Texas A&M—Corpus Christi

External Review for the Department of Music

Reviewer: Dr. Joe Stuessy

Date of Visit: March 27-28, 2008
I. Mission/goals/vision

The mission statement for the Department of Music is provided on page 5 of the Self-Study. It is also included on page 108 of the university’s undergraduate catalog (2006-2007). The mission statement appears to be appropriate for the department of music and is consistent with the University’s Institutional Vision and Mission as stated on page 9 of the catalog.

The department’s vision statement is in three parts. Level One sets forth a plan to achieve parity with other institutions in the Coastal Bend. Level Two identifies the improvements that would be needed to become a “first choice” program in the region. “Region” is not defined, but one might assume either the state of Texas or perhaps South/Central Texas. Level Three identifies improvements that would be needed to become a “first choice” program in an area that extends beyond Texas.

Given the number of undergraduate/graduate music programs in Texas (over 60)—including large and significant programs at the University of North Texas, the University of Texas at Austin, the University of Houston, Texas Tech, and Texas State, not to mention major programs in surrounding states (e.g., University of Oklahoma, Louisiana State University)—Vision Level Three appears to be so remote that it is hardly more than an unrealistic dream, at least in the reasonable future.

Depending on the definition of “region,” Vision Level Two may or may not be realistic. If defined as Central/South Texas, it becomes quite relevant.

Vision Level One is extremely relevant and realistic. In the discussions below, the reviewer will refer to items articulated in Vision Level One and Vision Level Two. Broadly speaking, the reviewer will suggest that any and all initiatives related to the creation of a Marching Band be eliminated. It will also be recommended that there be reconsideration of the prioritization of added faculty positions as articulated in Vision Levels One and Two.

II. Observations

A. Faculty

The faculty of the Department of Music is well qualified, very dedicated, and remarkably versatile. There is a strong element of collegiality that will prove to be one of the department’s greatest strengths. The level of collegiality that appears to characterize this faculty is relatively uncommon, unfortunately, in music faculties. Such collegiality should be jealously protected for it is only with everyone pulling in the same direction that the goals articulated in Vision Levels One and Two can be achieved.
Ironically, the faculty’s versatility, while it is an obvious strength, is also the source of one of the department’s most significant problems. Out of necessity, a significant percentage of the music faculty is teaching in secondary and even tertiary areas of expertise and experience. This practice is made possible only because of the versatility of the individuals involved. While admirable, this is not a good situation and, unless corrected, will deter the realization of either Vision Level One or Two.

Perhaps the most eloquent paragraph in the entire Self-Study is contained in Section VII.C. (Summary: recommendations). This paragraph is so accurate, so well stated, and so critical that it is quoted below.

“The diversity of the talents of the faculty, whether musical or intellectual, makes it possible (but not necessarily desirable) for faculty to teach in secondary and even tertiary areas of “expertise.” It is important for the reader to comprehend precisely what this means. In the music faculty’s experience, it appears that many senior administrators find that it is quite acceptable for the music faculty to teach in most distantly related (dare we say distantly qualified) areas. For example, it seems acceptable for a music faculty member who has earned a doctorate in a particular performance medium to teach courses in music theory or musicology (music literature and history) even though it is not their major field of study. Imagine what it would be like for an “earth scientist” (e.g., a geologist) to teach other science courses such as meteorology or oceanography, etc. As an earth scientist, s/he may not be as well qualified to teach these courses as someone with a Ph.D. in these fields. If it is not acceptable in other disciplines, why then is it acceptable in music? Shouldn’t music majors be taught by faculty whose principal expertise is reflected in the courses they teach?”

The obvious answer to the question above is a resounding “yes.”

Unfortunately, the theme of the summary paragraph quoted above is contradicted by the prioritization of new faculty lines as presented in Vision Level One. The additional faculty positions as listed in Table I (page 10) as the priority hires under Vision Level One include specialists in French horn, double reeds (oboe and bassoon), trumpet, trombone, low strings, saxophone, voice, and percussion. Several of these positions have already been added (e.g., percussion, trumpet, voice).
But consider the following:

- The overwhelming majority of music majors are Music Ed majors.
- For the BA degree, 31 credits (66%) of the 47 music credits are in music theory and history.
- For the BM Performance degree, 31 (42%) of the 73 music credits are in music theory and history.
- For the BM Teacher Certification degree, 31 (45%) of the 69 music credits are in music theory and history.

