Graduate Program Review  
Texas Tech University

Program Reviewed: TTU School of Music

Onsite Review Dates: Feb.2-4, 2014

Name of Reviewers
Internal:
Please include name, title, and Department
Click here to enter text.

External:
Please include name, title, and Department
Daniel Sher, Professor
College of Music
University of Colorado Boulder

I. Academic Unit Description and Strategic Plan
Please evaluate the following:

Vision, Mission and Goals
X Excellent __ Very Good __Appropriate __Needs Improvement

Strategic Plan
X Excellent __ Very Good __Appropriate __Needs Improvement

Please elaborate if you have identified any items in this section as Excellent.

The School of Music mission statement is well aligned with those of the College of Fine Arts and the larger University. The vision statement for the School spells out the highest of aspirations, which is appropriate for this comprehensive program that has such a proud tradition of excellence and
accomplishment. However, the School will need significant attention and resources in a few key areas (to be spelled out elsewhere in this Review) in order to continue to move along its upward trajectory to the lofty heights to which it aspires: “will...be recognized as one of the premier comprehensive schools in the United States…”

Please elaborate if you identified any items in this section as Needs Improvement. Provide recommendations in the area of Strategic Planning.

Click here to enter text.

Other comments (optional)
The Strategic Plan, located on the TTU website, is comprehensive and well articulated. It covers all of the necessary areas which, if addressed in a sustained and timely manner, will surely enable the TTU School of Music to reach its goals and aspirations.

II. Program Curriculum

Please evaluate the following:

Alignment of program with stated program and institutional goals and purposes
X Excellent __ Very Good __Appropriate __Needs Improvement __N/A

Curriculum development coordination and delivery
X Excellent __ Very Good __Appropriate __Needs Improvement __N/A

Program learning outcomes assessment
X Excellent __ Very Good __Appropriate __Needs Improvement __N/A

Program curriculum compared to peer programs
X Excellent __ Very Good __Appropriate __Needs Improvement __N/A

Please elaborate if you have identified any items in this section as Excellent.
The School of Music has just recently successfully undertaken its regularly scheduled review for reaccreditation by the National Association of Schools of Music, the outcome of which has led to a
continuance of national accreditation. In the course of this review, the School scrutinized every program and updated the curriculum for all its degrees. This ensured that the degree plans are all in compliance, and that the programs meet the current needs and aspirations of its students, bachelors through the doctorate. The School has done an excellent job of study and analysis of its degree programs in the context of TTU resources and student expectations and needs.

In the course of this review, it was clear that the development of degree offerings as they currently stand are well aligned with current student populations. The offering of academic courses appear to be as well aligned as is possible, given the fact that the faculty are stretched to the limit (and sometimes beyond) with respect to the number of courses they must offer in order to serve undergrad, masters, and doctoral level students at all times. Program learning outcomes assessment is well covered in performance by the obvious comparisons of entry auditions and culminating public performances. Academic work is comprehensively reviewed through required papers, comprehensive oral exams, and other similar mechanisms. Program curriculum appear to be comparable to those at peer institutions.

Please elaborate if you identified any items in this section as Needs Improvement. Provide recommendations in the area of Program Curriculum.

Although program delivery appears to be quite excellent in most respects, students, in our interview process noted that some classes required of doctoral students were populated with undergraduates on some occasions. This practice devalues the doctoral experience somewhat, and needs to be addressed.

Other comments (optional)
The TTU School of Music is to be congratulated for completing the reaccreditation process in a most timely manner.

III. Faculty Productivity

Please evaluate the following:
Qualifications
X Excellent __ Very Good __Appropriate __Needs Improvement __N/A

Publications
__ Excellent X Very Good __Appropriate __Needs Improvement __N/A

Teaching Load
__ Excellent __ Very Good __Appropriate X Needs Improvement __N/A

External Grants
__ Excellent __ Very Good __Appropriate X Needs Improvement X N/A

NOTE: External grants in arts education programs are

Teaching Evaluations
X Excellent __ Very Good __Appropriate __Needs Improvement __N/A

Professional Service
X Excellent __ Very Good __Appropriate __Needs Improvement __N/A

Community Service
X Excellent __ Very Good __Appropriate __Needs Improvement __N/A

