MID AMERICAN CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY MUSIC
PROGRAM REVIEW

REVIEW PROCESS

The staff of the MidAmerican Center for Contemporary Music (MACCM) prepared a self-study following program review guidelines. An external review team visited the campus; reviewed the self-study documents; interviewed unit staff (including the Director of the Center, the Coordinator of Operations, the Coordinator of the Music Technology Studios and the Electronic Technician/Recording Engineer, and library staff responsible for the MACCM Archive). The team also met with University leadership, a School of Art representative to the New Music and Arts Festival, music faculty, and students. The external review team limited the review process to the activities of the Center and did not “study in detail” the proposed Doctor of Musical Arts in the field of contemporary music (with a specialization in either composition or pedagogy) or the workings of the entire College of Musical Arts. The external team noted the professional and cooperative interactions throughout the on-campus review visit.

SUMMARY OF SELF-STUDY

“The MidAmerican Center for Contemporary Music is an internationally recognized organization that is dedicated to the dissemination, study and promotion of new classical music.” Its central and best known activity is the annual New Music & Art Festival. It also sponsors the events, Music at the Forefront and the Digital Arts Concert series. It offers small grants, primarily to faculty in the College of Musical Arts, for scholarship and travel. The Center includes the Music Technology and Recording Studios.

Mission

An Academic Challenge Grant received in 1987 helped establish the Center in 1990. The Center is organizationally within the College of Musical Arts, not a university-funded research center. Thus its activities are aimed primarily at the promotion of contemporary music through college-based venues and activities (“presenting concerts and symposia, disseminating information, sponsoring research and collecting archival materials.”)

Description of the Center and its Activities

The Director of the Center is a full-time faculty in Musical Arts, with a half-time responsibility to the Center. The Center also has a full-time Coordinator of Operations. The Electronics Technician/Recording Engineer has half of his time devoted to the Center, with overlapping
responsibilities to the College to maintain the Music Technology Studios. The Center is assigned a quarter-time graduate assistant.

The Center has an advisory board, comprising the Administrative Council of the College of Musical Arts, the recording engineer, and the coordinator of music technology. The advisory board thus provides for representation across units within the College, but not from outside the College.

The Center is internally funded, through two budgets, for an average annual funding of $44,730 over the last five years. Over the same time period, the Center received a total of $4,350 in external funding.

The Center is housed in on the third floor of Moore Musical Arts Center. Space devoted to the Center includes an office for the director, an office for the coordinator of operations, and an audio-visual room. The office for the Recording Engineer is associated with the Music Computer Lab, in a different part of the building. The Music Recording Studios are a suite of rooms that “offer undergraduate and graduate classes in MIDI, sound design, and programming in MAX/MSP, Csound and Supercollider.”

The Music Archives are housed in the music library of Jerome Library. Any scores or recordings submitted for consideration for the New Music & Art Festival, but not containing a stamped, self-addressed, return envelope, are entered into the archive. These materials can be browsed through the University’s online catalog. Other materials related to the Festival, as well as materials related to other Center activities and programs, are entered into the archive.

The self-study provides a detailed description of the research and creative activities of the College’s faculty and staff that have benefited from the Center. Without going into detail here, the benefits to faculty and staff are many and varied.

Activities

New Music & Art Festival. The Festival predates the Center by about 10 years. It has expanded over the years to include areas other than music. In recent years, Festivals have come to regularly involve the visual arts. They have also included poetry and dance.

Technology has expanded the venue for the Festival. In 2001, the Festival included a videoconference with the Cleveland Institute of Music, and a performance at an off-campus venue in Bowling Green (the Cla-Zel Theatre). The following year, the Festival expanded to other local venues, and to Ball State University, Indiana University, and the University of Michigan through videoconference.

