

AN INTERDISCIPLINARY DOCTORAL
PROGRAM IN THE FINE ARTS

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The concept of interdisciplinary studies in the fine arts has been growing in favor in recent years, but it does not seem that widespread change has taken place in higher education curricula to reflect the philosophical arguments for the interrelationships of the arts. It is frequently acknowledged that the future of the arts and their impact on society in general depend on the recognition that the arts are one in their benefits to humankind, in their need for public support, and in their claim to a significant place in all formal educational curricula. Although there will always be a place for highly specialized study at the graduate level in each area of the arts, the field also has an urgent need for the development of leadership that will reflect awareness of the mutual problems and the impact on society of all the arts. At the college, community, state, and national levels, informed and well-trained leaders with broad understanding of the current place and future significance of the arts in public life can do much to fulfill the potential envisaged by such federal breakthroughs as the establishment of the National Endowment for the Arts.

This article describes the experience of one university in its initial attempts to recognize the need and to implement a program to meet the challenge for such leadership and training. The details of this experience should be of interest to everyone who has a concern for the future of the arts in America, and especially to other universities that may be contemplating changes in doctoral programs for the arts. Texas Tech is one of four major public universities in Texas with responsibility for offering a full range of graduate programs through the doctorate. Fairly young as graduate institutions go, Texas Tech awarded its first doctorate in 1950, but did not begin to assume its place as a university until 1965, when under state mandate it became one of Texas' four major graduate centers. Today, all six of the university's colleges offer doctoral programs, and the schools of law and medicine are well established.

Only master's degrees were offered in three areas of arts as Texas Tech entered the 1970's. Departments of art, music, theatre arts had developed solid reputations for graduate study were graduating annually a modest number of master's level students. Both art and music were making bids for approval to offer the doctorate in their respective areas. The dean of the Graduate School was sympathetic to the need for doctoral study in the arts but was not convinced that there was sufficient justification for two new specialized degree programs, either in terms of the market for graduates or the need for such programs in the state. He had an idea, though, that the university might make a really significant contribution if it could pioneer an interdisciplinary program, drawing on the collective strength of all the arts departments to develop a curriculum that would produce really informed spokesmen and leaders for the arts in general. Accordingly, he appointed a broad-based committee to study the feasibility of such a program, and to develop a proposal for the consideration of the Graduate Council. A proposal was eventually drafted and submitted, and it was approved by all of the reviewing councils of the university and submitted to the State Coordinating Board. The Board approved the proposal in 1972, with favorable comments about the interdisciplinary character of the program.

As first approved, the program called for 30 semester hours of formal course work beyond the master's degree in one of the major areas, as well as courses in each of the other areas and in philosophy and museum science. Courses in these latter departments were in aesthetics and museum administration. In addition, the student was to develop a "collateral" field of at least six semester hours of work beyond the above in some area related to the major. The program was designed to culminate in a dissertation, but provided a choice of one of three options: traditional research, a formal report of a study growing out of an internship, or the development and solution of a significant professional problem. In each case, the study would be reported in a formal written dissertation, produced according to the conventional standards of scholarship and documentation.

Inasmuch as the program was not housed within a single department, it was administered by a steering committee made up of two members from each of the three major departments. After about five years of more or less autonomous activity, the committee was brought into the Graduate School, under the chairmanship of an associate dean, to provide better communication and advocacy for

the program, as well as to streamline the admissions and program- development activities.

About the same time the steering committee was brought into Graduate School, it began a thorough review of the program, partly because the need for some change was evident and partly because some observers believed that after five years' experience with a unique program, undertaken without the benefit of models at sister institutions, we should assess our successes and failures and accordingly shift into whatever new modes the record might suggest. The review included input from all of the graduate faculty members involved in the program and feedback from the first 10 graduates of the program. Although much of the feedback was positive, the committee soon determined that certain changes were needed, foremost of which was the strengthening of the interdisciplinary sense of identity and purpose among students and faculty.

Accordingly, the core requirement was increased from one to two courses in each the arts areas outside the major. These courses were redesigned so that the first in each sequence would provide a survey of the literature, theory, and practice in the discipline and the second would concern itself with the issues, organizations, pedagogical programs and general professional activities in the field. In addition to these changes, a fine arts seminar was added, as a means of bringing doctoral students together on a regular basis for interdisciplinary focus on various timely issues and concerns in the arts.