In other words, for all three degrees offered by the Department of Music, music theory and history equals from 42-66% of the music requirements. For music ed majors, music education courses are obviously the central focus. One wonders why the music faculty places a higher priority on hiring a bassoon teacher than on adding a faculty position in music ed, music theory, or music history!

Of course, the Vision Level One statement admits that “studio specialists may also be qualified to teach…other courses,” but this is a direct contradiction to the Summary statement quoted above.

The conclusion: the next music hires should be in the areas of music education, music history, and music theory.

The TAMU-CC Department of Music is in danger of drifting toward a very odd model for a music program—one that resembles an octopus with eight arms and no body. Considering the overwhelming number of music ed majors and the preponderance of music theory and history in all three music curricula, one must conclude that these three areas are, in fact, the “body of the octopus.” Of similar core importance are major ensembles (e.g., bands, choirs, and orchestras). Branching out from this core are the multiple areas of performance instruction (e.g., trumpet, clarinet, oboe, violin, sax, etc.). The sequence of hires in these areas is usually determined by real or potential enrollment.

If the hiring plan proposed in Vision Level One were to be realized, TAMU-CC would have a full complement of “arms” (specifically, the current specialists in flute, violin, clarinet, guitar, voice, percussion, trumpet, and low brass plus the proposed specialists in double reeds, French horn, trombone, low strings, and sax). Only in Vision Level Two would the department hope to add faculty members in the core areas (theory, history, and music education).

Deans and Provosts are not usually swayed by the “let’s build it and they will come” philosophy. They are reticent to hire a faculty member and
then hope that the appropriate students will show up. Rather, the music
department must be able to demonstrate, by actual enrollment, the critical
need for a given position. Thus, if and when there are say, 10-18
saxophone students, a strong case can be made for hiring a sax specialist.
Conversely, the teaching loads (and students) for faculty positions in
music education, music history, and music theory are already present.

These remarks must be tempered by certain realities as articulated in the
Self-Study:

- P. 17: “Adjunct instructors are not effective recruiters, nor are students
  attracted to study with adjuncts.”
- P. 8: “there are few qualified adjunct instructors available in the
  region….”

Given these considerations, the Department’s hiring plan will need to be a
blend that takes all these factors into consideration. Tenure track faculty
hires in basic areas such as theory, music ed, and music history need to be
addressed as soon as possible. Once that is accomplished, the Department
can resume hiring performance specialists to the tenure track based on
factors such as enrollment needs and availability (or the lack thereof) of
qualified adjuncts in the region.

Summary: I recommend modifying the faculty projections in Vision
Levels One and Two so that positions in music education, music history
(perhaps someone who can teach one of the performance areas as well),
and music theory become the highest priorities.

Although the Vision Level One statement calls for 2-3 hires annually, this
seems unlikely in today’s environment. If the university could agree to
hire these three positions over the next three years, and plan to add
performance specialists as enrollments dictate, the Department of Music
would have a very strong faculty profile by 2015.

B. Students

The reviewer met with a very impressive group of students for over an
hour. They were articulate and enthusiastic, and were obviously
passionate in their dedication to the TAMU-CC Department of Music and
very anxious to see it continue to mature.

The students raised several issues that appear to have some substance.
Most are addressed in Section IV of this report (Conclusions:
Recommendations for Improvement). One issue, however, consumed
most of the meeting and was unanimously and fervently expressed: the
state of the advising system.
The students made it clear (as does this reviewer) that their complaints had nothing to do with the capabilities of the specific individual now charged with advising music majors in the College. Rather, their complaint is that this person is so overloaded that it is impossible for her to discharge her responsibilities in a satisfactory way.

It appears that the person who advises music majors must also advise students in art, theatre, and communications. This creates an advising load of approximately 650 students. It also involves four very different and extremely complex programs. There are three basic curricula in music alone, one of which is the teacher certification curriculum (which is unusually complex and constantly changing).

