

Interdisciplinarity@WMU- Phase One Planning Template

1. **Brief Overview:** Provide a brief overview of the proposed interdisciplinary initiative. What types of questions would the initiative ask? What types of complex problems would it seek to solve?

Music Theatre Performance is one of the most competitive programs at Western Michigan University. With over 200 students auditioning annually for 15 positions in each freshman class, there is a significant demand and market for the skills and opportunities the music theatre performance program provides. Music theatre performance as an industry has greatly increased its societal influence in recent years with groundbreaking works that promote race and gender equity such as Hamilton and Fun Home to wildly commercial pieces that bring young and vivacious new audiences into the theatre like Wicked and Frozen the Musical. With the infinite delivery platforms now available through TV, film and social media, the power of emotional connection to music may be one of the most universal methods to promote human empathy and communication.

Most of the students who audition for WMU's current Music Theatre Performance major, however, do not achieve a position in the program and choose to pursue their education at other institutions. Providing a minor in music theatre performance would serve two significant goals. It would allow students who do not achieve a position in the program the opportunity to come to WMU and study music theatre while declaring other majors. It would also offer training in music theatre for WMU students pursuing related majors in music, dance, communications and education, as well as students who have a passion for the art form but are committed to other career paths.

2. **Impacted units:** What existing units, programs, and colleges would be involved in the proposed initiative? What other possibilities for collaboration across campus or in the broader community might exist now or in the future?

The primary impacted units would be within the College of Fine Arts; Theatre, Dance, and Music would house the new minor and provide the opportunity for Dance and Music majors to broaden both their skills and future career opportunities. That being said, student engagement in this program would be expected to expand to many colleges throughout WMU. The first impact would be on related fields in education, psychology - therapy, business, and social services. All of these units frequently utilize elements of music theatre for teaching opportunities, presentations, live promotional events and multi-media presentations. Additionally, the minor has the potential to engage the many students from across the University's numerous units who have developed a passion for this art form and have had to leave it behind as they choose to pursue seemingly unrelated careers. Nevertheless, music theatre continues to be an avocational passion that can enrich their lives through community organizations and engagement.

3. **Impact on teaching, learning, and curricula:** Describe the anticipated impact of the proposed initiative on teaching, learning, and curricula. How might this initiative help to grow enrollment, including by reaching new audiences of learners through continuing education, dual enrollment, or professional certification? How will the proposed initiative positively impact the training of

undergraduate and graduate students? How does it enhance our institutional commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion?

The pedagogical approach to teaching music theatre performance engages the brain in ways that few other educational experiences can. Combining singing with movement and storytelling is a visceral approach to education that allows students to truly connect with their work in ways unheard of in other fields of study. Combining the study of music theory with history, psychology, and incorporating international influences of movement, dance, poetry, language and music all are a significant part of the study and practice of music theatre performance. This minor has the potential to cross cultural boundaries and open hearts and minds for both the students who participate and audiences they impact for years to come. Diversity and inclusion are at the heart of what the nature of the unique and incorporating form of theatre this field of study engenders.

By creating this course of study in a minor it will grow enrollment. The literally hundreds of students who are not accepted into the music theatre program annually are a great untapped resource for the university, as well as the enhanced recruitment tool of having a minor that allows many students who are considering giving up their love of the stage to pursue other careers the chance to keep their passion for performance alive. Finally, giving the technical skills necessary to create meaningful musical performances to students pursuing fields that often incorporate elements of musical theatre will also enhance the recruitment of numerous departments throughout WMU.

4. **Impact on research and creative activity:** Describe the anticipated impact of the proposed initiative on research and creative activity. How will this initiative promote discovery and creative scholarship? How might it result in increased external funding?

Joining a music theatre performance element with the many related and conjoined fields currently taught at WMU will have a profound impact on the future of research and creative activity. It will open numerous unexplored opportunities for the social sciences, language study, business and even seemingly unrelated fields like math and hard science. Adding a performance element to research can only increase its ability to reach a wider and more diverse audience. The emotionally engaging and viscerally impactful effect of a live musical performance (or filmed for that matter) will add a powerful and lasting impression to the presentation of traditional research.

5. **Efficiencies and/or cost savings:** How might the proposed initiative contribute to increased efficiencies and/or cost savings, for example by reducing administrative positions (e.g. chairs/directors), sharing staff support services and/or by sharing facilities?

Administration of the minor would fall within the purview of the School of Theatre and Dance. Overseen by the current Director of Music Theatre Performance with supervision from the Chair and staff, no additional administrative support is anticipated. Facilities for the courses required in the minor are available within the School of Theatre and Dance. Any public performances by the students enrolled in the minor would add to the financial support of the program as well.

6. **Impact on course offerings and workload:** At present, proposed initiatives will only be feasible and sustainable if they can be supported by existing resources, including instructional capacity, faculty and staff time, and facilities. Will the proposed initiative streamline existing course or program offerings? Could the initiative help create more equitable and sustainable workload for faculty, for example, by reducing the need to offer under enrolled courses, reducing the frequency of course offerings or eliminating the need to teach some courses?

The Schools of Theatre and Dance and Music currently employ qualified faculty and staff who have the skills and resources to teach the added course load incorporated in the music theatre minor. While some additional hours may have to be added to the current part-time faculty, it is expected that the extra expense will be more than compensated by the increased contact hours with the students in the added courses.

The additional students to be enrolled in MT History (THEA 3720) can be added to the current teaching load within the School of Theatre and Dance. There would have to be some discussion to ensure that the additional students to be taking the various dance classes can be added to the current faculty load. Adjunct faculty would have to be engaged to teach the Vocal Tech Ensemble and MTP Workshop classes as the current faculty qualified to teach these classes are at full load.

7. **Additional Information:** What additional information would you like to provide in support of this proposal?

With the addition of a contingent of MT minors, it is encouraged that the School of Theatre and Dance examine its production program and possibly add a third musical to its annual production schedule to provide ample performance opportunities for the added students engaged in the study of music theatre at WMU. It would also be an exciting opportunity for further interdisciplinary engagement as students bring their own unique backgrounds and interests to the program.

8. **Contact**

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