

Creative Arts Program Review

In 06-08, faculty in the Creative Arts Division conducted Program Review in the following program areas: Division Office, Arts, Drama, and Music.

The review was begun under the oversight of William Cochran, Dean of Liberal Arts and Interim Vice President. The support team members who completed the review include Diane Boynton, Caroline Carney and Susan Steele.

Program Strengths and Support Team Commendations

Support Team members noted that all members of the Creative Arts Division are committed to integrating a comprehensive curriculum with professional involvement in the arts. As the self-study's Preamble says, 'It is our conviction that while the production aspect of the Division could theoretically exist without the educational component; the educational aspect of our offerings could not legitimately exist outside of a vital culture of professional level involvement in the arts.' This dual focus enriches the cultural life of the Monterey Peninsula, with high quality plays, concerts and exhibits. It also creates a rich mix in Creative Arts classes of transfer and vocational students, practicing artists who desire to enhance their skills, and life-long learners, all segments of which the faculty is committed to serving. The contribution of the Creative Arts Division to MPC's positive reputation in the community and to the recruitment of students is enormous.

Challenges

All programs in Creative Arts noted major and critical challenges with the quality of their facilities and with the inadequacy of their financial resources to buy basic and necessary class supplies and materials. The state of the facilities presents health and safety concerns across the board. Constraints on supply and material budgets have differential impact. In the case of Art, needed funds are generated by semi-annual sales of jewelry and pottery – originally intended to cover workshops and student scholarships – to cover necessities. In the case of Drama, the production schedule is limited to four shows a season, down from a high of six. In the case of Music, the number of performance groups is limited.

The Music and Art programs also stated that they find it a challenge to recruit and retain adjunct faculty. They attribute this situation to the absence of a local pool of qualified individuals, non-competitive adjunct salaries, and the fact that their course structures effectively limit adjuncts to a single course per semester.

Finally, the Division Office noted the need for a “coordinated, professional marketing plan for its many productions and exhibits.”

Goals

Most of the Division's goals arise from the challenges outlined above:

- Improve classroom and studio space to meet safety, health and pedagogical standards
- Stabilize operational budgets at a level that provides for excellent instruction and program growth.
- Develop and implement a professional marketing plan
- Aggressively encourage and assist an institution-wide rethinking and restructuring of the College's income structure so as to achieve long-term financial stability.

One goal moves beyond these challenges and seeks to position the Division's programs for the future.

- Explore and, where appropriate, implement curricular changes which foster integration of the various arts disciplines.

Issues

1) Productivity. The Program Review includes a comparison of the Division's direct costs (i.e. departmental budgets) and the dollars associated with the FTES it generates. While we understand the motivation for including a financial calculation in the program review – the Creative Arts are seldom viewed as revenue centers – we were unconvinced by this analysis, since it excludes any consideration of operational costs (e.g., utilities, building maintenance, etc.). The Division is pursuing an accounting of these costs.

2) Grade Distribution. The tables on course grades in Music and Drama show that a majority of students in all programs either get 'A's or credit. The program review argues that this situation is a consequence of two factors. (a) 'Admission to these classes is by audition, so students are not admitted unless faculty believe they are ready for the challenge.' (b) 'Students are taught from the first day that their participation must be positive, constructive and mutually supportive at all time. Students who are not able to maintain this discipline usually self-select out of the production, and eventually the department.' Few students withdraw from Drama courses, so the second factor takes precedence there; the withdrawal rate is higher in Music, so both factors appear to be at work. In any case, the Divisional account of this situation underscores its professional aspirations and commitment. The question is whether there is a place in this picture for a student who simply desires an experience in the arts.

3) Average Class Size and Concurrent Enrollment. The average class size over the period covered in the data tables is 13 for Music and 12 for Art. This is below the number required by the MPC/MPCTA Contract and, hence, demands comment. The program review notes that these numbers are explained by the practice of offering concurrent

sections – e.g. introductory, intermediate and advanced sculpture courses at a single time. The Support Team understands the rationale. ‘This situation represents the Art faculties’ aggressive efforts to maximize both the accessibility of courses and enrollment.’ We do not find, however, that the program review adequately explains how multiple courses can be taught in the same classroom and meet the course objectives for students with widely disparate backgrounds and abilities.

