

Process

This review is informed by several sources of information. Among these are the following:

- Monthly meetings between the dean of the college and each department head. While not entirely devoted to graduate programs, items such as assistantships, graduate curriculum, new program proposals, and graduate faculty are frequently addressed in these meetings.
- Monthly meetings of the college graduate council. Chaired by Associate Dean Christopher T. Terry, this council devotes time each month to sharing best practices, discussing recruiting and funding, discussing curriculum and new programs, and vetting program proposals and requests for graduate student funding.
- Enrollment and graduation data provided by the School of Graduate Studies.
- A mid-term review meeting with the dean and two associate deans and each of the three department heads and graduate program coordinators (GPCs) held specifically in preparation for this review. In this meeting, using the five-year plan as a framework, the participants engaged in a focused and frank discussion about the strengths and weaknesses of each of our graduate programs, changes needed in the programs, and potential ways to remove any obstacles to progress.

Successes to Date

Program development: Departments reported general progress on most of their objectives outlined in the five-year plans. With one exception (the DMA in Choral Conducting, which has been put on hold pending further development), the program changes contemplated in the plans have been made. Specifically, Art and Design has added an Interior Design specialization to the MFA program, and Music has added several new specializations within the MM that initially had only a single specialization in Piano Performance and Pedagogy. The MS in Human Environments has also been eliminated in this transition.

Accreditation: It is also noteworthy that all MFA specializations in the Department of Art and Design are accredited by the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD) as part of that department's accreditation, awarded this earlier academic year. (The Department of Music is already accredited by the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM), and the Department of Theatre Arts is preparing to seek accreditation from the National Association of Schools of Theatre (NAST) as soon as some critical facilities upgrades are completed.)

Student interest and applications: Departments reported that interest of prospective students in graduate programs has increased over the last three years, and expressed some concern that this interest has not necessarily translated into increased numbers of applications. One department cited the national test score requirement as a deterrent to applications, and the college is grateful that the graduate school is considering a proposal to allow alternate measures, such as a faculty portfolio review, to fulfill this requirement. Department heads and GPCs reported that the number of graduate students who actually enroll is lower than projected, often due to lack of availability of assistantship and tuition funds or inability to award funds as early as competing universities. Theatre, in particular, has seen an erosion in the number of students accepting positions due primarily to assistantship funding. This is placing the quality of their program in some jeopardy for the future unless additional funds can be brought to bear.

Graduation numbers: The number of degrees awarded and the time to degree appears to have been an issue identified in some of the initial peer reviews and department plans. It bears mention that the degrees in Theatre Arts and Art and Design are MFA terminal degree programs, not masters degrees. The typical time to completion for an MFA student with little or no teaching, family or work responsibility is three years. It is unclear whether or not the peer reviewers understood this prior to pointing out low numbers of graduating students. Time to completion in music (2-year masters students only—USU's music department has no terminal degree programs.) has generally been good, although thesis recitals have sometimes caused a delay of one semester in graduation. As music has grappled with the addition of multiple specializations and the concomitant changes in admissions processes in the department, it appears that two students who probably should never have been recruited into the program will not complete their degrees. New admissions procedures implemented by the department's graduate committee should eliminate this problem for the future.

Mentoring: Departments cited strong mentoring relationships between faculty and graduate students as one of the foremost strengths of each of the college's graduate programs. All three programs cited direct faculty involvement as a major boost to recruiting and one department (Theatre Arts) attributes a near-100% placement record to successful mentoring programs, including faculty and visiting professionals-in-residence. All three departments identified building a broad community of graduate students who might serve as mentors to each other in a climate of low total numbers and highly discipline-focused performance and practice programs as a challenge.

Areas for Continued Effort

Recruiting: Although correctly identified as a strength in several programs, enhanced graduate recruiting continues to be a high priority for the college. Recruiting in some programs, such as ceramics and piano, is quite strong yet depends on a single faculty member. In other programs, such as scene design, recruiting seems to occur quite late in the year relative to national norms. Even in programs that are currently close to capacity, enhanced recruiting will lead to stronger students. Improved recruiting will continue to be an area of focus for all three departments, particularly as the college redesigns the website and reassesses public relations and marketing efforts.

Management: Improvements in graduate program management were identified by two of our departments (Art & Design and Music) as major areas of future work. In these departments, graduate programs rely heavily on faculty taking on extra responsibilities that are not currently accounted for in faculty loads. For example, GPCs are not consistently provided with release time from undergraduate teaching responsibilities. While graduate students can provide some backfill through teaching assistantships, the courses appropriate for them to teach seldom aligns with the faculty members bearing most of the teaching burden. One department (Art & Design) noted that lack of available faculty time is the main impediment to the development of an interdisciplinary degree program. A potential solution will be to look more carefully future faculty hires (either new lines or replacements) to find appropriate ways to strengthen graduate programs. Some programs are beginning conversations about decreasing the number of undergraduates accepted so that they can accommodate more graduate students. The easy route (and one that would be very popular!) would be the addition of new faculty lines. In the current budgetary climate, however, the college will need to be creative in order to strengthen graduate programs within existing faculty resources. Art and Design, for example, has added technical personnel in printmaking and ceramics to try to make more time for faculty in these areas to work with advanced students. Theatre Arts has upgraded technical positions to professional practice faculty in the design disciplines in order to take on some of the teaching load. Music's task is more challenging, since this department is expanding its graduate and undergraduate offerings at the same time. With the upcoming retirement of the current department head, one task the new department head will have is to carefully consider the balance between these programs in such a way as to create synergy rather than competition for resources. Even with the programs working well together, music's projected enrollment of 20-24 students was overly optimistic. 8-12 total students would be a more reasonable target for the near future.

Funding: The most often-heard challenge our programs are having is the availability of graduate tuition funding and assistantships. The college is grateful for the leadership the graduate dean has shown in keeping the door open for the college to request funding from existing programs and in creating new programs, such as the excellence waiver and Arts-STEM Fellowship, that are providing significant help. Even with these programs, funding for graduate assistantships and tuition awards was cited by each department as the single most challenging roadblock to attracting high quality graduate students. The college will continue to devote time to development efforts in support of graduate fellowships, which have shown some success (just over \$90,000 of one-time funding in the last three years), and we have high hopes that new funding from the legislature may allow the graduate

school to expand programs that currently serve only some terminal degree and masters level students. As academic leaders in the arts, the department heads and dean will continue to advocate for an even playing field for all terminal degree programs on campus.

Conclusion

It is often noted that graduate students are a ready labor force that can boost departmental productivity and that these students can be important contributors to research and creative work. While these statements certainly are true in the graduate programs of the Caine College of the Arts, we as a faculty recognize that the compelling reason to invest time and resources in graduate education is that these students are the future of the profession. In spite of the challenges that our colleagues identified during this review, the college recognizes the successes that the departments have had since the drafting of the five-year plans and is optimistic about the future of graduate education in the arts at Utah State University.