

University of Nebraska at Kearney

Academic Performance Review

Music Program Fall, 2018

APR Committee Members

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Abstract

Across the duration of the APR campus visit, students, faculty, alumni and administration alike spoke highly of the Music program at the University of Nebraska at Kearney across multiple fronts. These included faculty qualifications, high quality performances, ample student research and profession-based learning opportunities, and strong community support. It should also be noted that the committee was impressed with the professionalism and well-spoken nature of the students we interacted both in individual and group meetings.

While the points of pride that emerged from the review process are to be commended, areas for needed improvement, investigation, re-evaluation, and/or change emerged as well, some of them significant in nature. These items included: a perceived environment of inappropriate professional behavior between and among faculty, and from faculty to students; deficient facilities; a need to re-evaluate and align curriculum; faculty workload imbalances; a need for clearer communication regarding program procedures that include finances, staffing decisions, future APR guidelines and promotion and tenure policies; and opportunities to enhance recruiting efforts via data collection and data-based decision making along with shared recruiting responsibilities among faculty.

The following report elaborates on these items, and includes recommendations for improvement, where applicable and available. The report is organized according to the University of Nebraska at Kearney APR Guidelines document.

Evaluation of Self-Study Document

The self-study was provided to the APR committee in its entirety the night before the APR began. As a result, the document informed the evaluation process as it unfolded to a limited extent, so comments are based on review of the document after the study concluded.

There are issues of concern regarding the creation of the self-study document that include:

- The completed document was submitted to the committee the night before the APR began, and did not include appendices to which it referred.
- The 2018 self-study document does not contain updated data throughout. For example, enrollment data is only included up to 2011 (see p. 10). When consulting the document to better understand faculty and student concerns, it was decided by the committee that the document was not entirely reliable.
- Faculty shared with the committee that they were not included as a group in the process of drafting the self-study document. The faculty were presented with the document at a faculty meeting the Thursday before the committee's Monday arrival, and reported that multiple errors/omissions existed.
- The previous APR document was never made available to the committee because it could not be found. As a result, the information from the previous APR was not part of the creation of the self-study, nor the final report.

Evaluation of Mission of the Program

The official mission of the program stated in the APR Self-Study reflects the reality of the Music Program in all areas related to quality of music performance and quality of instruction, based on reports from current students, faculty, administration, and alumni encountered by the committee.

There are two recommendations:

1. Program faculty should consider a new draft that includes a commitment to seeking out diversity within the program and training music students to find success within diverse environments, along with reflecting their reorganization into the College of Arts and Sciences.
2. See the section below titled “Culture” regarding the accuracy of the statements within the mission that “...the department [is] an indispensable center of...cooperative achievement” and “The faculty continuously creates a...rewarding student-centered learning environment.” The issues described in these sections should be addressed to better lend full credence to these statements.

Evaluation of Program Resources

Facilities

The single greatest factor impeding the UNK music program’s success from a resource standpoint is the current facility; the Fine Arts building was not built to house programs of the size and scope of what currently reside within its walls. Resulting significant issues for the music program include:

- Lack of storage space for equipment. Equipment is stored in hallways and the lobby (for example theatre lighting equipment and choral risers) because of inadequate storage space. This creates problems when attempting to maintain quality inventory, is an eyesore to prospective students and the general public, and has implications for safety.
- Lack of storage space for instruments. A significant amount of percussion equipment is currently housed in the Calvin T. Ryan Library building, in a basement that is not humidity controlled. This presents challenges when programming requires that these instruments be transported and used, and when trying to maintain their condition. The more often instruments are transported, the more difficult they are to maintain.
- Lack of appropriate teaching space. It was reported that some classrooms are too small to facilitate the needed equipment/student population/room to move (for example, Elementary Music Methods classroom and Percussion Studio).
- Lack of appropriate acoustical treatments. There are significant sound bleed problems in practice rooms, rehearsal spaces and classrooms that result in a physical space in which it is difficult to concentrate on tasks at hand, according to faculty and students alike. Lack of proper sound absorption in ensemble spaces and percussion practice spaces is concerning for health and safety as well.
- Lack of adequate HVAC and humidity control, resulting in instrument and uniform inventory damage. Wooden instrument condition (string instruments, woodwinds, drums, and pianos, in particular) is difficult to maintain because of significant temperature

fluctuations in the building and poor humidity control. This results in cracked, warped, and mildewed instruments and uniforms and reduces the lifespan of this equipment.