Changes also were made in the examination structure.

Whereas written qualifying examinations had been required in both the major and the interdisciplinary core, it was decided to make the core examination entirely oral with broad representation in the faculty examiners, while retaining the written examinations in the major. It was felt that the kind of learning experience the core activities fostered could better be assessed in the oral setting with more opportunity for probing and feedback.

Another important point of consideration in the review of the program was the role of the philosophy faculty. It was mutually agreed that the course in aesthetics was a crucial part of the program, providing the best single opportunity of all the course work for integration of advanced aesthetic theory across the arts. Faculty members teaching the course felt the need for more time to accomplish their desired goals, and consideration was given to a second course in philosophy. For various reasons, that change was held abeyance, but the committee recommended, and the Graduate Dean appointed, a member of the philosophy faculty as a regular member

of the steering committee. Some discussion occurred, in fact, adding philosophy as a fourth major area of the program, with the idea that students might be offered the option of a major in aesthetics, as well as music, art, or theatre arts. Some such development may yet be possible in the future, though it was not pursued restructuring of the program.

Through spring 1981, there had been 32 graduates of the program, 8 with majors in Art, 14 in Music, and 3 in Theatre Arts. These figures approximately reflect the differences in the size of the faculty in each of the three departments. Currently, about 50 students are active in the program, most from within the region but a respectable number from distant states and other countries. The graduates have included students from Taiwan and Pakistan, and one student from New Zealand is currently involved in an internship at the Polynesian Cultural Center in Hawaii. Another student from Japan is now completing a dissertation applying the principles of the Suzuki violin teaching methods to visual arts education. *Most of these students have been attracted by the unique character of the program; currently we are not able to offer any fellowships and the only support provided is in the form of teaching assistantships. Nearly all of the students who wish such assignments are appointed, for either one-quarter or one-half time duties, at least during the residence year. The residence requirement is the standard for doctoral programs in general, one full year of study, at least 24 semester hours during a given 12-month period, with no more half-time employment.*

In the summer of 1981, at the end of the first nine years of the program, a survey was taken of the 32 graduates up to that point. Questions were posed ranging from an inquiry about previous position, through a request to evaluate the course work, to comments on general strengths and weaknesses of the program, to an assessment of the relative value of the program in aiding career goals. The survey also provided an open invitation to offer additional comments. Respondents were invited to leave the return anonymous if they wished, and to leave blank any questions that seemed to call for information that would reveal identity. Most of the respondents chose to reveal their identities, and a good number wrote lengthy comments in addition to answering the questions. Twenty-one of the 32 questionnaires were returned and all of them provided usable information. Almost without exception, the responses were thoughtful, full, and evidently candid. There were criticisms of the program, especially from the earlier graduates, ranging all the way from a

perceived lack of cohesiveness and focus to concern for the relevance of certain courses. But overall, there readily appeared an enthusiastic conviction about the unique worth of the program and a feeling that it should be more widely known. One graduate wrote as follows:

The Fine Arts Program is a unique course of study. To me, it is not just a presentation of the arts as interdisciplinary simply because they belong to the family of art, but a wonderful and exciting realization of the interdiscipline of structure and form which exists in the various art forms.

A few students indicated that some college and university programs were not as receptive to their interdisciplinary training as might be desirable, tending to favor applicants with more traditional degrees, but generally, the graduates had found ready acceptance and opportunity to utilize their broad training.

Most of the graduates entered the program with some prior academic connection, hoping to enhance their capabilities or to advance in the field. Nine indicated that their career goals upon entering the program were permanent faculty positions at the college or university level. Five specifically sought openings in fine arts administration, in either academic or other agencies.

As of the time of the survey, two of the 21 respondents occupied roles of chairman and dean of fine arts divisions in colleges, one was chairman of a college speech department, 15 were teaching at college level, one was chairman of a high school arts division, one was director of a Native American Studies program, one had recently resigned from a college position, and another was composing while seeking appropriate employment. Twelve of the respondents indicated that their doctoral program was the significant factor in acquiring their present positions; seven indicated that it was not but this may be explained by the fact that approximately that number returned to positions previously held.

