

Performing Arts Circle

Report on Immediate Priorities and Opportunities

The Performing Arts Circle met on May twenty-first with representatives from the UBC Vancouver departments of Theatre, Music and Fine Arts. Support for a performing arts program was ecumenical, and expressed in participation from departments as disparate as Women's Studies, Education, History, English, Business, Philosophy and Fine Arts, as well as community arts groups.

The community representatives emphasized the dearth of performing arts programs in interior British Columbia, and the size of the market for their graduates. Conversely, faculty from the two UBC campuses saw in the performing arts an opportunity to enrich both the undergraduate experience and the cultural life of the region. An active, vibrant performing arts program at the North Kelowna Campus would attract members of the outside community to our institution, thereby increasing our visibility in the community. It would also enhance undergraduate recruitment and retention. A number of local high schools maintain strong performing arts programs, but their graduates find that they must leave the valley in order to pursue their interests. There is a strong regional and local demand for a performing arts program, as well as a market for its productions and its graduates.

The wide range of departments represented in the meeting, as much as the discussions themselves, bespeak interdisciplinary opportunities. A program in performing arts would provide a forum in which experts from both campuses can provide perspectives. The Vancouver representatives, in particular, felt that the Kelowna campus enjoys an enviable and almost unique opportunity to achieve what Rhodri Windsor-Liscombe referred to as "the criticism of practice". Whereas many institutions teach either practical skills or critical analysis, our program could achieve an uncommon synthesis. UBC-Okanagan is in a remarkably strong position to integrate both rigorous academic analysis and skilled performance and stagecraft in a singular program of study.

We envision two new degrees, a BA and a BFA. The BA would add courses in practical skills — such as acting, lighting, props, and stage design — to offerings in the history and theory of theatre. The BFA, on the other hand, would add similar courses, but to our existing and very strong offerings in visual arts. Both, however, would compound practice and theory.

A number of faculty would have to be hired in order to teach these practical skills. As importantly, new infrastructure would have to be built to support their instruction. A blackbox studio space would allow for a number of different performance possibilities, but must be supported by carpentry and lighting workshops, storage areas for props, and, most importantly, teaching and rehearsal space. We would, in fact, favour deferring the construction of a flagship, proscenium-arch theatre, perhaps even indefinitely, if such a deferral would accelerate construction of rehearsal and workshop facilities. Members of the community also expressed an interest in such infrastructure, since there appears to be a city-wide shortage. There is, on the

other hand, no lack of production venues in the city, and it would be much easier to organize and rehearse a performance on campus then move it downtown than the contrary. Ground should be broken for these facilities within the next year or two.

In the meantime, we must increase the visibility of the performing arts on the Kelowna campus. Importing performances from Vancouver would be one of the most productive ways to leverage the two-campus structure of the University of British Columbia. These would allow us immediately to start exposing students to the performing arts and thereby enriching their undergraduate experiences. Such visiting performances would be especially important in music, which may take some time to establish as a program. Exchanges of faculty would enrich our pedagogical offerings, allowing for guest lectures, perhaps through the Arts Colloquium, and short teaching workshops or even full-term courses, perhaps led by postdoctoral students. In any case, an exchange program should be relatively inexpensive and established by September of 2005.

We are determined that the performing arts enrich the undergraduate experience for all students. There was therefore a great deal of interest in integrating the fine and performing arts into a first-year foundation course, which would connect the appreciation of the arts to the humanities. While the establishment of integrated first-year offerings would be a daunting task, several existing first-year courses already address or could easily address elements of the performing arts. Allowing students to sign up for a package of such courses would allow us to leverage the offerings already available, without creating an entirely new first-year programme. If all of the students in a particular section of English 150 (Poetry and Drama), for instance, were simultaneously enrolled in a first-year Theatre section, then the two classes could study complementary texts and ideas. If they were also enrolled in the same sections of Introduction to Psychology, then the psychology class could use exercises from the performing arts as a teaching tool, and relate its content to that of the other sections. Such a structure would allow us to begin offering an integrated performing arts and humanities program with only one new course. It should be possible, therefore, to begin offering first-year courses within the next two years.