- An outdated appearance, and somewhat unclean/unkempt facilities. The large ensemble rehearsal room is an example of a space in disrepair and poor condition.

It is the recommendation of the committee that the possibilities of starting over are thoroughly explored—building a new facility either in place of the current one, or elsewhere on campus. The significance of the issues with the current facility (especially lack of space and unreliable HVAC) would require intrusive remodeling and additions. Those expenses would be better invested in a building that is custom-suited to the needs of those who will use it, rather than attempting to further patch the current facility.

When considering the significant community support in Kearney for the Arts as a whole (as evidenced by the String Project, Kearney Area Symphony Orchestra, Museum of Nebraska Art (MONA), the Crane River Theater, etc.) it is our recommendation to launch a fundraising campaign via the University Foundation to support the building of a new Fine Arts facility. Tapping into Alumni and community support—with the help of faculty and student groups—would help to facilitate, in part, this process of creating an all-inclusive, community/campus connection and support of the Arts via a facility that can be the envy of the area. Impacts can include enhanced prospective faculty and student recruiting; reduction of repair/replacement costs on instruments, equipment and uniforms; greater opportunities for collaboration within the department, university, and between faculty/students and the greater Kearney community, to name a few.

Equipment

Faculty and students reported that they were supplied with the needed equipment, and requests for equipment are supported. Reports of disrepair were repeated in reference to the issues created by a lack of HVAC/humidity control (damaged string instruments, drums, woodwinds, and a bad odor on marching band uniforms).

It is of concern that the lack of storage space creates undue wear and tear on equipment (e.g., moving percussion to the Fine Arts building from the library, storing risers in the lobby, etc.).

Budgeting

Faculty, overall, were pleased with the amount of financial support for equipment and student scholarships. No mention was made of financial support of scholarly/creative work, indicating there was no concern there.

There were multiple concerns raised by faculty regarding the transparency of the program budget, in particular by ensemble and scholarship budget custodians who are unaware of how much funds are available for each of their respective areas to make purchases, repairs, and disburse funds via scholarships. Also, care should be taken to communicate with faculty when scholarship funds allotted for specific purposes are changed—there was concern about funds

being disbursed outside of the original intent for their use. Looking forward, greater transparency (and inclusion of faculty input, as appropriate) with all department funds is recommended.

There is a need to make the funding model for the Graduate program clearer, for the purpose of long-term planning within that program (for faculty load, resources, course offerings, etc.). Both the Chair and the Dean of the Graduate School communicated this need, and it appears to exist throughout campus.

Staffing

Questions were posed by multiple faculty regarding the staff piano accompanist position—issues centered around the unavailability of accompanists in applied studios, but also varied (some faculty do not have any issues, some do). The committee recommends that the Administration clarify to the entire faculty how this staff position (time) is to be utilized in applied studios, ensembles, etc., and what procedure applied students/faculty will have for securing an accompanist.

Fees charged to students for use of a staff accompanist were another source of concern, primarily among students who conveyed a financial inability to pay, but also among faculty who were unable to “force” students to pay this fee and secure an accompanist. It is the committee’s recommendation that the program faculty and administration re-evaluate this procedure and either, a.) charge a flat fee at the beginning of the semester, attached to applied course enrollment, so it can be rolled into student’s financial aid packages; or b.) do away with the fee and pay this position solely out of payroll funds. The committee is unsure why student fees are needed to support this position, in general.

There is a need for additional clerical help in the department, for the oversight of the graduate program in particular. The Dean of the Graduate School indicated there may be graduate assistantships available to facilitate this need, and that the position may be shareable between the music graduate program and the needs of the music program office as a whole, where the Chair and some faculty have communicated a possible deficiency as well. The committee recommends that the program administration pursue this option and request a G.A. via the Dean of the Graduate School, who communicated an annual reallocation process for these positions. It is recommended that a G.A. with statistical experience is sought out (Education and Science areas could fill this need), as that individual may also assist with data tracking/processing related to the graduate and undergraduate recruitment and retention (specifics related to the need for data-based decision making are below, in the recruitment/retention section).