Students indicated that there were problems with the most basic aspects of advising (e.g., making appointments, getting responses to email inquiries, etc.). When, in frustration, they turned to music faculty members for curricular advice, the College advisor sometimes reacted defensively (for perfectly understandable reasons).

The advising system, at least for music majors, appears to be broken. The obvious answer (additional staff) may be unrealistic. One possible solution might be to survey all comparable advising loads across the campus to determine if some reshuffling of existing personnel could result in more equitable advising loads.

C. Curriculum/program

The three curricula offered by the Department of Music appear to be well designed and in compliance with the standards of the National Association of Schools of Music (NASM). There are a few relatively minor items that could be addressed.

- The Bachelor of Music with Teacher Certification (instrumental track) would be enhanced by the addition of a Marching Band Techniques course. A significant number of music majors are following this curriculum. It is likely that a significant number of these students will be expected to administer a marching band at some point in their careers. Competencies in drill design, band administration, and similar topics should be addressed in a full course (not merely a unit in a broader course). The course should be offered in fall semesters so that students could be assigned to various local high schools to work as “assistants” to band directors during the marching season. [Note: this should probably be a two credit hour course, which may create some difficulties given the current pressure to decrease the hours in various curricula; the current design requires 132 hours; some music ed
programs in the state have been approved at 134 hours, but this is the proverbial “moving target.”

- NASM does not require auditions for entering music majors as it once did. However, it is clear that NASM prefers auditions where possible. There appears to be nothing that prohibits the initiation of an audition process at the beginning of the student’s academic career. In current practice, the Basic Music Skills Assessment (discussed below, Section IV.A) serves as the audition. But this occurs at the end of the sophomore year. This means that some students (i.e., those who never had a realistic chance of completing a music degree) will have wasted two years of their time, energy, and money (not to mention faculty load time for private instruction) when an earlier assessment could have set them onto a more realistic academic course. Music programs that have installed audition systems have found that enrollments actually increase over a period of several years because better music students will tend to prefer programs that are more selective.

- There appears to be an error in the catalog (BM in Performance); the hours do not add up correctly.

- Instrumental techniques courses are currently offered only in the summer. Students expressed displeasure with this (due to both work/personal conflicts in the summer and the fact that the course content is difficult to cover in an abbreviated format).

- Students were unhappy that they were required to be in large ensembles every semester, even after the minimum of eight credits had been satisfied. This policy is in place more for the benefit of the department than for the students. They understand this, but resent having to pay tuition for this “extra” requirement. The reviewer suggests that the chair/faculty engage in a dialogue with representative students to see if a satisfactory compromise can be reached (e.g., small “performance grants” for participation beyond the minimum requirement).

D. Facilities and Resources

The Performing Arts Center

In this reviewer’s opinion, the single greatest resource for the TAMU-CC Department of Music is the Performing Arts Center. This facility has established an enviable reputation throughout the state of Texas (not only because of its overall aesthetic appeal, but due to its excellent acoustics). This facility is a real gem and should be a source of considerable and justifiable pride for the entire university.
The Center for the Arts

Unfortunately, the Center for the Arts does not merit the same reputation. Even at its current size, the music department appears to have reached a critical point relative to its available space. Any further growth (which appears to be both inevitable and desirable) will exceed the current facility’s capacity. It appears that the Center for the Arts is simply inadequate to support the needs of three vital areas (music, art, and theatre). Practice rooms, classrooms, and faculty offices/studios are already at capacity usage.

It appears that the best (only?) solution is a rather expensive and ambitious one: namely, a new facility for music and theatre. The realization of such a facility would allow the art program to expand throughout the current Center for the Arts. Thus space problems for three areas could be solved by one new facility.

It would be best if any new music facility were to include a small performance space (e.g., a Recital Hall seating 300-400). Many music performances attract small audiences (e.g., 75-200). Even with the three-tiered design of the Performing Arts Center, seating 150 people in a 1400-seat hall has problematic effects on performers and audiences alike. When those same 150 people are seated in a 300-seat hall, the effect is far more positive.

There are apparently problems in the current facility other than mere space. Sound transmission problems are, at times, severe. This will inevitably be a concern when NASM visits the campus in five years. Also, there are reports of mold problems (and thus the related health concerns).

