

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS OF THEATRE

Visitors' Report

California State University, Chico

Chico, California

Bradley Martin, Chair
Department of Music and Theatre

May 2-4, 2017

Jeffery Scott Elwell
P. Gibson Ralph

Degree for which Renewal of Plan Approval and Final Approval for Listing is sought.

Bachelor of Arts – 4 years: Theatre Arts

Degree for which Plan Approval is sought.

Bachelor of Fine Arts – 4 years: Musical Theatre

DISCLAIMER

The following report and any statements therein regarding compliance with NAST accreditation standards represent only the considered opinion of the visitors at the time of the visit. Definitive evaluation of compliance and the accreditation decision will be made by the Commission following a complete review of the application, including the Self-Study, the Visitors' Report, and any Optional Response to the Visitors' Report submitted by the institution.

OPTIONAL RESPONSE

It is strongly recommended that each institution submit an Optional Response to the Visitors' Report, which may be used to correct (1) errors of fact, (2) conclusions based on such errors, and (3) any documented changes made in the program since the on-site review. In particular, information in the Optional Response should address noted issues of apparent noncompliance, such as those included in Section P. of this report, and any areas where the provision of further information has been deemed advisable by the institution.

A. Purpose

The current California State University, Chico statement of university objectives emphasizes the institution's commitment to "a liberal education . . . to provide a diversity of intellectual, cultural, social and recreational activities and experiences for the university and surrounding communities" (Self-Study, Section 1, A p. 6). In turn, the goal statement of the Department of Music and Theatre states that the unit's "primary obligation is the liberal arts education of our students (Self-Study, Section 1 A, p. 7). The statement further commits to a "broad base practical education in the arts and crafts of the Theatre and Dance with an opportunity to focus on a specific area of the craft (Self-Study, Section 1 A, p. 8). While the department's mission statement was crafted to express expected exit proficiencies, as per university expectation, "our department exists in order to prepare our students (majors and minors) for entry-level professional positions or further education" (Self-Study, Section 1 A, p. 7), departmental goals are consonant with the university's objectives. Further, the unit's goals and objectives are clearly expressed.

B. Size and Scope

The institution appears to meet NAST standards regarding sufficient enrollment to cover the size and scope of the theatre program. There are currently 24 males and 42 females enrolled in the theatre program as majors for a total of 66. Twenty-seven student majors (40.9%) are members of under-represented groups. Roughly 800 students generated almost 3800 student credit hours in theatre in the previous academic year. Enrollment in the theatre arts program is 40 with 26 enrolled in musical theatre. There were 14 graduates in the previous year, when enrollment was considerably higher (86 with 55 in theatre arts and 31 in musical theatre). The program has 6 full-time faculty members and 5 adjuncts. Two of the faculty members were new tenure-track hires in Fall 2016.

The institution appears to meet NAST standards concerning a sufficient number of advanced courses in Theatre appropriate to the major areas of study at the baccalaureate level. The institution appears to meet NAST standards concerning offering a requisite number of performance/production experiences at an advanced level.

C. Finances

The institution does not appear to provide an annual budget adequate to support the theatre unit's mission, goals, objectives and the size and scope of its curricular and production programs. When compared to like-sized NAST peers (public institutions, 1-100 majors) in the 2015-2016 HEADS report, the institution falls somewhere between the 65th and 75th percentile, with an operating budget of \$80,999 and a production budget of \$133,120 for five annual productions. Theatre also has \$83,157 in funding from student fees, box office revenue, and income from endowment.

The institution does not appear to have done any long-range planning around the theatre program but does appear willing to commit itself to sustaining the programs of the theatre unit during the projected term of accreditation. The theatre executive appears to be involved in the budget development process but there does not appear to be either a fundraising or development program for the theatre unit.

It is not clear how the institution meets standards regarding adequacies of finances in relationship to size and scope of the theatre unit (NAST *Handbook 2017-18*, II.C.1.a.(2)).