4) 4) FTES/FTE. The College and the Division disagree on how to compute the FTES generated by the Drama Program. Many of the area’s performance venues offer MPC credit for their productions, under Instructional Service Agreements. The FTES generated by these courses are counted by the College under contracts and thus are not included in the FTE/FTES table in Drama’s program review. This practice is identical to the treatment of the FTES generated by courses in ESL under ISAs or by courses in PFIT at local gyms under ISAs; the first are not attributed to the ESL Program and the second are not attributed to Physical Education. The Division believes that these FTES are properly attributed to Drama, because of the active involvement of the program’s faculty, both in recruiting these contract classes in the first place and in their involvement with the contract classes’ daily operations and productions. The Division believes that these factors distinguish their relationship to these courses from the ESL and PFIT contract courses. From the program’s and the Division’s point of view, the success of these productions turns on the support and expertise of Drama’s faculty and staff. The narrative is based on the Division’s computation. ‘FTES, including Drama contract courses (which are not computed in the tables), averaged 266.5 in fall semesters, 309.7 in spring...Contract courses account for approximately 60% of the FTES.’ Until the extent of the faculty involvement in these courses is confirmed and quantified, it is not possible to ascertain whether to compute FTES based on the college’s practice vis-à-vis Instructional Service Agreements in general or whether to treat the relationship between the Drama Program and these courses differently. This issue must be resolved, so that there can be confirmation of the contribution of the program to the College.

5) Curriculum and Programs Although the list of goals at the beginning of the program review identifies the intent to explore curricular changes in order to foster the integration of the arts programs, the view of the Division is that these are dependent on the facilities within which the programs are housed. Thus, the narrative did not address what other initiatives need to be undertaken to achieve this goal. We note in this regard that only Drama and Art History have completed the curriculum review required as part of the program review. A large portion of the photography courses is completed, but almost the entirety of Art-Studio and Music remains to be done. At least as important is the question of where the future of the Division lies and how it is planning for the future. While the facility and budgetary challenges facing the Creative Arts are significant, the division would be ill-advised to let these issues absorb all of its energy.

Support Team Recommendations

The Support Team strongly endorses the Division's goal in regard to improving classroom and studio space. We are particularly concerned that attention be paid to the health and safety issues that the program review identifies.

The Support Team also endorses the Division's goal to professionally market its productions and exhibits. A relatively small infusion of funds on this front should produce income that more than covers the expense. Structuring the marketing expense so that it is paid for by the income it generates would make the Division accountable and would not divert funds from other college needs and priorities.

The Support Team acknowledges that the Division is particularly vulnerable to reductions or instability in operating budgets, because of the relatively high cost of instructional supplies and their necessity. In the absence of establishing Divisional priorities for its operational needs, however, it is difficult to see how the College is to respond – short of immediately restoring the operating budgets of all of the Division's programs. Of course, such an action could leave newly emerging programs without the support required for growth. We recommend, therefore, that the Division consider the relative needs of its programs, prioritize these needs, and strategize with the academic leadership on how these can be met over time.

Finally, the Support Team encourages the Division to think strategically about its programs and their direction. Program reviews are not intended to be remedies for the past alone; they are also opportunities to create a vision of the future. This program review is relatively weak on this score. Given the level of the challenges that the past has produced for the Creative Arts – clearly documented in this program review – this result may be understandable. When the present includes daily contact with decaying insects, bird feces and safety hazards, thinking about the future can seem an exercise in futility. But, in spite of the current conditions, the future will arrive and the Division will want to have shaped it.

Overarching Issues

A number of the issues identified in the Division's self-study are not division-specific and should be addressed by the college:

- a. Since the appropriateness of supply budgets for departments and divisions has not been confirmed after the budget reductions that took place in fiscal year 2002-2003, the support team recommends that the College develop a plan to address supply and equipment budget needs for all divisions to ensure that they are consistent with college goals.
- b. At least a portion – hopefully, a significant portion – of the campus' facility needs should be met under the College's facility renovation plan.

The support team, therefore, underscores the importance of improving classroom and studio space. The planned remodel of the Creative Arts complex represents a great opportunity for the College to make the necessary improvements on both of these counts.

- c. A timely and professional institutional marketing plan should be developed and implemented. This plan should promote a positive image of MPC, apprise the community of the wide variety of programs and services available through MPC, and promote MPC news and events.
- d. The support team notes that the Division found working with the data intended to support the program review to be not only a major challenge but also an exercise with little utility. The data provided to units beginning their review process is not packaged so as to make it easily accessible to those unaccustomed or averse to manipulating numbers. In addition, there is no manual to guide units in the development of their review nor is there an explanatory workshop at the beginning of the process. The support team recommends that the College attend to these issues, in order to make the process more productive for subsequent programs undergoing review.