Review of Texas Tech University Graduate Programs in Music

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**Program Overview and Vision**

(Evaluation: Good)

The Texas Tech University (TTU) School of Music graduate programs appear to be excellent in nearly every regard. The depth and breadth of course offerings, the overall outstanding quality of faculty and students, and strong and dedicated leadership and staff support clearly work together in creating what is obviously an outstanding array of graduate programs.

There does appear to be a discrepancy, however, regarding the goal of the School of Music to "be recognized as one of the premier comprehensive schools of music in the United States" and the high quality, yet clearly regional, nature of the current program, which is the sole reason we grade them as good rather than excellent. The gap between the vision and the reality of the program is significantly wide enough to warrant concern. In our estimation, either the mission statement should be revised to reflect the regional nature of the program, or a significant number of factors need to be explored and adjusted as part of a long-term effort to attain the desired goal as expressed in the mission statement.

There really is no simple set of strategies to achieve such a goal, nor are we positing that such change is even desirable given the historic achievements of the institution. The TTU School of Music currently enjoys a high level of success in what it does. It clearly functions as an outstanding regional comprehensive music graduate program that attracts a high caliber of students, trains them through a broad and comprehensive set of degree programs, and enjoys a highly successful placement rate for its graduates.

It is easy to iterate specific factors that may likely come into play in keeping the institution from attaining its goal of being a national player; yet even collectively, changing them would likely have little significant short-term effect. In the long term, adjusting these factors would at least serve to bring the institution into line with many of the public, comprehensive music programs that currently enjoy a national profile. Nonetheless, we will reiterate some of those areas of concern. For example, the size of the current student population appears to be greater than what the School of Music is capable of supporting without requiring a number of faculty to work continuous overloads, which in turn leads to less time for faculty recruitment and professional visibility on the national playing field. Quality must supersede quantity, as increasing the
latter cannot in and of itself increase the former. We strongly recommend that the School of Music engage in an active program of enrollment management for the purpose of decreasing faculty overloads and allowing for the development of a more focused, quality graduate student population.

In that light, we note four factors appearing in the supplied data and garnered during our visit that raise concerns about the status of the graduate population. First, the majority of the current graduate population appears to have come from within the state of Texas. Although the School does have a strong population of international students, it lacks a national representation of students, which clearly indicates that it is not successful in attracting students from beyond its regional boundaries. We strongly recommend that the institution be more selective in their admissions process to insure that the students brought into the program are consistently of the highest caliber. Second, the acceptance rate of applicants appears quite high, implying that the institution is not being as selective in its admission process as needed to insure a consistently high caliber of graduate students. Third, a significant number of current graduate students also did their undergraduate training at TTU, thus further working against a broad graduate population with the breadth of external experiences we feel is necessary for a strong graduate student population competing in a national playing field. Fourth, while the data show a strong placement record for graduates, the majority of placements are at smaller regional schools that, in general, are not of the caliber that will lead to developing a pipeline of outstanding future graduate students. Our observations of many very successful programs show that being more selective will not lead to an overall reduction in numbers over the long term, but will generate a more desirable program that will draw from a wider pool, will tend to place those students at better institutions, and will ultimately raise the national profile of the institution.

We also feel that TTU will never succeed in raising its profile simply by desiring to be "better" than their targeted competitive institutions. Every school plays that game to some extent, but no matter how good an institution there is always someone better. We believe that TTU offers a set of degree programs that are not only very good, but are different than most other programs across the country (to be detailed below). Such programs offer the institution the opportunity to show how they are not only very strong but, in fact, are uniquely different than those of their competitors—a strong marketing tool, since TTU becomes the "only" place to attend for the student attracted to that uniqueness. We strongly believe that the institution should put significantly more effort into promoting their uniqueness rather than fighting the uphill battle of trying to be simply better than their competitors.

All of these suggestions notwithstanding, we strongly believe that the TTU School of Music has a very strong regional graduate program—one that it can be quite proud of—that is not in need of a substantial fix. Our suggestions are offered solely in light of the stated mission of the School of Music that they wish to be something that is not reflective of their current status and that, while not unattainable, is still far from their grasp.
Faculty Productivity

(Evaluation: Excellent)

A careful review of TTU Graduate Faculty Application Forms for all members of the School of Music faculty clearly indicates that their educational and artistic attainments are a major strength for the school. High-level scholarship and performance are evident, appear to be very important to the faculty, and set an appropriate standard for graduate students. The Director of the School is very supportive of the graduate program, and the Associate Director for Graduate Programs provides excellent leadership. Comments from a meeting with approximately 30 graduate students indicated that faculty were diligent in attracting, retaining and educating graduate students, and provided a very positive and collegial learning environment for them.

While faculty productivity in the areas of teaching and creative work/research were judged to be excellent, there is concern that some faculty teaching loads, which are quite high compared with comparable universities, may in the future diminish teaching and creative activity. It is suggested that this situation be monitored, and that appropriate load reductions be considered, in order to relieve the possible negative impact on faculty productivity. It is also suggested that consideration be given to reducing the size of the undergraduate student body in the School of Music as a way to lower faculty loads, and to create more space and provide better support for graduate students.

At a meeting with members of the School of Music graduate faculty, comments were made in strong support of the leadership of the Director of the School of Music. Particularly appreciated were increases in technology assistance and equipment for the graduate program including “smart” classrooms. Also, graduate faculty commented regarding positive relationships between students and faculty, and the high quality of students attracted to the graduate music program at TTU.