Concert Series. The Music at the Forefront series, which includes two or three concerts a year, involves externally contracted composers. The Digital Arts Concert series involves new music technology such as live computer music and “video works or tape pieces presented in a multiple-channel sound-diffused environment.”
Archive. As mentioned previously, the music archive (housed in Jerome library) consists of scores and recordings submitted for consideration for the Festival, as well as other documents. Also, a growing collection of audio files and documents are accessible online, through the MACCM website.

Outreach. The Center has helped to support and promote new music through many means. It has contributed to the acquisition of equipment for the recording studio, provided support for Student Composers’ Forums, and acquired new music for performance on campus. The Center has also promoted collaborative efforts between the New Music & Art Festival and the Festival Series organized by the College.

Grants. “The Center awards grants to faculty, part-time faculty, staff and full-time students of BGSU in support of projects involving classical music composed in the last 25 years.” Grant proposals are reviewed by a committee, on which the Director serves as a non-voting member. Grants support performance, composition, travel, and recording.

Strengths and Issues

The Center has been effective in promoting and supporting composition and performance of new music. The New Music & Art Festival is “one of the most prestigious venues of its kind in the United States.” Overall, the Center has contributed meaningfully to the faculty and students of the College of Musical Arts, and to composers of new music on a national and international scale.

The self-study identifies the following issues or concerns.
1) The self-study states that “it is a priority of the Center” to seek ways to fund MACCM special projects through external sources.
2) The Director’s position is an academic year position. However, the duties of the Director require effort beyond that time frame.
3) The Recording Engineer’s time has been assigned to recording projects, but many such projects have not been completed in the expected time frame.
4) The archive materials are difficult to access or search. Only some of the materials are available online, and much of the material is non-circulating.
5) Whereas the Center makes concerts and materials available to students, the self-study states that “the Center needs to bring its offerings to more University students.”
6) The self-study states an intent to increase the opportunities for faculty to play compositions featured at the Festival at other venues.

Seven-year Plan

New Music & Art Festival. The self-study reveals that the Center is looking several years ahead in planning the events for the Festival. Efforts will be made to produce a publicity DVD, “showcasing events and activities from previous festivals.” The plan calls for encouraging increased international participation in the Festival, as well as pre-festival talks to high school and University classes. The Center will explore the possibility of producing a television special with WBGU-TV “featuring highlights from the New Music & Art Festival.” The Center will
continue its efforts, as described earlier, to expand the use of technology and the venues for the Festival.

Concert Series. As with the Festival, planning for composers and presenters for the Music at the Forefront series and the Digital Arts Concert series is looking ahead several years to secure leading participants. The series will be promoted through production of a new brochure. In the longer term, the “structure of the two concert series will be revisited.”

Proposed Doctoral Degree in Music. The proposed doctoral program would be designated Doctor of Musical Arts in the field of Contemporary Music. The Center is well-suited to provide support for and benefit from the proposed doctoral program.

Special Projects. The plan calls for Center involvement in several projects, including: record CDs of student compositions; a residency project in which composition students compose new music for area high school ensembles; establish off-campus venues for performance of new music; incorporate new music from the Festival and the two Concert Series into University classes; expand the grant program, so that it does not emphasize travel as much as it has; develop a strategy for the most effective use of the Recording Engineer’s time; review the makeup of the advisory board; increase the accessibility and use of the music archive; increase the range and number of audio and video materials (including simulcasts) available through the MACCM website; and encourage minority and diversity programming in new music as well as the increased participation of individuals from under-represented groups.

**RESULTS OF PREVIOUS REVIEWS**

This is the first cycle of program review for the Center.

**SUMMARY OF EXTERNAL REPORT**

The external team praised the MACCM for fulfilling the stated mission to “study and promote contemporary music and technology in order to enrich the lives of northwest Ohio residents and assist professionals throughout the United States.” Areas of concern were placed within the context of “an exemplary” unit working to achieve stated goals.

**New Music and Art Festival**

Presented as the most important activity of the Center, the external team noted that the event itself is “quite short in duration” and reaches limited audiences. Specific suggestions for development include the following:

*Radio show.* Design and produce a regular radio show connected to the mission of the unit.