Please elaborate if you have identified any items in this section as Excellent.
The faculty are well qualified in their respective sub-disciplines, and they are devoted to their teaching, to a fault. The academic faculty (those teaching courses in Musicology, Music Education, and Music Theory) willingly accept teaching overloads, beyond the scope of normally assigned duties, which most peer institutions would consider to comprise a heavy teaching load to begin with. They serve on multiple student committees, make themselves available to their students outside the classroom and studio for mentoring and advisement, and in general, give the impression that their teaching mission is their highest priority value among the vast majority of them (if not all of them.) They also give the impression that they willingly accept these extraordinary overloads in service to the students, to ensure that they have the courses available in order to meet normative times to graduation.
Applied faculty (those teaching performance studies in the individual instruments, and voice) appear to have teaching loads more in line with national norms.

Please elaborate if you identified any items in this section as Needs Improvement. Provide recommendations in the area of Faculty Productivity.

Among the academic faculty, the size of the teaching load, and the faculty’s dedication to teaching is a two-edged sword. They are all striving to remain current with their scholarly research and publication, but they function under the burden of a teaching workload that is not, in the experience of this reviewer, commensurate with the School’s stated aspiration to be recognized as “one of the premier comprehensive schools in the United States...” as it is spelled out in the Vision Statement. Faculty are teaching the equivalent of 3, sometimes even 4 courses each semester. Given that circumstance they are productive in their scholarly research and publications to a remarkable extent. But it is a struggle that is clearly not sustainable if the School truly wishes to be recognized as “premier.” It is the performances and published scholarly research, every bit as much as the excellence in teaching, that brings national attention and recognition to a program.

This issue also appears to be a matter of equity with other similar disciplines within the University (other arts programs and the humanities). It would be useful to the institution to compare School of Music teaching loads with those in the other arts and humanities areas of TTU. Such an initiative might also include a review of course rotations and class sizes within the School, especially in the undergraduate core courses, to ensure that multiple sections are offered only when absolutely necessary. Class sizes at the graduate level appear to be at the maximum. Related to all of this is the observation, above, that some doctoral classes enroll undergraduate students, which can creates an inappropriate standard of teaching. A study of these various load and enrollment issues might reveal some solutions to these challenges.

Other comments (optional)
The faculty are to be congratulated for the singularly strong service they provide to the School, College and larger campus, to the surrounding community, and to their various professional organizations. It is an exceptional record of involvement in the service of their profession and their University.

IV. Students and Graduates
Please evaluate the following

Time to degree
X Excellent ___ Very Good ___ Appropriate ___ Needs Improvement ___ N/A
Retention
X Excellent __ Very Good __ Appropriate __ Needs Improvement __ N/A

Graduate rates
X Excellent __ Very Good __ Appropriate __ Needs Improvement __ N/A

Enrollment
X Excellent __ Very Good __ Appropriate __ Needs Improvement __ N/A

Demographics
X Excellent __ Very Good __ Appropriate __ Needs Improvement __ N/A

Number of degrees conferred annually
X Excellent __ Very Good __ Appropriate __ Needs Improvement __ N/A

Support Services
X Excellent __ Very Good __ Appropriate __ Needs Improvement __ N/A

Job Placement
X Excellent __ Very Good __ Appropriate __ Needs Improvement __ N/A

Student/ Faculty Ratio
X Excellent __ Very Good __ Appropriate __ Needs Improvement __ N/A

Please elaborate if you have identified any items in this section as Excellent.
Time to degree, retention, and graduation rates all appear to be well in line with national standards, and in comparison with some peer institutions, may even exceed them. Job placement appears to be robust, and the record of placement of graduates is very strong. The student/faculty ratio is within acceptable limits, though barely (see remarks, above about undergraduates enrolled in courses for doctoral
students). Enrollment, demographics, support services, and the number of degrees awarded annually all attest to a well-functioning delivery of the various degree programs.

Please elaborate if you identified any items in this section as Needs Improvement. Provide recommendations in the area of Students and Graduates.

Click here to enter text.

Other comments (optional)
The School of Music administration (Director, Associate Director for Graduate Studies) and the staff are to be congratulated for ensuring a positive experience for students in all of these realms.

Click here to enter text.