D. Governance and Administration

1. Overall Effectiveness

There is a tradition of support by the institution for the theatre program, which has continued through the tenures of the current president and provost. The commitment of significant resources for the new Humanities and Fine Arts Building, which includes spaces for theatre performance classes and performance, is one such indication of support. The location of the Department of Music and Theatre within the College of Humanities and Fine Arts is appropriate to the goals of the unit. Therefore the university's governance structure presents no difficulties in implementing the mission, goals and objectives of the unit.

There seems to be a bit of a disconnect between the dean and the chair of music and theatre. The chair is completing the second year of a three-year term and came to the institution from a national search. The chair has raised some concerns that seem to be in conflict with the dean's understanding of how this institution operates. The dean is also the product of a national search and so neither the chair nor the dean have the institutional memory that several of the theatre faculty and staff possess. This seems to have caused a myriad of problems during the past year.

2. Policy-Making

3. Theatre Executive's Load and Responsibilities

Theatre executive's load is governed by the CBA that provides for a 75% release for administration. As is described in the Self-Study, I D, institutional and departmental structure and responsibilities allow for proper communication and involvement in decision-making on all levels.

4. Communication

Regular theatre faculty meetings are not held, and communication among faculty and staff appears to be problematic. The department does not meet as a complete unit. Music and

theatre faculty are treated as separate groups. The same can be said for communication between the chair and the dean. Faculty members are unionized with and operate via a Collective Bargaining Agreement. Faculty in the unit elects chairs for three-year terms.

E. Faculty and Staff

The faculty does not appear to have the appropriate training and competence to deliver the curriculum effectively. Theatre faculty members hold terminal degrees in performance. Theatre history and criticism courses, traditionally taught by an individual holding a Doctor of Philosophy, are offered by Master of Fine Arts holding faculty members. It is, therefore, unclear how the institution meets the standard that faculty qualifications enable the theatre unit and the specific educational programs offered to accomplish their purposes (*NAST Handbook 2017-18*, II.E.1.a.(1)).

As mentioned above, the faculty appears to be sufficient for the size and scope of the program. The student/faculty ratio also appears appropriate. Despite a heavy workload, the faculty morale seems to be relatively high. Appointment, evaluation, and advancement policies seem to work effectively. It does not appear that the faculty has enough time to take advantage of professional development opportunities. It is not clear what strain might be placed on the faculty with the addition of a Bachelor of Fine Arts program in Musical Theatre.

The support staff also appears to be adequate for the size and scope of the production program. There are six full-time employees in the School of the Arts, who have the responsibility for constructing and designing productions for theatre as well as other units in the College of Humanities and Fine Arts. These employees include: a production manager for the School of the Arts, a costume shop supervisor, an assistant costume shop supervisor, a scene shop supervisor, a safety officer, and a publication communication specialist as well as a myriad of paid and volunteer student workers. These support staff members, however, report to the associate dean of the college rather than the chair of music and theatre and therein lies some of the confusion and discontent that the visitors discovered during their time on campus. Faculty directors and designers don't feel that these staff members are dedicated to the theatre program and can be pulled away from the work on productions to handle other college or university events. The School of the Arts production manager doesn't believe that has happened or if it has, that it hasn't impacted the quality of services that they are providing. There is an impression among the faculty members that the production manager has drawn student workers from theatre production tasks. The visitors learned in meetings with the production manager that students sign up for production work placing responsibility for working or not working on theatre productions on student choice.

F. Facilities, Equipment, Technology, Health, and Safety

The Self-Study (pp. 42-46) provides a comprehensive review of the classroom and performance facilities used by the Department of Music and Theatre and provides detailed descriptions of facilities, including the unit's permanent performance spaces, Laxson Auditorium (1337 seats), Harlen Adams (486-seat proscenium), and the Wismer Theatre (black box, 100-150 seats, depending on configuration). Laxson Auditorium underwent a complete renovation in 2006.