The unique nature of the program was apparently the most significant attraction for the first 32 graduates. Fifteen listed the interdisciplinary aspect as the most influential factor in their decision. Six listed the location of the program, and others mentioned program flexibility and faculty reputation. This response was no great surprise, inasmuch as the faculty for a new doctoral program is not so likely to possess a national reputation as is an older, established faculty, and the special characteristics of Tech's program are the most likely to receive emphasis in recruiting or publicity. Eleven of the respondents indicated that they first learned of the program through professors, three became aware of it at professional meet-

ings, and only one said that first notice came through a journal reference to the program. A number of the graduates offered the opinion that the program needs to be more widely publicized. This response should probably have been expected from the first graduates of the program. Current applications would indicate that as the program matures, and as graduates are getting out into the field, there is a more general awareness of both the existence and distinctive nature of the program.

The graduates generally rated their course work in the program from adequate to superior, with a slightly larger number (15) the major area rather than core (10) or collateral (11) courses as superior. Fifteen of the 21 respondents rated their curriculum advisement from adequate to excellent, and the same number rated dissertation advisement in the same way. Three of the respondents reflected dissatisfaction with their counsel in both areas. Ten indicated no need for career and placement counsel, seven felt that it was adequate to their needs, one felt that it was poor, and three did not respond to this item. These responses seem to indicate a general perception of effectiveness in the program's courses of study and in faculty counsel, though, as perhaps might be expected, there were a few with less sanguine retrospective feelings. A few of the respondents did not feel that their dissertation was terribly significant, indicating "some," "not very," and "somewhat," but the rest ranged from "central" to "extremely" in their responses. Only two of the respondents had participated in internships; both rated their experience very significant. In view of continuing reservations about residence requirements in doctoral programs across the country and a general resistance to the cost of a year's residence on the part of many who had to take temporary leave from full-salaried positions, it is interesting to note that only two of the 21 respondents felt that the requirement was not justified. All others indicated that "yes," the requirement "was justified in of its contribution to the quality of their programs." This response was of particular gratification to Graduate School officials, as well as to most of the program faculty members, who insist that every doctoral program must include a period of sustained maximum involvement with program faculty, students, and other campus resources.

Sixteen respondents rated the general resources and facilities "good" to "excellent" (11 indicated "excellent"), while three reflected some dissatisfaction. Asked to identify perceived weaknesses program, respondents offered widely varying conclusions, from "too

broad in scope" to "not enough work in other arts areas" to "too much flexibility." Given the range and sometimes contradictory nature of the responses, it was difficult to make any generalizations. When asked to comment on the strengths of the program, respondents showed greater agreement. Fifteen cited the interdisciplinary and flexible character of the program, with several others mentioning faculty and library. One student saw as the program's greatest strength the lack of a language requirement. We hope the response was an attempt at humor.

Asked if they would follow the same course again, 15 responded "yes." Others registered some reservation and three indicated "no." Responses to the final question, "can you recommend the program to others?" were almost the same as to the previous question, a not unexpected result. Two understandably indicated that they could recommend the program to persons with appropriate interests, that is, in such an interdisciplinary focus. We were pleased with the affirmative responses. The others raised rather serious questions, attenuated somewhat by the knowledge that some entered the program merely because of its proximity to their employment rather than because they were sold on its interdisciplinary nature. Another disappointed graduate had expected the degree to provide him with a ready opening into some administrative position and it did not. The response to this question does suggest the need for ensuring that all persons considering entry into the program clearly understand and be committed to its unique nature. As the program matures, we believe that this problem is more or less being resolved.

Each respondent was invited to provide additional comments and these offered some of the most interesting aspects of the survey. Some made brief comments (such as, "on reflection, it is a *fine* program. It is quite well respected nationally. I'm proud of the Ph.D. in Fine Arts degree at Texas Tech University.") Others provided full pages of suggestions, commendations, and reactions. One student thought the qualifying examinations were too long and strenuous, "a bit of overkill." But the same respondent had high praise for the rest of the program, saying the "program is unique and provides a valuable degree alternative for faculty and administrators who have found satisfaction in interdisciplinary activities."

Another wrote: "I thoroughly approve the modifications which I am aware have taken place since the last evaluation, and realize that some of the problems (particularly in advisement) have been solved as the program matured, being peculiar only to the first graduating class."