In this reviewer’s opinion, the university has taken a laudable first step by building the Performing Arts Center. It is now time to finish the job by creating a companion facility for the music and theatre programs.

Equipment

Recent infusions of funds have been successful in providing a favorable inventory of musical instruments for the Department of Music. However, one area remains problematic. A former instructor in percussion, facing a paucity of university-owned instruments, generously provided his own personal equipment for the use of the department and its students. While this served the immediate situation, it led to the inevitable crisis. When that individual left the university, his personal instruments went with him (naturally). The result is a deficiency in university-owned percussion
equipment. The department is encouraged to create a prioritized list of needed percussion equipment and ask the Dean to explore possible sources of funding.

Library

There appear to be several issues concerning the music faculty and the Bell Library. Both problems may be relatively easy to resolve.

The first “disconnect” has to do with the full expenditure of music allocations. According to the Self-Study, in both 2005 and 2006, budget allocations for music acquisitions were not fully expended (see page 118 of the Self-Study). When asked, the library staff member responsible for music acquisitions assured this reviewer that all allocations had been expended in full. Obviously, both positions cannot be correct.

The second issue concerns the CD collection. The library maintains a “closed stack” policy in this area (closed even to faculty members). The reason for the closed stack policy, of course, has to do with security (theft or loss of CDs). There is an inevitable implication that the security concerns might involve faculty. Not only is this offensive, it creates some inefficiency when faculty members seek to “browse” the CD collection. Even if electronic browsing becomes possible, there is something to be said for maintaining the ability for faculty members to physically browse the collection.

In this reviewer’s opinion, these two issues could be resolved if the library staff member were to be invited to attend a music faculty meeting. With an open and honest dialogue, there is a good chance that satisfactory answers could be discovered for both issues.

Scholarship Resources

All relevant persons within the university must understand that the music department is more comparable to athletics than it is to other academic units. Like athletics, the music department must engage in the recruiting wars on a full-time basis. Like athletics, music is unable to sit back and see who enrolls; music must actively recruit a specific number and type of student. Just as the football coach must have a quarterback, a couple of running backs, a few wide receivers, and a talented linebacker, music must attract a certain number of clarinetists, oboists, cellists, and flutists. Just as there are all-state athletes, there are music students who have made all-state band, choir, and orchestra. When these top athletes and musicians are identified, every university in Texas (and beyond) tries to recruit these students. Among the important elements in the athletic and music recruiter’s arsenal is scholarship assistance.
An athletic program with inadequate scholarship funding will be noncompetitive. The same applies to music.

Scholarship funding (in athletics and music) must be stable. Annual fluctuations wreck the program. The timing of allocations is critical. All music programs in Texas hold auditions in the early spring (February and March). By the end of March, scholarship offers have been distributed, usually with a two- or three-week accept/reject deadline.

This year, the TAMU-CC Department of Music learned of its scholarship allocation on March 26. That is simply too late to compete. The top music students have already received and accepted their scholarship offers at other universities.

To be competitive, one can assume that about half of the students in a music department will be on a music scholarship and the average scholarship will be $1500-$2000 (public institutions). So in the case of TAMU-CC, an annual scholarship budget of $75,000 to $100,000 would be competitive. Whatever the amount, it must be stable from year to year and be known to the department no later than the fall semester each year.

Students actually reported having their scholarships lowered not because of any actions on their part (e.g., GPA problems, course load problems, etc.) but because the department’s scholarship funding had been decreased. This is very poor policy.

Music scholarships are usually offered on a four-year basis with certain criteria in place that must be met each semester in order to retain one’s scholarship.

The solution, of course, is for the music department to have its own set of scholarship accounts (endowed and expendable). These funds would be dedicated to music and would be stable from year to year. The department could know its account balances at any point in the year and budget appropriately for the next round of auditions.

If the university expects the Music Department to be competitive, it needs to charge its Development Office with identifying and developing music scholarship funding, both endowed and annually expendable. Until that happens, the music program will be recruiting with both hands tied behind its back.
Recruiting Resources

As indicated above, scholarships are a critical element in the recruiting wars in music. But scholarships are not the only element. The Music Department must generate a reputation throughout Texas that will make students want to come to TAMU-CC. One of the key ways to do this is to have large ensembles tour the state, performing in community colleges and high schools.