The visitors learned from the Self-Study and during a tour of the unit's facilities that the primary performance space is used by other departments for large enrollment classes limiting access to the facility for load-ins, hang and focus of lighting fixtures, and adjustments during the week of

technical rehearsals. Therefore, it is not clear how the institution meets standards regarding facilities availability (NAST *Handbook 2017-18*, II.F.1.c.).

The scenic and costume facilities and equipment are sufficient to support the program production schedule.

Shop supervisors and the production manager are not in the reporting line to the theatre executive. Therefore, it is not clear how the institution meets standards regarding safety (NAST *Handbook 2017-18*, II.F.1.f.).

The visitors observed instruction in the design lab, PAC 261, a room with limited equipment in support of design functions. Therefore, it is not clear how the institution meets standards regarding space, equipment, and technology allotted to any theatre unit function which must be adequate for the effective conduct of that function (NAST *Handbook 2017-18*, II.F.1.b.).

G. Library and Learning Resources

The Department of Music and Theatre's theatre holdings are described in detail along with the policies and procedures for the operation of the Meriam Library and the California Library System in the Self-Study. The collection contains many theatre plays, and books on scenic, lighting, and costume design, acting, directing, stage management, and theatre history on the shelves.

Annual library financial allocations are minimal. There is a librarian at the Meriam Library who acquires new acquisitions in coordination with the Department of Music and Theatre librarian. Audio visual holdings have been transferred to electronic format and are retained in DVD format. The Department of Music and Theatre maintains an extensive collection of musical theatre scores and vocal selections in the music library in the Performing Arts Center available to faculty and students. The library seems to provide the proper resources so that both faculty and students have immediate access to all necessary materials when needed. The institution appears to meet NAST standards for library resources.

H. Recruitment, Admission-Retention, Record Keeping, Advisement, and Student Complaints

- 1. Recruitment, Admission, Retention**
- 2. Record Keeping**
- 3. Advisement**
- 4. Student Complaint Policy and Its Effectiveness**

The Department of Music and Theatre relies on a few ways to recruit students that were confirmed during discussion with the students in the department. Due to budget cuts, the High School Theatre Festival, which was reported to have provided a significant recruitment yield, has been cut. The department relies upon performance events at regional high schools and a visible presence at institution wide recruitment events to recruit students to the program. Faculty noted in a meeting with the visitors that a considerable amount of service time is devoted to recruitment activities. In both the meeting with faculty and the meeting with

students, the projected offering of a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Musical Theatre was viewed as a recruitment tool that would significantly raise enrollment.

Retention requirements appear to be appropriate for a theatre program that offers the Bachelor of Arts degree.

The visitors checked student records for accuracy. Advising appears to be meeting the needs of the students. The students commented on the accessibility of the faculty and their willingness to assist and advise them.

The institution provides a published guide for student complaints.

I. Published Materials and Websites

The published materials were sufficient and appropriate for an undergraduate theatre program. These materials seem to accurately represent what the Visitors saw while on campus. All parties we met with agreed that these materials were both comprehensive and effective in communicating the Theatre program.

J. Branch Campuses, External Programs, Use of the Institution's Name for Educational Activities Operated Apart from the Main Campus or the Primary Educational Program (if applicable)

Not Applicable.

K. Community Involvement; Articulation with Other Institutions (if applicable)

The Self-Study (Section 1, J, p. 67) establishes the importance of community outreach for the unit in the form of collaborative relationships with area theatres: Theatre on the Ridge in Paradise, CA, The Blue Room and Chico Theatre Company in Chico, CA. Faculty and students are involved in these community and semi-professional theatres. The department also assists local theatres by lending assistance from the costume shop and scene shop.

The Department of Theatre and Music has created and maintains articulation agreements with 112 community colleges. They also maintain articulation agreements with other California State University campuses.

