PROPOSAL TO CREATE A COLLEGE OF VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

The School of Music, Theatre and Dance at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) and the Department of Art, currently housed in the UNCG College of Arts and Sciences, seek approval to become the College of Visual and Performing Arts by unifying the performing and the visual arts in a single new unit. We believe the separation of the visual and performing arts on the UNCG campus has inhibited recruitment, academic program development including international program creation, interdisciplinary activities, outreach and community engagement, audience development and event marketing, reputational enhancement and fundraising. Following eighteen months of faculty and staff dialogue in the affected programs and in community forums in the School of Music, Theatre and Dance and the College of Arts and Sciences, we have become convinced that the arts would benefit from being housed in the same administrative unit. Prior to the merging of music, theatre and dance in 2010 to form the School of Music, Theatre and Dance, two consultants were brought to campus by the Provost. These consultants, Dean Kwang-Wu Kim of the University of Arizona and Dean Robert Graves of the University of Illinois, recommended the development of a “unified College of the Arts” containing the visual and performing arts. Among other reasons, the consultants felt that unification was wise because of “the changing and increasingly interactive/collaborative nature of the arts in the twenty-first century.”

THE ARTS LANDSCAPE IN NORTH CAROLINA AND BEYOND

A survey of University of North Carolina campuses indicates that the visual and performing arts are housed in single colleges on every campus in the system except UNCG. [Please see Appendix #1.] The Western Carolina University College of Fine and Performing Arts consists of the School of Stage and Screen, the School of Art and Design, the School of Music, the Bardo Arts Center, and the Fine Arts Museum. The Eastern Carolina University College of Fine Arts and Communications is comprised of the School of Arts and Design, the School of Communication, the School of Music, and the School of Theatre and Dance. The UNC Charlotte College of Arts and Architecture includes the School of Architecture, the Department of Art and Art History, the Department of Dance, the Department of Music, and the Department of Theatre. The Appalachian State University College of Fine and Applied Arts is made up of the Department of Applied Design, the Department of Art, the Department of Communication, the Department of Theatre and Dance, and the Department of Sustainable Development.

An examination of how the arts are organized on university campuses in other states shows that, in the majority of cases, the visual and performing arts are housed in the same academic unit. In Virginia for instance, George Mason University has a College of Visual and Performing Arts with Schools of Art, Dance, Music, and Theatre. James Madison University has a College of Visual and Performing Arts with Schools of Music, Theatre and Dance, and Art and Design. Virginia Commonwealth University, which has the largest arts enrollment in that state, has a School of the Arts with Departments of Art, Music, Theatre and Cinema. South Carolina’s Winthrop University has a College of Visual and Performing Arts. The University of Memphis has a College of Communication and Fine Arts. Pennsylvania State University and Temple University are similarly structured, as are universities in Illinois, Michigan, and Mississippi.
We propose that the new UNCG College of Visual and Performing Arts be composed of four units: the School of Music, the School of Art, the School of Theatre, and the School of Dance. The new College would replace the existing School of Music, Theatre and Dance with its departments of music performance, music education, music studies, theatre, and dance as well as the Department of Art. Each of the four discipline-specific schools of the new College would have a director. The directors would be the same individuals who are currently serving as department heads; this title change follows common practice and would bring UNCG into alignment with peer university structures. [Appendix #2, an organizational chart depicting the new structure.]

In its current configuration, the UNCG music program is divided into three departments each with its own head/chairperson. During the 2015 National Association of School of Music reaccreditation visit, the Team of Visitors strongly urged that the music program consider changing its organizational structure in order to achieve a stronger sense of purpose and unity. The combined music faculty met and have recommended to the Dean and Provost that music be allowed to unify under a single leader and governance structure.

THE ADVANTAGES

The unification of the performing and visual arts will offer a number of new opportunities. For instance, the very-recently-approved School of Music, Theatre and Dance BA in Arts Administration has quickly attracted a large group of both majors and minors, and projections for growth are ahead of what was initially predicted. A concentration could be developed within this BA degree in Museum Administration and Studies. Such a program would be far easier to launch, enroll and administer in a unified College. Based on student interest, the Department of Art is strongly considering implementing a new concentration in Animation and Computer Game Design. That new concentration should be interdisciplinary and music composition should be an integral part of it. This concentration would also be far easier to launch, enroll and administer in a unified College.

Both the School of Music, Theatre and Dance and the Department of Art have intense interest in developing new international programs and short courses and expanding existing programs, including summer courses and winter/spring-break programs. Identifying and cultivating international partners and appropriate locations with specialized facilities and/or cultural assets (museums, concert venues, historic sites, points of architectural interests) is both time consuming and costly. This is particularly the case with more distant countries such as China. A larger arts unit would make such program development more cost effective. Moreover, the per-student costs of international short-course programs is lower when more students are enrolled and the likelihood of this occurring is greater in a unified College.

Fundraising opportunities would also likely benefit from a unified arts College. The 2007 consultants, referred to earlier, noted that “in development fundraising, it often happens that a donor wishes to support a wide range of activities or simply the “arts” in general. Under the present system, that donor has to contact different colleges” in order to support the arts.

The School of Music, Theatre and Dance presents well over 300 arts events each year and the Department of Art has its own extensive schedule of exhibitions and special events including visiting artists and speakers. The School of Music, Theatre and Dance has a
Director of Strategic Communications on staff to assist with audience development and student recruitment communications. The Department of Art has a part-time gallery director who carries out some of the same tasks. It would be more efficient and less costly if those individuals could market the visual and performing arts together, coordinating dates, sharing mailing list, exploiting and exploring media contacts. Further, it would be far easier for University Relations to market the arts as a whole rather than the arts spread across several units.

One of the roles of a public university is to provide regional arts leadership and that is more easily accomplished working together than individually as we’ve seen with the recently-instituted 2015 Arts Summit: The Future of the Arts. The arts are commonly utilized for the joint purposes of community and economic development as well as for enhancing and reforming K-12 education. Unifying the arts on the UNCG campus would promote these purposes.

Opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration would be better advanced in the context of a single arts unit. For example, faculty could work together on creating courses or even programs in such areas as Expressive Arts Therapy, Critical Writing in the Arts (art criticism), and the new field of Social Practice in the Arts. The ability of faculty from diverse disciplines to meet “more naturally” and frequently will foster exciting new program, learning, and career opportunities for our students.

The ability of the UNCG arts disciplines to articulate with North Carolina’s community colleges is also improved through unification. This concept carries forward to the developing relationships and agreements with international university partners for the exchanges of students and faculty members.

Opportunities for the expansion of existing or new community-engaged programs would likewise be greater were the arts housed together. The School of Music, Theatre and Dance’s new Community Arts Collaborative has recently promulgated programs in the performing arts in conjunction with the Boys and Girls Clubs, City Arts, and the Salvation Army. These programs could become more comprehensive were the arts unified. The Department of Art has a new downtown Greensboro facility that could serve both the performing and the visual arts as a center for events and educational activities.

CONCLUSION

If approved, the new College of Visual and Performing Arts would be the largest and most comprehensive arts unit in the University of North Carolina System and would have the largest array of undergraduate and graduate degree programs. [Please see Appendix #1.] The new College would be strongly positioned to compete on the national and international level while providing North Carolina students with a unique and enriching set of arts-based opportunities.

Approved, this proposal will go to the UNC Board of Governors for the July meeting. Approved by the Board of Governors, the College of Visual and Performing Arts structure will be effective August 1, 2016.