NOTES FROM MEETING

MAY 21, 2004

ATTENDANCE:

Arts: Bob Belton, Dean; Johann Feught, Fine Arts; Jim Tanner, Fine Arts; Ruth Frost, Women's Studies; Sean Lawrence, English; Carolyn MacHardy, Fine Arts; Bryan Ryley, Fine Arts; Ken Phillips, English; Daniel Keyes, English; Manuela Ungureanu, Philosophy; Stephen Foster, Fine Arts

Education: Greg Wetterstrand; Sharon McCoubrey

Business: Jayne Brooks, Dean; Marietta Stanley, Janet Mercer

Student: Jayna Bussiere, Arts & Education

UBC: Rhodri Windsor-Liscombe, Head of Art History, Visual Art and Theory; Robert Gardiner, Head of Theatre, Film and Creative Writing; Jesse Read, Head of the School of Music

Community: Ron Forbes, ED for Rotary Centre for the Arts (RCA); Michael Irwin, theatre technician; Wes Crealock, RCA Vice President; David Mann, ED for Sunshine Theatre

Everyone introduced themselves and noted why they were interested in the Creative and Performing Arts Circle.

There was a general discussion on the demand for Creative and Performing Arts programs. The local high schools have strong theatre, music and art programs and students who want to continue in theatre and music at the post-secondary level must go elsewhere to continue their education. Many of these local students would rather stay in the Okanagan to continue their studies. As well, the community representatives noted that they need trained personnel in such areas as theatre technicians, actors, singers and musicians.

This proposal touches many areas of OUC as it has ties to and interest from Education, Fine Arts, Social Work, Education, Anthropology, History, Philosophy, English, Business, and many others. The performing arts proposal is truly multi and interdisciplinary and we have the chance to build something very unique at UBCO.

The Creative Writing proposal is already moving forward and was supported by the group. It was further noted that the existing Fine Arts program at OUC had an excellent reputation and no changes were anticipated in that area. The discussion then seemed to focus mainly on all aspects of theatre, and to a lesser extent on music and film.

Because of the scope of a Creative and Performing Arts program, it was agreed that we should think big at this point and ensure we had everything included, as additional components would be harder to get later.

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There was a discussion on whether this initiative should be a BFA or a BA or both. The discussion also involved whether to have just a production "doing it" stream or also a "studying it" stream. The preference was to have both streams with perhaps the first in the BFA and the second in the BA.

During the discussions it was also noted that UBCO had an excellent opportunity to establish a new Music Program. The establishment of a separate UBCO music program would enhance the Education Faculty's ability to train teachers in the B.Ed. program on how to teach music to students in the elementary *and* secondary school system. If the courses were at UBCO as part of a music program, the Education students could take advantage of them. As well, graduates of the music program could continue on to complete a post-degree in Education.

Discussions covered both immediate things that could be done as well as longer-term initiatives. What to do and what not to do was also discussed and the comments from UBCV were greatly appreciated.

Short-term:

- have some of the UBC music or theatre productions come to OUC during the 2004/05 year to add some student life activities for current students, garner enthusiasm and student demand for such programs at UBCO in the future, and provide the Okanagan with a taste UBC performing arts programs
- collaborate on a first-year survey or foundations course in fine arts to be offered at UBCO - perhaps with three weeks each on music, art and theatre - optional for most students but required for Education students (UBCV is trying to move to 12 credits) - the course could be adapted slightly for each faculty that uses it (i.e. the business of ..., the teaching of, the appreciation of ..., etc.)
- bring other select UBCV courses to UBCO for delivery
- have faculty exchanges and student exchanges between the two institutions
- have graduate students, research assistants and post-docs from UBCV assigned to the program at UBCO for specific projects

Long-term:

- Preference was given for a separate School or Faculty of Creative and Performing Arts with its own Dean. Departments within the School or Faculty might include the already successful Visual Arts program as well as new areas such as Creative Writing, Film, Music and Theatre stagecraft/acting/design/directing/producing/etc.)

How to make it happen:

What to do:

- Work on partnerships and ties to the local community to save money on capital investments and gain support for program and graduates
- use performing theatres downtown and in other locations

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- use local professional artists to assist with classes and productions in exchange for their use of our shop space and rehearsal space
- Make sure you have at least one 40' X 40' rehearsal room for every two shows you plan to do each year - and two shows may be enough to start
- Go for a black box theatre on campus - dedicated space which can get messy without anyone worrying about it
- Consider going with musical theatre as there is a demand for it and UBCV does not have a musical theatre program. It ties music and theatre together and the local community, with its large senior population, loves musical theatre
- Do a summer institute so UBCO students, high school students, seniors and community could all participate - perhaps the survey course described above to start

What not to do:

- Concentrate on a formal theatre on campus to the detriment of working classrooms and a black-box theatre that is dedicated to the program and can get as messy as needed
- Playwriting or screenwriting specifically