V. Facilities and Resources

Please evaluate the following:

Facilities
__ Excellent __ Very Good __ Appropriate X Needs Improvement __ N/A

Facility Support Resources
X Excellent __ Very Good __ Appropriate __ Needs Improvement __ N/A

Financial Resources
__ Excellent __ Very Good __ Appropriate X Needs Improvement __ N/A

Staff Resources
X Excellent __ Very Good __ Appropriate __ Needs Improvement __ N/A

Please elaborate if you have identified any items in this section as Excellent.
There were many relatively minor but quite difficult issues (for example, some spaces in the building have experienced severe water damage; in other instances humidity resulting from an aging HVAC system can get out of control) regarding maintenance and repair of the music facility. The Director of
the School informed us that the TTU facilities management team has responded collaboratively and cooperatively to all calls for assistance. Facilities Management has been empathetic and quite helpful, doing all that they can to ensure that the very best can be made of the aging (one might say failing) and largely inadequate state of the facilities in which the School of Music is housed (see below). The evaluators had the opportunity to meet the School of Music in-house facilities and equipment and instrumental inventory support person, praised by the Director and students for playing a crucial role in ensuring the best possible use of space for the storage of instrument inventory and marching band equipment and uniforms. This reviewer was impressed with his dedication to the School, to the considerable benefit of the students.

Please elaborate if you identified any items in this section as Needs Improvement. Provide recommendations in the area of Facilities and Resources.

There were two major issues brought to the attention of the reviewers, first, in the Self-Study, and then throughout the on-site visit, and by all stakeholders: faculty, students, and the administrators (Director and Associate Director, and the Dean of the College). It is clear to this reviewer that these deserve attention and need to be addressed at the earliest possible moment. Both of them are holding back this fine program from meeting its full potential, and both, unsolved, stand in the way of the School of Music meeting aspirations to singular excellence that appear to be well within reach:

1. Facilities:
There is simply no other way to put it: the facilities available to the faculty and students at the TTU School of Music, for a program of this comprehensiveness, size, scope, and standing within the higher education music community, are the worst that this reviewer has seen in nearly thirty years as a visiting evaluator. The weaknesses are these:
First and foremost, there are an insufficient number of practice rooms, half, in fact, of what would be considered a standard practice nationally. As a result, the reviewers encountered students wandering the halls seeking a practice room, and other students routinely practicing their instruments in the hallways and stairwells. Furthermore, these practice rooms were carved out of a facility that was never intended for music practice and study. As a result there is no sound isolation from one room to another; the cacophony of sound carrying from one room to another, and out into the hallways is rather extraordinary.
The situation would be analogous to a chemistry department with inadequate numbers of laboratories, such that students cannot get access to the spaces they need to experiment. And, imagine such few laboratories as there are without ventilation hoods. Such are the conditions with which these music students, expecting to be able to refine and master their performance craft have to contend with.
Second, there is but one concert facility for all performance activities. (The reviewers acknowledge that one other space is available for opera). This is an impossible situation simply because the size and scope of the program can’t begin to provide access to all students and faculty to performance spaces. Perhaps
it goes without saying, but performance facilities are essential in a music learning setting. Students must present public recitals in order to meet the requirements of their accredited degree programs to be eligible for graduation. They must also perform in ensembles large and small. These are the centerpieces of the performance major’s pursuit of excellence. The School bravely manages around this inadequacy by relying on the kindness of local church venues, which is inappropriate from a venue standpoint and from a degree-offering standpoint, and not easily sustainable.

But that is not the only problem; the one recital hall must accommodate every performance modality. It is the venue for band and full orchestra concerts, for solo recitals and chamber music. No one recital space can possibly serve this many functions. The orchestra, which we heard rehearsing in the hall, is clearly performing in an inappropriate acoustical setting; the venue is too small, too reverberant, too harsh on both the performers’ and the audience’s ears.

The third most serious deficiency is the lack of a third large rehearsal space so that band and orchestra can each have its own rehearsal home. Without that, there is insufficient set-up and strike time between rehearsals (the set-up for band is quite different than for that of an orchestra), and furthermore, graduate assistants are doing the work, which is a janitorial function rather than a TA function. The nature of having to schedule consecutive rehearsal times for the large ensembles (include jazz band as another ensemble) means that students and faculty have fewer times in the day to schedule the other courses required of music and music education majors.

Other issues are of almost equal urgency: Graduate TA’s do not have sufficient office space. They either scramble for a practice room to teach in, or give up and schedule lessons in their apartments. Even though such a practice might seem to be a safe and adequate solution, this reviewer has a concern that if a student is injured in transit to a lesson at a TA’s apartment, the University could be liable because that student was “required” to take a lesson off campus.