It is also recommended that the responsibilities of the office staff positions (including student assistants) be clearly defined, along with the responsibilities of the Chair, so that redundancies are eliminated and deficiencies are clearly identified for the purpose of justifying requests for additional help. The creation of the APR and drafting of instrumental scholarship letters are examples of tasks that are in part clerical (and made simpler with the routine maintenance of records), and not clearly defined as to whom is responsible.

Evaluation of Program Effectiveness

Points of Pride

Students, alumni, faculty and administration were highly complimentary of the program across several areas, all of which have a significant and meaningful impact. The Music Area should take great pride in each of these, as the items listed below are included here because they were mentioned by all of these stakeholders:

- High quality performance product
- Highly qualified faculty
- Quality, “good” students (good people)
- A high level of support for the arts in the community

The committee was also highly impressed with the well-spoken, mature nature of the Music area students who participated in the APR process, including those who spoke to us individually and the participants in the student group.

Faculty/Student Culture and Civility

The professional culture existing within the Music program at UNK is where the most significant need for immediate improvement resides. A perceived environment of unprofessional behavior between and among multiple faculty and from faculty to student(s) permeates most areas of the program, including student/faculty/administration morale, professionalism/civility, the tenure and promotion process, faculty retention, teaching effectiveness, prospective student recruitment, student success, and individual’s perceived safety, among possible others. It is the opinion of the 2018 APR committee that the issues of professionalism and incivility described below require thorough and immediate investigation and attention from both within and outside the program for the purpose of positive and lasting improvement. There should be a sense of urgency surrounding these topics for the reasons listed above, along with the upcoming National Association of Schools of Music (NASM) accreditation self-study process (beginning 2019) and accreditation visit (anticipated 2021). Suggestions for improvement are included at the end of this section.

Faculty Civility

Based conversations with multiple faculty, committee members from other departments (including previous APR review teams) and administration, it appears that a civility/morale problem has existed within the Music Program for several years, but has not been addressed in a comprehensive manner. Dr. Tassi was a member of the 2007 Music APR. At that time there was general incivility, divisiveness, and distrust among faculty. These behaviors have impacted morale because of a negative perception of workplace safety—comments (or synopsis of comments) from faculty included:

- “harmful work environment”
- “there is an unsafe environment that includes anger and sexual harassment issues”

- “There is a concerted effort to remove or dismiss senior faculty”
- “I was bullied throughout promotion and tenure”
- Faculty is “famous” across campus for being “splintered”
- Promotion and tenure decisions are “extremely hostile”
- “This is a tough place to work”
- “Toxic and unsafe environment for younger professors”
- “I feel professionally unsafe here”
- There are “divisive aspects” to the faculty that are shared with students and the community at large, including in-service music teachers

Overall themes (with themes defined as topics mentioned 3 or more times by separate individuals) related to negative effects of faculty incivility that emerged included tenure and promotion, safety, division between junior and senior faculty, and morale—with students commenting on their full awareness of the rifts that exist professionally among the faculty as well because they have witnessed negative interactions or faculty have shared their thoughts on this topic with students. The negative effects of these problems are obvious when considering job satisfaction/perceived workplace safety, communication, job satisfaction, teaching effectiveness, faculty recruiting, modeling of professional behavior for pre-service professionals, etc.

It is the committee’s suggestion—and the suggestion of more than one faculty member who is equally concerned about faculty civility issues within the program—that an outside investigation and professional mediation is necessary to fully understand this long-existing problem and attempt to repair damage. This should include interviews with faculty and students, review and redesign of Tenure and Promotion procedures (a timely necessity considering the formation of the new College of Arts and Sciences), and mediation between those faculty who have developed outwardly negative professional relationships and acted on/communicated those feelings. Perhaps the university Human Resources department is equipped to assist with this important task. As mentioned above, the sense of urgency related to addressing this problem should be born out of both the University’s prioritization of a safe and conducive workplace environment, faculty and student retention, and the Music program’s upcoming NASM accreditation process, which will include questions related to these topics.