*Online articles or journal.* Contribute regularly to online magazines or design and produce an online journal connected to the Center’s website.
Website. Re-design the Center’s website, and expand the audience for it. Analyze usage statistics to “expand both from the standpoint of content and national/international coverage.” Explore ways to link to other sites.

Venues for Festival. Consider the viability of touring specific events from the Festival, or of finding a second venue to do Festival or a portion of it.

Scope of Festival. Consider the viability of expanding the Festival into other disciplines as appropriate, taking advantage of current campus emphasis on connecting the arts.

Grants for Research and Creative Activity

The grant funds distributed by the Center appear to be help promote the stated mission of the Center. Although the system appears to be working, the external reviewers noted that most universities distribute such funds in a more “interdisciplinary” approach. The external reviewers state that similar funds at other universities are not set aside exclusively for (or by) musical arts.

Music in the Forefront and Digital Arts Concert Series

The two series of on-campus concerts (formerly known as Mostly MIDI series) appear to be a good idea—“if [the events were] well supported and attended.” Given that the team did not attend, no further comment can be made.

Organizational Structure

The unit needs more full-time staff. The coordinator needs a support staff in order to support his efforts in research, outreach, web development, and grant writing.

MACCM Archive

The external team found the cataloging and handling of the archive to be well done and professional. Although the archive is an important collection documenting submissions to the annual festival series, it is not a “systematic and comprehensive research repository.” In short, attention should be given to articulating a focused and realistic mission for the holdings, perhaps one related to particular strengths within the College (such as compositions for saxophone, etc). “The visitors caution that the Archive be understood for what it is and not for what it is not; it is not the sort of systematic and comprehensive research repository that the libraries of such organizations as the American Music Center are endeavoring to build.”

Outreach to the College and Community

The external team found that the Center occupies a significant position within the College of Musical Arts and has done much to cultivate that standing. It is clearly a valuable and valued unit within the College. Given the proven excellence of past Festivals, the event has the potential to become an event of national importance.
The mission statement of the Center is more modest in scope than the actual activities. The reviewers conclude that the Center and the University are not taking “full advantage of the considerable outreach possibilities that the Center and the Festival present.”

The Future

Given its present resources, in terms of money, staff, and time, the external reviewers feel it is unlikely that Center can do more than sustain itself. They do, however, emphasize one suggestion the Center might work on: taking advantage of existing strengths in technology and music.

- partner with campus technology programs, particularly in the area of interactive media;
- explore the feasibility of expanding connections with “pop” oriented performance forms, such as lap top computer performances or turntable technologies and the forms associated with “sound art” and “sound artists”;
- reword the call for submissions/compositions to provide focus for the Archive, to include a process to “actively solicit works from composers;”
- consider the problem that the call for submissions does not seem to be prompting established composers to submit work for the Festival—what does this mean and how can it be corrected?

PROGRAM REVIEW COMMITTEE FINDINGS

The MidAmerican Center for Contemporary Music has a record of distinguished accomplishments; in particular we note the annual New Music and Art Festival. A valuable component of the College of Musical Arts, the Center is worthy of continued support and development. The MACCM has successfully fulfilled its mission and has developed an innovative seven-year plan with many creative ideas. Findings from the program review process focus on issues of resources, audience development, assessment of program quality, and mission.

1. Mission. The activities of the Center may go beyond the stated Mission of the unit. Whereas it is a college-based center, the range of activities suggest that it is functioning, in part, as a university-based center. The PRC finds that the Center needs to address the following sorts of questions: Should the Center move forward with a more limited and focused mission statement? Should the mission be expanded to include all that is currently being done as well all proposed? What are the implications for an expanded mission? Can it be sustained? How will the reliance on external funding shape the Center’s activities in the future? What are the Center’s priorities? In times of limited resources, what is essential and what should be eliminated? Should the unit’s programming be reduced to support a more focused mission?