And, last but certainly not least, there are an insufficient number of classrooms, and these too lack acoustical isolation from other spaces in the building, which is a problem when one is teaching music content in one space and in competition with music emanating from another space. The situation creates inordinate confusion in the learning environment.

2. Financial Support:

Another concern expressed universally by faculty, students, and the administration, including both the Director of the School and the Dean is the poor level of financial support of the graduate TA’s; their stipends are low by any measure. They are low in comparison with any other discipline on the campus, they are most certainly not competitive with stipends at peer music programs around the country; they are too low to provide even a semblance of living expenses. The Dean of the College informed us of her work on a proposal to the upper administration to provide a $1.5 million package to raise the budget to a more acceptable level. Without this funding help, it is not clear how TTU can, going forward, successfully compete with other well-regarded programs, both in Texas, and nationally. This reviewer enthusiastically endorses this proposal.
Other comments (optional)
Even given these extremely challenging conditions, faculty and student morale is remarkably high. Somehow the work of the School of Music gets done. How wonderful it would be if such excellent productivity were rewarded by facilities that met the basic needs of these excellent programs.

VI. Overall Ranking

Overall Ranking
__ Excellent  X Very Good  __Appropriate  __Needs Improvement

Please provide summative conclusions based on the overall review.
This reviewer was impressed with the excellence of the faculty and their dedication to the program. In particular, they are to be congratulated for the commitment they have to service within the surrounding community, and to their profession through the associations in their discipline. The students are enthusiastic about the level of instruction and mentoring they receive, and the administration of the school is admired by all of the constituent stakeholders: students, faculty and staff. Curricula are organized around the needs and expectations of the students, and staff support of their degree completion appears to be excellent. One can only conclude that the School of Music fully deserves the investments that are recommended below.

Please provide summative recommendations based on the overall review.
The TTU School of Music already has an outstanding reputation for its level of faculty, student, and alumni accomplishment. It is a comprehensive program that meets a high standard of excellence in many areas, but which has a few areas that are in critical need of improvement. These are:

1. Facilities. It is clear that the School of Music is in dire need of better and more spaces, for practicing, for rehearsing, and for performing. If these issues are solved, it could lead to solutions for providing appropriate office and teaching spaces for its fine cadre of TA’s. More classroom spaces are also in order.

   It is understood that it is unrealistic for an external reviewer to recommend that the campus engage in a building project that could easily cost $60 to $100 million. Therefore, this reviewer urges the campus to think about addressing these challenges in stages. Perhaps a wing of a new facility could be planned and built that would provide practice rooms and a large rehearsal facility, or practice rooms and a second performance space. Exactly which spaces to prioritize would be a matter for the Dean of the College to discuss with the Director of the School, and then bring forward to the upper administration. Clearly, any
facilities project must be feasible and fit within the scope of other University priorities and challenges. Such a phased approach might be the best way forward.

2. Financial Support of Graduate TA’s:
This reviewer recommends approval of the Dean’s proposal to raise the size of TA stipends. To reach a modest increase to each stipend, she estimates that it will take $1.5 million to do so across the entire school budget. Even if this must be implemented in stages over the course of three or four years, the impact on morale, on student productivity, on recruitment of quality students, will be dramatic.

3. Academic Faculty Loads.
Some accommodations should be made that can allow faculty the time to engage in research leading to publication. Although an across the board reduction in teaching loads may be impossibly expensive, perhaps the Graduate School could set aside some load relief funding for faculty who submit proposals for research projects that would lower a teaching load for a semester. Some part-way solution of this kind might be just the motivation the faculty need to engage in the research they’ve always wanted to do, but haven’t had the time.

In conclusion, this reviewer acknowledges that the issues that would most assist this excellent School of Music to reach its potential, implemented sweepingly, represent a price tag that is enormous, to say the least. But it must be acknowledged that these issues are critically important, and what has been recommended here is a piecemeal approach that begins to attack the problems, leads ultimately to solutions, and in doing so, can raise morale and a sense of forward progress for the institution as a whole. The leadership, faculty and student talent is in place and deserves this level of attention and support.

In closing, I wish to thank the Texas Tech University Graduate School for the privilege of visiting the School of Music and the opportunity to become better acquainted with this outstanding music program.