Faculty to Student Civility

Multiple students reported somewhat similar concerns regarding civility/safety surrounding interactions with Music area faculty. These included FERPA concerns, Title IX concerns, and repercussions that resulted from filing official complaints. FERPA concerns were regarding the sharing of student grades publicly, by pointing at the location where a student sits and sharing the grade the “student who sits there” earned. Title IX concerns were regarding interactions already reported to the university where students were made to feel uncomfortable because of intrusive questioning, use of language in a classroom setting, and sharing of overly personal details from faculty to student. The APR committee is not equipped to investigate these reports (all students said they reported these issues following the official protocol), but the number of described incidents is of concern, and warrants investigation.

There were also multiple reports of repercussions against those who reported (students), including being “yelled at” by the faculty member, confronted and asked why they chose to report, etc. Students also referred to being asked by the Title IX office to sign a document requiring them to not share the details of their report moving forward—another item to investigate further.

The issues mentioned above related to culture were shared in a meeting with the Chair of the APR committee, Dr. Strickland, Dr. Tassi (current APR Committee member who also served on the 2007 APR) and the Senior Vice Chancellor, Dr. Charles Bicak. Dr. Tassi’s 2007 APR experience included many of the same faculty civility issues as still exist at this time, particularly those related to factions between senior and junior faculty that inappropriately bled into the tenure and promotion process.

Tenure and Promotion

The tenure and promotion procedures in the Music area have not been updated in several years, and are due for a re-evaluation. Care should also be taken to align expectations with campus-wide standards, share expectations and procedures clearly with faculty, and follow them closely. It is the committee’s recommendation (and it appears to be standard in other departments on campus) that the tenure/promotion process in the department only include those items in the portfolio; discussions among and documents provided by the committee, official discussions among the tenured faculty before and during voting, etc. should be limited to those items that exist within the realms of teaching, scholarly/creative work, and service, with personnel issues or concerns pursued via other avenues. This has, according to reports, been a problem in the past.

Workload

Faculty workload imbalances are a persistent problem in the program. The Chair and multiple faculty expressed concerns regarding this issue. Some faculty are overloaded while others are, at least at times, significantly under-loaded. The committee was unsure of the reliability of the self-study document data, as faculty pointed out some discrepancies in the document.

It is the recommendation of the committee that programs/degrees within the Music area be reevaluated for their impact on load/resources vs. enrollment and positive impact on the department/community. For example, the piano pedagogy certificate program was reported to have significantly low enrollment across multiple semesters with no clear indication of a focused plan to recruit and enroll more students, while taking up faculty load to teach under-enrolled courses.

Another concern regarding workload is how to quantify those tasks outside of teaching hours and scholarly/creative release. These include (but are not limited to) recruiting activities on campus and recruiting-related travel, organization and execution of departmental events/activities (festivals, honor groups, camps, etc.), scholarship auditions and the workload included (generating letters, tracking acceptances, etc.), inventory responsibilities, committee participation, etc. There is an imbalance in these areas where some faculty carry a heavy recruiting load and others very little if any, for example.

To attempt to “level the playing field,” it is the APR committee’s recommendation that:

1. Committees are assigned using a shared governance approach, where faculty volunteer to serve on a minimum required number of committees. The Chair should, of course, encourage (but not require) the most appropriate faculty to apply for committees that would benefit from their expertise. This approach is opposed to solely assigning.
2. Faculty who are recruiting actively are given release time for their efforts, perhaps 1 or 2 load hours, much like the system used by most Athletic departments, and the requirement is included in the faculty job description. These faculty would most likely exist in the ensemble/applied areas, and specific expectations would need to be drafted to justify the release.
3. Low-enrolled programs/studios are given recruiting goals and a timeline to meet those goals, after which a review of relevance/impact is conducted, and faculty are possibly re-assigned to other courses in the curriculum.
4. Have a minimum expectation for recruitment activities included in the yearly evaluation document for all faculty, regardless of rank. This would apply to the “service” portion of the yearly evaluation. Tasks could include meeting with prospective students, visiting school music programs/applied studios of status, ensemble/faculty solo performances that take place on school campuses or include invitations to targeted prospective students, etc.
5. Since the Chair ultimately controls load assignments, those faculty who are routinely underloaded should be reassigned (as specialization allows) to General Education courses or other appropriate assignments by the Chair.
6. More clerical tasks are absorbed by the office/student staff (see the recommendation for increasing the amount of office staff above), including the drafting and mailing of scholarship letters, inventory, music copying/distribution, etc.