N. Programs, Degrees, and Curricula

1. Credit Hours

a. Definitions and Procedures

(1) Definition of Credit and Methods of Assigning Credit

The Self-Study (p. 69) identifies the definition of semester-or quarter-hours of credit. In another section of the Self-Study (pp. 78 – 80), “Policy for Determining credit

hours for lecture, studio, etc.” and “Transfer Credit” (pp. 80 – 83) awarding credit is addressed.

(2) Publication of Definitions and Policies.

The institution publishes (a) current definitions and methods, and (b) transfer of credit policies (<http://catalog.csuchico.edu/viewer/17/ACAREGS.html#CreditPolicies>).

(3) Procedures Used to Make Credit Hour Assignments

Policies are documented by the Academic Policies and Regulations on the institution’s website. The department appears to follow all CSU policies and procedures for awarding credit.

(4) Means Employed to Ensure Accurate and Reliable Application

This information was not provided in the Self-Study. The institution is asked to provide an overview of the procedures used by the university to ensure application of credit/time requirements in the Optional Response.

b. Evaluation of Compliance

Regarding credit and time requirements for graduation, the institution appears to meet NAST standards. The visitors note that as outlined in the Self-Study (pp. 85 - 89), between the Undergraduate Catalog and Department of Music and Theatre website, the institution appears to meet the NAST standards for published materials.

c. New, Experimental, Atypical Formats or Methods

Not applicable

2. Specific Curricula

a. General Content and Competency Standards

The institution appears to meet the general standards for awarding the Bachelor of Arts degree.

b. Individual Curricula

Bachelor of Arts – 4 years: Theatre Arts

(1) Status: Renewal of Plan Approval and Final Approval for Listing

(2) Curriculum: The curriculum appears to provide a solid, broad-based foundation in the theatre discipline. The degree requires 120 units. According to the Self-Study (p. 85) these hours include 48 units of general education courses and 22 units of electives. The remaining credits in the theatre arts program include 20 units of major courses and 30 units in major electives. Regarding the combination of the core curriculum, general education requirements and electives, the institution appears to fulfill the goals articulated in the NAST *Handbook 2016-17* for studies in general education.

(3) Title/Content Consistency: The degree title appears to be appropriate and consistent with the content.

- (4) Student Work: The team observed a variety of classes, met with students, and attended the opening performance of *How to Succeed in Business*. The show contained an all major, all-student cast, even in the older character roles. Directing, design and technical supervision was by faculty members. With few exceptions, the audience was composed of students required to attend to fulfill course requirements. There were roughly 400 to 450 in the 1337-seat auditorium, and several left at intermission.

While the caliber of students' work in the production could be considered appropriate to the nature of the degree offered, a significant number of the cast members were obligated to play characters far outside of their age range, character type, technical ability and experience. It might be justifiable on educational grounds to permit student actors to stretch to such challenges, but the production quality was clearly hindered by the practice. Faculty members designed the sets and costumes; a guest designed the lighting. The production was of adequate quality and was well received. The scenic and costume design work was strong; lighting demonstrated the need for a qualified lighting designer on staff. Choreography was acceptable for a liberal arts baccalaureate degree but was not of a level to be expected from a program seeking Plan Approval for a professional degree in musical theatre. Production values were hindered by the inappropriately large dimensions of the stage and auditorium, acoustics, budget and the amount of time from the release of funds for construction to opening. The visitors suggest that in the future, play selection takes into more consideration such factors as role age range, skill demands and minimal production values.

In the classroom, the quality of instruction was good and students seemed engaged and attentive to the material presented.

The curriculum appears to provide a sequence of study that leads to a level of craft and skill appropriate to a baccalaureate liberal arts degree in theatre.

- (5) Development of Competencies: The program appears to have a formal method for implementing ongoing and routine student assessment.
- (6) Overall Effectiveness: It appears that the institution meets both NAST and institutional established standards.