Quality and Quantity of Graduate Students and Graduates

(Evaluation: Satisfactory)

The number of enrolled graduate students appears to be appropriate given the size of the faculty and concern regarding limitations in facilities for the music program, which will be addressed later in this report. Positive and active student recruitment is taking place, and retention of qualified students does not appear to be a concern, although, as mentioned earlier, the majority of students appear to be either predominately international (predominantly Asian) or regional. Information provided by TTU Institutional Research Services, and reinforced in the on-campus meeting with graduate students, indicates that a predominance of enrolled graduate students are from Texas with a significant number holding at least one degree from TTU. This distribution is dissimilar to that of most “premier” music programs that have larger percentages of other-state USA and foreign students enrolled. It might benefit the School of Music in reaching its goal if a more
aggressive student recruitment plan could be developed that would specifically target non-Texas students for admission to the graduate program. It would also benefit the School significantly to encourage better breadth of student experiences by encouraging TTU undergraduates to attend graduate school elsewhere.

The School of Music appears to be pleased with the record of placement of its graduate students in professional positions, and the visitors certainly feel that graduate education at TTU prepares them well for such employment.

Financial support for School of Music graduate students appears to be sub-standard compared to most peer universities, and very much so compared with institutions with "premier" music programs. Not only are the stipends low, but deductions for tuition and health insurance make them even less attractive and viable. This certainly provides an enormous challenge to TTU faculty in their efforts to recruit non-Texas students to Lubbock. At the very least, additional funds should be found to cover the full costs of insurance and tuition, and in order to be truly competitive, the School of Music would also need to raise the stipend itself by a few thousand dollars.

The career success of its graduate students is a source of considerable pride for the music faculty, and the unique and challenging degree programs and excellent instruction offered by the School of Music appear to prepare students very well for employment in the profession.

While the School of Music graduate program may not be enrolled "at capacity," the visitors feel that it would be much better to invest any funds that can be made available to improve current TA stipends rather than to increase the number of stipends. This is all the more important if the school is to make progress toward its goal of becoming more competitive nationally for excellent graduate students.

Curriculum and Programs of Study

(Evaluation: Excellent)

The graduate degrees offered by the TTU School of Music all appear to be outstanding. Without exception, they are comprehensive in their content, broad in their scope, reflective of national practice, and uniquely positioned in their intent.

The Ph.D. in Fine Arts is a particularly noteworthy degree, as no other direct correlative exists in the country that we are aware of. Rather than focusing on any one unique sub-specialization within the academic spectrum, which in turn leads to degreeed individuals competing in the same field for the same jobs as students from the best schools in the country, graduates in this degree program are uniquely trained to teach at the multitude of institutions across the country that are looking for broad-based music educators capable of excelling within a teaching environment more focused on the exploration of broad
societal issues than on narrowly-focused research tracks. Nonetheless, this degree does not lack in rigor, and stands up well nationally against other Ph.D. degrees.

Of additional interest is how the broad fine arts philosophy of the Ph.D. degree carries over into the content of all the other music graduate degrees. The institution clearly espouses a common philosophic approach throughout the entirety of their graduate offerings that is worthy of championing and promoting by the institution. The strong placement rate of TTU students seems clearly reflective of the nature and success of these programs.

In examining the specific curricular content of all the degrees offered, we encountered only a few anomalies worthy of note. None of these issues, in themselves, should be considered as being seriously detrimental to their respective degrees, but should be viewed as subtle weaknesses that are deserving of thoughtful reflection. Specifically:

1. While it is clearly noted that a course in research methodologies is required for all doctoral degrees but is not required for any masters degrees, the NASM standards are very clear that such skills should be required for any graduate student in an academic track, such as musicology, theory, ethnomusicology, and music education. We strongly recommend that a course in research methodologies be required in the relevant masters degree programs.

2. It seems unusual for a Ph.D. program to have no foreign language requirement. Although we were informed that such a requirement is usually mandated through individual advising for all Ph.D. students, we believe it should be clearly spelled out and documented if, indeed, it is required.

3. Similarly, we note that the master’s degree in general music education contains a significant number of courses in instrumental music, yet has no apparent requirements in vocal music. We feel that a balanced general music degree requires study in both instrumental and vocal music training.

Facilities and Resources

(Evaluation: Unsatisfactory—Music building humidity control, temperature control, and sewer problems.)

(Poor---Insufficient number of student practice rooms and TA offices; lack of funding for graduate student travel and professional development; need for opera rehearsal/performance space.)

(Good---Library resources, new recording studio, new “smart” classrooms.)

School of Music facilities are very problematic. HVAC systems are a constant and severe source of discomfort; areas in the old sections of the building are below standard in regard to sound isolation; presentation technology is inadequate in some classrooms.
(others have been elevated to “smart” status and work well); and there is not a physically
and acoustically appropriate space for opera rehearsals and productions. The urgent need
for a small performance venue is admirably being addressed with the retrofitting of the
choral rehearsal room so that student solo and chamber performances for small audiences
can be presented when classes and rehearsals are not scheduled.

Except for the HVAC problems, the newer parts of the music facility seem to serve
graduate students adequately, but the older sections of the building present challenges
which graduate students must overcome. Fortunately, they appear to have the energy and
capacity to do this.

Library resources are located in the University Library where a good music collection
with sufficient room for expansion is available to meet graduate student needs. A music
faculty library committee is active in its oversight of the music collection.

All support staff for the School of Music with whom the visitors came in contact were
helpful, gracious and appeared to be dedicated to the welfare of students. However, it
was noted that the Associate Director for Graduate Programs does not have a designated
staff position to assist him and the school’s graduate students. This was a considerable
concern for the visitors who are unaware of any other major university music program
that does not have at least one staff person directly and solely serving graduate students.
It is highly recommended that this situation be addressed as quickly as possible.