Recruiting and Retention

Enrollment numbers are of concern, as they were reported to be declining. It should be stated, though, that this is a trend nation-wide as competition for students increases and other factors make the enrollment landscape challenging.

That being said, it was shared by the Dean of the College of Education that “Music Education numbers are dropping more significantly than any other [education] program” and the data provided by the Chair (89 Music Majors, 26 Music Minors, 32 online Graduate Music students) reflects this enrollment decline across all degrees in the Music Area. The 2012 APR Self-Study (secured by a committee member after conversation with the previous chair) shows a total undergraduate Music Major enrollment of 144 in 2011. This reflects a decline of approximately 40% among undergraduate Music Major population across the last seven years. It should be noted, however, that the graduate program in 2011 included only 9 enrolled students compared to the current 32; it was an on-campus, face-to-face program.

The committee believes these enrollment declines are attributable to some factors beyond the nation-wide trend that can be possibly addressed. These items and our recommendations include:

1. Re-assess the on-campus, visiting music student experience with the office of Admissions. It was reported that some visiting music students are told that faculty are unavailable to meet with them, despite the Music area not being contacted to provide a faculty connection. This interaction between prospective student and current faculty (and even students, possible) has been proven via enrollment research to have positive impacts on recruiting. It is our recommendation that a system be created to guarantee academic appointments with faculty based on schedules, and that a back-up faculty member be available in case of last minute changes.
2. Provide faculty with dedicated time (release) for recruitment, and place the expectation for some degree of recruitment on all faculty, regardless of status, via yearly evaluation service expectations. See specific recommendations in the section titled “Workload” above.
3. Hire a Graduate Assistant with expertise in data analysis to track enrollment trends, including:
 - a. surveying incoming students as to why they have chosen to participate in the program and what interactions they have had with UNK Music faculty and students preceding their arrival on campus (e.g., attendance at campus events, interacted with faculty or students at conferences, interacted with faculty or students at their high school campus, etc.)
 - b. surveying visiting students regarding what they liked/disliked about the program and their visit
 - c. surveying current students who choose to leave the program (exit survey) regarding why they chose to leave, etc.

This data would be analyzed for trends, and from that information action should be taken to address areas of concern and to increase focus in areas that appear to have a positive impact on enrollment. The Recruitment, Retention and Marketing Committee that exists within the Music Area should be provided with this information, and can guide this approach as they are able. Some of this data may already be available from other offices on campus, and should be sought out and acted upon.

4. Work with the Registrar’s Office Transfer area to actively recruit transfer students via matriculation agreements, 2-year college visits by faculty/ensembles, and clear transfer equivalences (shared online) that can possibly entice students looking to transfer in Theory, Music History, Music Education, etc. credits.

Recommendations for the Future

Specific details regarding recommendations for the future were included among the identified areas of concern above. The most significant of these include:

1. Building a new Fine Arts facility.
2. Addressing significant concerns related to faculty and faculty/student work environment and culture.
3. Dissemination of an updated Music Faculty Handbook with policies and procedures that include (but are not limited to) the tenure and promotion process (including 3rd and 5th year reviews), committee assignments, annual evaluations, staff accompanist practices, etc.

4. Invest in efficient recruiting strategies.
5. Communicate budget details to faculty more clearly.
6. Secure more staff via a Graduate Assistant position with required experience in statistical analysis (to assist with recruiting and retention data).
7. Balance faculty workload more evenly, including load hours and other duties. Insure that credit values for courses are uniformly applied.