Bachelor of Fine Arts – 4 years: Musical Theatre

- (1) Status: Plan of Approval
- (2) Curriculum: The curriculum appears to provide a comprehensive program musical theatre. The degree requires 120 units. According to the Self-Study (p. 93) these hours include 60 units (50%) of theatre and dance, 24 units (20%) of music, 30 units (25%) of general education courses and 6 units (5%) of electives. The institution appears to meet the standard for Bachelor of Fine Arts in Musical Theatre curricular structure (NAST Handbook 2016-17, IX, D 1 b).

It is unclear how the institution will meet the need for “opportunities for performance in workshops and full productions of musical theatre in a variety of formal and informal

settings (NAST Handbook 2016-17, IX, D 3 a). with the constraints on performance space.

- (3) Title/Content Consistency: The degree title appears to be appropriate.
- (4) Student Work: The team observed a performance of the musical “How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying”. This was the department’s “Large Musical” (Self-Study p.21) for which sizable income is budgeted. Faculty reported ticket sales below anticipated levels. Large chorus numbers were fairly stagnant and without evidence of a program supported by dance training.
- (5) Development of Competencies: The program appears to have a formal method for implementing ongoing and routine student assessment.
- (6) Overall Effectiveness: Based on the 2016-2017 HEADS data, there are 43 students in the BA Liberal Arts program and 35 in the BA Musical Theatre program. With courses in acting required every semester for the BFA in Musical Theatre and the acting requirements in the liberal arts core, it is unclear how the one full time performance faculty member and one part-time member will be able to meet the curricular demands of the new program. The dance portion of the curriculum, one course per semester, relies upon a part-time faculty member.

3. Study of the Transcripts of Recent Graduates and Comparison with Catalog Statements

4. Performance

5. Theatre Studies in General Education

The unit offers a number of sections of an introduction to theatre course for non-majors. This course is taught by the full-time faculty, is useful to the department’s productivity and serves the university non-major student population well. The difficulty with this obligation lies in the faculty effort necessary to maintain and perhaps increase enrollments. It is yet another strong argument to justify the restoration of a full faculty line and the addition of a new large lecture area in the anticipated additional performance venue.

The department also permits non-major enrollments in major classes on a limited basis. This practice seems to work and does not inhibit major learning experiences.

O. Theatre Unit Evaluation, Planning, and Projections

There are a number of systems in place and these include workshops, a campus master plan, cross-campus linkages and a formal outcomes assessment process. The department goes through regular system-wide program reviews on a ten-year cycle, with five-year progress reports. The unit must also provide annual reports to the College of Humanities and Arts. Through such avenues the department is well aware of the university and college’s expectations.

P. Standards Summary

It appears that the institution meets the standards with the exception of the following:

1. It is not clear that the institution meets the standards regarding finances (NAST *Handbook 2017-18*, II.C.1.a.(2)).
2. It is not clear that the institution meets the standards regarding faculty qualifications (NAST *Handbook 2017-18*, II.E.1.a.(1)).
3. It is not clear that the institution meets the standards regarding facilities, equipment and safety (NAST *Handbook 2017-18*, II.F.1.b.c.f.g.).

Q. Overview, Summary Assessment, and Recommendations for the Program

1. Strengths

- A dedicated, gifted and hard-working faculty
- An enthusiastic and positive student body
- A strong reputation within the college and university

2. Recommendations for Short-Term Improvement

- Begin strong audience development activities.
- Continue to work on effective course rotations that allows full-time faculty to offer significant components of the curriculum.
- Provide release time for faculty professional development.
- Work on effective and appropriate marketing materials for the program.
- Develop an effective system for student recruitment.

3. Primary Futures Issues

- Analyze faculty needs, performances, courses and majors as they relate to the mission, goals and objectives of the unit with regard to the Bachelor of Fine Arts in Musical Theatre.
- Explore the relationship between the School of Arts' activities and the unit's mission, goals and objectives.

4. Suggestions for Long-Term Development

- The visitors encourage the department to increase major enrollments and seek the addition of new faculty lines in lighting design.