Graduate Program Review
Ph.D. in Fine Arts
Department of Theatre and Dance
Texas Tech University
Lubbock, Texas

Reviewer
Tice L. Miller, Professor of Theatre
Johnny Carson School of Theatre and Film
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

Program Overview and Vision:
This is a multidisciplinary PhD degree in the Fine Arts, which includes art, music, philosophy, and theatre. The theatre component includes both practical and academic studies. This degree program aims to provide artists with a broad arts education to “prepare them for leadership roles in the fine arts, and particularly in theatre organizations.” Students choose two of five tracks: design, history/theory/criticism; arts administration; and playwriting.

The College and Department promote this degree as unique because it brings the arts departments together. In my session with graduate students, many claimed they were attracted to the degree because they planned to teach at small liberal arts colleges and this prepared them for doing so. Others were here because it prepared them for administrative positions, especially in colleges and universities where a PhD is required.

Questions:
Should the Department consolidate some of its degree programs to give focus to what it is doing? I counted nine degree programs including the PhD in Fine Arts.

Does the rationale for a practice-oriented PhD that existed in 1972 still make sense today? Back then colleges and universities required the PhD for its faculty; today the MFA is accepted as a terminal degree by most institutions of higher learning. There is no demand for PhD’s in design, a subject discussed in our meeting. Would an MBA in Arts Management make more sense in the marketplace than a PhD in Fine Arts with an emphasis in Arts Administration?
Faculty Productivity:

A review of Curriculum Vitae in the Self-Study reveals: one scholar who publishes regularly; a professor who publishes plays and has helped to revise a textbook; a professor who has published several reviews and surveys; a professor with one article and several conference papers; a professor with several non-research articles; and an administrator who has published books and articles. Most of the faculty is involved in creative activities, both on and off campus. Faculty members in acting, directing, design and playwriting regularly chair and serve on PhD committees including overseeing the dissertation. We were told that faculty contact hours per week add up to something like 18-20. And in addition, the faculty is expected to work creatively outside of TT or publish.

Questions:

Should MFA faculty serve on PhD committees and vice versa? Should MFA faculty chair PhD committees? Should faculty members who do not publish be involved in mentoring students in the writing of the dissertation?

Is the workload reasonable for graduate faculty expected to maintain a national professional reputation?

Quality and Quantity of Graduate Students and Graduates:

I was impressed with the students who attended our session. They were articulate and seemed clear about what they wanted in this program. While most came from Texas, there was a fair number from around the country.

Quantity: for AY 04/05, the Self-Study lists 31 Doctoral students. I was told that some 20-21 were on campus taking courses. According to the Self-Study two students received the PhD in 04/05; one in 03/04; four in 02/03.

Questions:

Is the graduate program (MFA and PhD) too large for the resources available (both faculty and funding)? Comments from faculty and students alike suggest that there are not enough directing slots for graduate students, not enough financial support of graduate students (student debt seems excessive), not a timely offering of required courses, not enough time for the quality mentoring of graduate students (seen in the low graduation rate of PhD’s), and only one specialist in several areas including History/Criticism/Theory.
Curriculum and Programs of Study:

The PhD in Fine Arts requires 48 hours of course work plus 12 hours of dissertation. Of the 48 hours, 15 hours must be in core courses of art, music and philosophy. Most of the PhD students find these courses worthwhile. They take a qualifying oral examination on the core. The student specializes by choosing two from five tracks: Acting/Directing; Arts Administration; Design; History/Theory/Criticism; or Playwriting. There is a qualifying examination on this part and includes both a written and oral exam. One elective is allowed. All students must take a seminar in theatre research methods and a Theatre History Survey course. For the dissertation, the student may elect to do a research study, focus on a professional problem, or if in the playwriting track, write two long plays. A defense of the dissertation then concludes the program.

Questions:

Would it be better for the national reputation of the Department to conform to standard practice by making the PhD a research not a practical degree? I recognize that this aspect of the degree has been a selling point since its inception in 1972 and is a larger issue involving the College of Visual and Performing Arts. But there are no PhD programs like this in the country, and this uniqueness may work to the disadvantage of graduates in certain job markets.

One or two doctoral students at our session noted that they were in the last year of their program and had taken only one theatre history course. Do qualifying exams ascertain that these doctorate students are proficient in all areas of theatre history?

Would it make sense to require History/Theory/Criticism as one of the tracks for the PhD with the other track chosen by the student? This is the model used by many programs.

Facilities and Resources:

There is a lack of classrooms in the department, therefore production-oriented as well as academic classes are held across campus. The two theatres are adequate for production work although the scene shop is not, forcing the classes and the building of sets on to the stage. The lack of studio and rehearsal space forces classes (and rehearsals) into spaces inappropriate for creative work (spaces with concrete or hardwood floors, low ceilings, and inadequate ventilation). Students who have chosen directing as one of tracks are completing the program having directed only a one play due to lack of space and a heavy schedule.

I had only an hour to review holdings in the library, but found most of the major reference books necessary for a graduate program. I did not investigate whether the library has significant primary source materials. I did learn that like most university libraries today, electronic access at Texas Tech provides a means to acquire plays,
periodicals, and references not physically on the shelf. To learn about the rigor of the program, I perused a couple of dissertations and MFA theses but did not arrive at an opinion about quality. I would need to examine in more detail several more dissertations to have an opinion about the quality of research and writing.

Summary:

In reviewing the Self-Study and after spending a day on campus interviewing faculty and students, it seems to me that the Department is under some pressure to produce numbers and this has led to some of the issues noted above. In my opinion there are too many degree programs and too many graduate students for the size of the graduate faculty. I am not sure about the rigor of the PhD program, but with all graduate students required to audition or work on productions plus their course work and their graduate or teaching assistantship assignments, quality may be difficult to obtain. And it seems to me that the graduate faculty is not given enough time and resources to maintain a national reputation. And finally, the faculty and administration should revisit the reasons why this kind of PhD was established in the first place and ascertain if it still viable today.

These are the issues that this faculty should consider if the PhD is to become a program of national reputation.