On such tours, everyone is a recruiter. This includes not only the ensemble director, but also the ensemble students and any music faculty members that accompany the tour (perhaps as soloists or small ensemble performers).

These tours increase awareness of not just the music program, but also the university as a whole. In fact, experience tells us that of the students who eventually enroll as a result of hearing a touring ensemble, only half actually become music majors. The other half enroll in other areas of the university and, in some cases, opt to play in the band or sing in the choir.

Therefore, funding travel for large music ensembles is not only a recruiting strategy for the Music Department, it is a recruiting strategy for the University.

You can be sure that high school students in South/Central Texas are regularly visited by ensembles from UNT, UT, UTSA, UH, Texas State, and others. If TAMU-CC has no presence among these visiting performers, many high school students will assume that there is no music program at TAMU-CC. As the saying goes, “out of sight, out of mind.”

Large ensemble tours are expensive (more so every year) and logistically complex. A reasonable plan is to have a rotation plan that sends one large ensemble on tour each year.

The Dean mentioned that the department has never really asked for funding for ensemble touring. That might be because the task of administering a weeklong tour for forty students is a daunting task (especially for an overloaded faculty). But such tours would seem to be necessary to generate increased interest within the recruiting district.

III. Outcome Assessment

Learning outcomes appear to be well developed by the Department of Music. Pages 68-78 of the Self-Study articulate the desired learning outcomes for each of the three degree programs offered and indicate the specific skills and knowledge that are needed to realize
the desired outcomes. The Self-Study indicates the curricular component that addresses each knowledge and skill.

Each degree requires a capstone experience that requires the student to synthesize his/her various experiences in music. For the Bachelor of Arts and the Bachelor of Music Performance degrees, the capstone experience is the Senior Recital. For the Bachelor of Music with Teacher Certification, the capstone experience is the student teaching experience.

The Self-Study also describes several assessment measures. These indicate the very positive maturation of the music program. For example, music students have achieved a 100% pass rate on the last eleven administrations of the ExCet/TExES exam (2004-2007). By comparison, the pass rate during the years 1991-1998 was roughly 75%.

Another indicator of student success is the impressive list of graduates during the years from 2002-2006 who moved into the music profession or graduate school. It appears that at least 75% of the music graduates are actually using their undergraduate degree as teachers, church musicians, or in graduate studies. That is a very favorable percentage.

Much of this success appears to be correlated to the Basic Music Skills Assessment (see pages 78-83 of the Self-Study). The BMSA is, in effect, a kind of barrier exam by which a music student moves from the lower division to the upper division. It is a very well designed barrier that takes a comprehensive look at each student. It involves a written statement by the student, a performance proficiency jury, a sight-singing/aural identification exam, a piano proficiency, and an interview. The department is to be commended for designing this kind of comprehensive process. It not only meets, but exceeds standards required by NASM for student assessment at this level.

IV. Conclusions

A. Strengths: Identify practices or activities that should be maintained and enhanced

[Note: if items listed below have been discussed earlier in this report, they are simply listed here with citations to the earlier discussions; items not discussed above are briefly described here.]

- Performing Arts Center (see section II.D above)
- Music Faculty (see section II.A above)
- An experienced music executive who maintains a collegial and mutually supportive atmosphere in the department.
- A supportive Dean who obviously understands the unique nature of music programs and has a firm grasp of the history of the department at TAMU-CC; he has created a very enviable reputation for fairness.
- The Basic Music Skills Assessment (see section III above)
• A high quality electronic piano laboratory; this includes 20 Roland student units plus an instructor unit; the central role of piano proficiency is well served by this facility.

• The Creative Activities and Scholarly Enrichment program offers valuable release time to enable faculty to pursue their creative/scholarly agendas; as the university continues to mature, expectations will surely increase for creative and scholarly achievements for faculty members; the CASE program makes these increased expectations realistic.