Documentation is an important aspect of a research center, particularly a research center dedicated to promoting creative activity in the arts. In order to maintain the documentation required, it is important that the MACCM carefully consider the resource issues connected to the process of documentation (i.e., which activities should be documented as well as the appropriate form of documentation). To do so will establish priorities for the unit and will directly link the “research” aspect of the unit to the creative programming.
2. Assessment of program quality. Although the leadership within the Center endorses the quality of the holdings within the archives and the quality of Festival participants, assessment measures need to be put in place to provide an objective record of program quality for all aspects of the Center, including the archives and the annual New Music & Art Festival. The Center should develop assessment procedures that help to focus the mission of the Archives in light of the concerns expressed by the external team, specifically questions of quality. Assessment should begin with an explicit statement of the purpose of this collection. Assessment procedures should discover whether the current acquisition procedures support this mission. An assessment of the current holdings should lead to a discussion of how these holdings can be promoted. Similarly, a qualitative assessment of Festival participants would also provide valuable evidence to support external funding requests. In short, is the Festival attracting the best of contemporary composition? Is the Festival helping to promote new music on a national and international level?

3. Audience development. Audience development is an ongoing concern and priority for the Center. The self-study presents an impressive list of exciting and creative proposals to enhance current programming–ideas ranging from continued community outreach to the use of technology as a performance venue. It would be inappropriate for the PRC to suggest how these proposed activities should be prioritized except to emphasize the necessity of linking Center activities to questions of funding, outreach, and assessment. Certainly, the issue remains as to how Center activities will attract and connect with audiences. Although the Center should and must do more in the area of audience development, a focused University-wide plan should also be considered.

4. Resources. In order to fulfill its stated mission and to move forward on plans articulated in the seven-year plan, the MidAmerican Center for Contemporary Music needs additional resources–these include increased internal support as well as external funding. The self-study and the external review team all speak to the need for a summer stipend for the director, a review of the duties for the recording staff, and suggestions for additional staff to support outreach and grant writing. The PRC recognizes the links between operational support/expansion of selected areas within the Center and issues of funding and staffing. However, it is unrealistic to rely on University resources at this time. Therefore, strategic plans for future Center activities must all be tied to plans to secure external funding sources.

PROGRAM REVIEW COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the self-study and external review documents, and consistent with the major findings that resulted from these reviews, the PRC makes the following recommendations.

1. Mission. Given the current full range of activities designed, staffed, and supported by the Center, in addition to those proposed in the unit’s plan, issues arise as to the articulated mission for the unit. The leadership of the Center, along with appropriate College faculty, should meet with the Dean to review the mission statement for the Center and work to establish priorities for the Center in light of College planning and initiatives. These discussions should begin immediately. A revised mission statement should be completed by the end of fall 2003.
2. Assessment of program quality. There are two related areas for which assessment should be developed: the Archives and the New Music & Art Festival. Assessments should provide information that will guide planning for both these endeavors. These assessment projects should be implemented by Spring 2005.

3. Audience development. Audience development should become a greater priority for the Center. The PRC recommends that the College of Musical Arts support audience development for Center activities, not limited to the New Music & Art Festival. Specifically, the PRC recommends that the College of Musical Arts, the School of Art, and the Department of Theatre collaborate to hire an external consultant to develop a plan of action for audience development for the university’s fine and performing arts units, including the Center. The leadership of the Arts Roundtable, which includes the dean of Musical Arts, should initiate this collaborative effort by December, 2003.

4. Resources. In the spirit of “spending money to make money,” the PRC recommends that the College provide an appropriate summer stipend for the Director to allow for additional effort in fund raising. Contingent on that funding, the PRC also recommends that the Center be expected to secure external funding streams to support the activities of the Center. Increased efforts to secure external support should be evident within a year of the college’s increased investment in the Center.

The MidAmerican Center for Contemporary Music should report annually to the Dean of the College of Musical Arts, with a copy to the Provost, on the implementation of these recommendations.