

## Proposal to establish a Master of Fine Arts in Dance

### Introduction

Subcommittee A of the Academic Programs Committee reviewed the proposal to establish a Master of Fine Arts in Dance on October 18, 2017. Purnima Shah, Director of the Dance Program, and Michael Klien, Associate Professor of the Practice of Dance were in attendance as representatives for the proposal. APC was provided with the following documents for review: the original proposal dated August 28, 2017 and budget dated September 10, 2017, ECGF talking points and questions, response to ECGF questions (set II), response to administrative questions September 8, 2017, the ECGF resolution, MAC guidance to APC, the ECGF letter to the Provost, and a revised proposal submitted on October 11, 2017. The proposal had been previously reviewed by the Executive Committee of the Graduate Faculty and the Masters Advisory Council.

### Summary of Discussion

- **Target audience** – APC asked for clarification on the “target audience” for the proposed MFA program and how this target audience relates to the total application pool for dance MFA programs nationally. Professors Shah and Klien clarified that the total enrollment in MFA programs nationwide is estimated to be 300 students, annually. Precise numbers in terms of applicants to such programs are not available, but likely to be in the range of 600-900. The size of the applicant pool for the proposed Duke MFA is unclear and poses risks. The program may appeal to a wider pool because it goes beyond the typical curriculum that characterizes most dance MFA programs. The proposed program includes the study of movement more broadly, integrates a range of interdisciplinary training and electives, and does not focus solely on a particular school of dance technique. However, the program may draw from a narrower pool because it combines practice and theory, requiring lengthy residency in the program and a rigorously researched thesis. The program will compete against other, more narrowly defined MFA programs that offer shorter residency and focused, conservatory training.
- **Financial considerations** – APC and the representatives engaged in a broad discussion about the financial challenges that the MFA program may face. The financial viability of the program, at least in the initial years, will be highly dependent on being able to matriculate students who are able to pay full (or nearly full) tuition. Professor Shah has initiated interactions with the Office of Development and Alumni affairs to discuss efforts to establish an endowment for the program, with the goal of providing scholarships to decrease the costs of attendance. APC discussed the challenges of such efforts (e.g. donors are often more interested in funding projects rather than

fellowships) and noted that since the Dance Program does not have a track record of cultivating endowments such efforts are most likely to “pay off” only in the long term. It is thus likely that the proposed program will have to attain financial viability in the short-term (three to five years) in the absence of endowments.

- **Contingency plan** – The discussants were asked to elaborate on the contingency budget. Professor Shah provided a paper copy of a detailed contingency budget based on five full-tuition paying students during the initial two years of the program. Professors Shah and Klien indicated that the program is not financially viable with fewer than five matriculants per year.
- **Collaboration with ADF and ARKS Dance Research Laboratory** – APC asked the discussants to elaborate on the proposed collaboration between Duke Dance and the American Dance Festival (ADF). Points of discussion included the Summer Intensive Program, entitled "ARKS Dance Research Laboratory" and MFA student access to ADF dance courses. Professors Shah and Klien noted that there is currently no graduate level training within ADF, and thus the proposed collaboration would be an important new initiative for both programs. To give the committee a better sense of the types of activities anticipated for the ARKS Dance Research Laboratory, Professor Klien described an example theme and the types of activities, visiting artists, research investigations, collaborations, performances, and interactions with the wider Durham community that the ARKS summer program will seek to create. Regarding access to existing ADF courses, it was clarified that these courses are undergraduate level dance training and are not requirements of the MFA. MFA students who wanted to enroll in additional ADF coursework would have thus to pay their own tuition and fees.

## **Resolution**

The committee expressed enthusiasm about the novel nature of the degree being offered, and the extent to which this leverages strengths at Duke, including faculty outside of dance and the ADF. APC recommends to the provost the approval of the Master of Fine Arts in Dance degree.

- The APC recommends that the MFA in Dance program explore interactions with Duke units outside of the humanities; such interactions could enrich the program and potentially attract a greater number of applicants. Possible areas of interaction/collaboration that were suggested included movement as it relates to human health (School of Medicine, School of Nursing, and Duke Integrative Medicine)

and the management, funding and sustainability of the arts (Fuqua and the Department of Economics).

- Michael Klien's verbal description to APC of the vision for the ARKS Dance Research Laboratory, and the accompanying case study example he provided were very helpful in clarifying both the vision and novelty of this effort. APC recommends that a written version of this case study be included in the proposal.
- The proposal should be updated to include the contingency budget, and the impact of budgetary modifications on program activities should be made clear. In internal APC discussions, it was noted that the current MFA in Experimental and Documentary Arts has struggled to meet target enrollments for reasons such as students accepting the invitation to join the program, but then failing to matriculate. There was concern that the Dance MFA could run into similar issues. Given this, the Dance Program should seek feedback from the MFA|EDA program to integrate into their contingency planning for the Dance MFA.

### **Broader Issues**

The Dance MFA review has exposed several broader issues that APC would like to bring to the attention of the Provost:

- The relatively high costs of attendance for MA and MFA programs in general, and the long-term financial burden that this often places on students in such programs, raises larger questions about the cost of education and the ethics of offering such degrees. E.g. do the long-term outcomes of these degrees (professional advancement, personal growth) merit the high debt burden on the graduates? These are issues that warrant further discussion.
- If due to financial considerations, an MA or MFA program was 'short-lived', this could have a negative impact on students' career prospects. This is an especially important consideration in light of cost of attendance. A review and discussion of the current policies and procedures for sun-setting programs that are not financially sustainable or no longer operate effectively may be warranted, given the recent uptick in new programs.

**Vote** 14 approved, one did not vote