• Unique offerings in music business and music technology; with over 60 baccalaureate music programs in Texas and over 600 nationwide, some distinguishing points of uniqueness are essential; the department’s offerings in music business and music technology fulfill that need.

• An increasing number of music students are taking full-time loads; this is a sign of maturation by the Department of Music.

• An increasing presence in the community; because of the activities of the faculty and students, the department appears to be establishing a greater recognition factor in Corpus Christi and the Coastal Bend area.

• A favorable record of music graduates moving into the profession or graduate school (see section III above)

• Learning outcomes are well developed for each degree program (see section III above)

• Dramatic improvement in results for the ExCet/TExES exams (see section III above)

• Student organizations (see Self-Study pages 94-99) are a necessary and advantageous element of the Department of Music.

• The location of the university is an obvious asset; Corpus Christi is an appealing and desirable place for both students and faculty; the specific location of the campus is especially appealing.

• The instrumental inventory (see section II.D, “Equipment”); but also see section IV.B below.

• Recruitment efforts as described in the Self-Study (pages 89-90) are appropriate and successful; but also see section IV.B below.

B. Weaknesses: Identify concerns that impact program quality (attempt to prioritize the top five if more than 5 concerns are identified)

[Note: all of the items listed below have been discussed earlier in this report; they are simply listed here with citations to the earlier discussions; the listing below is in priority order.]

• The university needs to hire new faculty members whose primary areas of expertise and experience are in the fields of music education, music history, and music theory (in that order) as soon as possible—preferably within the next three years. Theory and history are core areas of all three music degrees; music education is, by far, the most popular degree offered by the department. See a full discussion of this concern in section II.A
above. This weakness (especially in music education) will inevitably create problems at the next NASM accreditation evaluation.

- The university needs to build a more appropriate facility to house both music and theater—a facility that matches the aesthetic and utilitarian impact of the Performing Arts Center. See a full discussion of this concern in section II.D, “The Center for the Arts,” above.
- The university needs to provide stable and timely allocations for music scholarships. If adequate and stable music scholarships are not available on a timely basis, the Department of Music will be placed at a severe competitive disadvantage. See a full discussion of this concern in section II.D, “Scholarship Resources,” above.
- The university needs to provide funding to send large music ensembles on tour annually. This will have positive implications for general university recruiting as well as music recruiting. See a full discussion of this concern in section II.D, “Recruiting Resources,” above.
- The university needs to provide a better system of advising for music majors. See a full discussion of this concern in section II.B, above.
- The university needs to provide an adequate percussion instrument inventory for the Department of Music. See a full discussion of this concern in section II.D, “Equipment,” above.

C. Recommendation: Identify items/parameters for improvement and suggest modifications that may lead to improvement

[Note: My primary concerns/recommendations are listed above in section IV.B. The items listed below are of some importance, but are less critical and are more easily accomplished.]

- Consider requiring auditions for all entering music majors (i.e., prior to their first semester). See a full discussion of this recommendation in section II.C.
- Consider adding a course in Marching Band Techniques to the Bachelor of Music with Teacher Certification curriculum. See a full discussion of this recommendation in section II.C.
- Consider offering the instrumental techniques courses in the long semesters (rather than the summer). See a full discussion of this recommendation in section II.C.
- Consider inviting a representative of the Bell Library to a music faculty meeting in order to have a dialogue about two concerns: (1) an apparent miscommunication regarding the full expenditure of allocations for music acquisitions; and (2) the policy of closing the CD stacks to music faculty members. See a full discussion of this recommendation in section II.D, “Library.”
- Apply some creative thinking to the students’ concerns about requiring ensembles every semester, even when the minimum degree requirement has been met. Perhaps a dialogue with some representative students
would be advantageous. See a full discussion of this recommendation in section II.C.

- Consider providing increased funding for faculty travel for those who are participating as presenters (including composers, performers, panelists, session chairs, adjudicators, etc.) at professional events. This increased funding could be obtained by eliminating travel assistance to faculty members who are merely attending such events. Most music departments, for example, do not provide funding for faculty members to attend TMEA.

- Correct an apparent error in the Undergraduate Catalog’s description of the Bachelor of Music in Performance curriculum (the credit hours do not seem to add up correctly).