Another graduate, now in a major midwestern university, wrote:

The flexibility of the program with an individualized curriculum is, in my opinion, one of its greatest assets. The interdisciplinary approach is another. I understand the core requirements have been reevaluated and revised... I feel extremely good about my experience. I believe it certainly helped prepare my background for the well-rounded, comprehensive relatedness aspect of the program I am in here at _____, where I am not only a theorist, but also a musicologist and performer.

Current students seem equally enthusiastic with the program. Periodic meetings are held with all of the faculty and students, and opportunity is given for frank discussion of the aims, needs, and progress of the program. Although in the early stages of the program there appeared to be a desire on the part of some faculty members and many of the students to play down the interdisciplinary aspects in favor of more traditional specialization, it has evident, especially since the fine arts core was strengthened, that tendency has changed and that both faculty and students are rather fervently committed to the unique interdisciplinary thrust. Although further changes and strengthening will no doubt evolve through time, we believe that the program now provides *both* the desired depth in the major area *and* breadth across all the arts.

A major concern has been in making the general academic world aware that although our students study across the arts, the program is not an exercise in dilettantism. Each candidate develops a program of study in his major area of the arts that is essential equivalent to the curriculum he would pursue at an institution offering a traditional doctorate in that area. The Fine Arts core of the program is in addition to this major area work. But the ideal of the total program is that study in the major will be informed by interdisciplinary arts perspectives and that the core will be enhanced by the specialized knowledge of the major field.

We see increasing evidence that this ideal is being realized, overcoming earlier concern that core and major study requirements were pursued as separate and only marginally related components. At least three things have contributed to the realization of this ideal: (1) the strengthening of the core requirement to include greater exposure to the "other arts," (2) the aesthetics course in the Department of Philosophy, which encourages an interdisciplinary approach to criticism of the arts, and (3) the fine arts seminar, which brings together on a weekly basis all of the students in the program for mutual experience of art and exchange of varying perspectives. This seminar frequently includes attendance and later critical discussion of plays, exhibits, and concerts as regular parts of the course.

Now in its tenth year, the program has profited from continuous evaluation and change. While it has not, perhaps, revolutionized doctoral training in the arts, it is providing one model for solid yet innovative fine arts education at the highest level of graduate study. It was recently reviewed by three national authorities under the auspices of the state's Coordinating Board. Campus faculty and administrators had the distinct impression at the beginning of the reviewers' visit that skepticism and likely negative criticism were in the atmosphere. After all, here was a program operating outside the proven traditional mold. The reviewers' attitudes changed visibly during the visit, and their final report reflected enthusiasm and clear approval.

The consultants hope that the Ph.D. in Fine Arts as developed at Texas Tech University will serve as a national model for future development at other universities. ... Without question, this program should be accorded priority within the state university system because of its uniqueness.

Needless to say, the report was gratifying to the participants in the program.

One recommendation of the visiting reviewers reflects a need the steering committee has for some time recognized and had already begun to initiate attempts to fulfill. The reviewers wrote that the program

should be looking in the future toward bringing to the faculty individuals qualified to direct research in interdisciplinary studies appropriate to this degree program. The program has been, up to this time, directed by faculty members with specializations limited to their respective disciplines. The consultants believe that at least one position should be made available for a faculty member with a broadly based background in fine arts.

The logic of this recommendation is apparent, and an attempt is being made to secure a distinguished leader with a fine arts generalist background, not only to direct research, but to provide interdisciplinary leadership for all areas of the program.

Funding is also being pursued for several fellowships to attract and support more outstanding students in a national recruiting program. This effort coincides with another of the consultants' recommendations, and, if successful, will provide a significant thrust to the program and its visibility.

Our conclusion then, after thorough evaluation and inventory, is that the Fine Arts Doctoral Program at Texas Tech is fulfilling the unique role for which it was implemented. It has demonstrated its validity and might well serve, as its reviewers suggest, as a model for other universities across the nation.

We make no claim that all doctoral programs in the fine arts should follow this model; there

clearly is a need for the more traditional programs. But a few programs like the one at Texas Tech, distributed across the country, might well succeed in meeting a national need in providing new leadership and advocacy for the fine arts in America.