School of Music Response to the Task Force for Graduate Education

The School of Music offers four graduate degrees (M.A., M.F.A., D.M.A., and Ph.D.), each of which features multiple opportunities for specialization according to the instruments, clinical skills, and research methodologies involved. Although no official ranking system exists for graduate programs in music, the School of Music enjoys a national, and, indeed, international reputation. Thus, the rating of “Good” given the School of Music by the Task Force for Graduate Education appears to result from the typical misunderstandings shared by much of the academic community with regard to the operating procedures of a comprehensive music program.

In accordance with the standards set by the National Association of the Schools of Music (hereafter NASM), all applicants for non-thesis M.A. degrees, the M.F.A. and the Ph.D. are required to audition in addition to providing the standard application materials (application to the Graduate College, three letters of recommendation, statement of purpose, transcripts, and, where applicable, GRE and TOEFL scores). Applicants for the M.A. with thesis and the Ph.D. submit representative written work in addition to the standard application materials, and are further expected to demonstrate an acceptable level of musicianship. Acceptance rates for a given program of study or studio range anywhere from thirty to seventy percent each year, and depend less upon a quota system than they do upon the quality of the individual applicants. Although some programs within the School of Music such as conducting and music therapy attempt to retain classes of relatively similar size from year to year for practical reasons, it has not been the practice of the School of Music to turn talented students away because neither assistantships nor alternative funding is available for them. Thus, the fact that our graduate program currently enrolls over 100 students who do not receive financial support should be regarded as a testament to the dedication of our faculty and the high level of professional preparation provided by our programs, rather than as an indication of our lack of selectivity. That so many students come without financial support may also contribute to the slightly longer time towards completion of degree, but it should be noted that the data regarding degree completion rates quoted in the report of the Task Force for Graduate Education is ten years old, so reflects neither our current student body nor the recent rejuvenation of our Ph.D. programs that has come about as a result of the introduction of new faculty and the attendant recruitment efforts and program policies recently instituted by them.

In spring 2008 the School of Music underwent a comprehensive review by NASM, and thereafter received full accreditation of its degree programs. A self-study of over 200 pages was written in preparation for this review, and the self-study includes detailed plans for improvement of each degree program and its individual tracks of study. To distill these plans in just a few sentences is tantamount to applying a few meaningless panaceas to a variety of unrelated issues. While we recognize that adequate funding for our graduate students is a major concern and our facilities are not what they were prior to the flood of 2008, we chose not to focus overly upon these issues in our report because money and buildings are not the only proverbial vessels of oil belonging to the School of Music. Since the flood of 2008 the School of Music has given three major oratorio performances that involved some two-thirds or the student body, as well as numerous ensemble concerts and recitals. In this we have been graciously supported not only by The University of Iowa, but also by many institutions in the community, and we, therefore, make music at the same rate and level of quality despite a few acoustical limitations. An operating budget that prohibits funding all the graduate students in our program is a problem we share with every comprehensive School of Music of comparable size, scope, and quality in this country, and, as a result, we are continuously investigating new avenues of funding.