

An Exploration of Assessment in the Arts

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Status of Assessment

“More Than You Think, Less Than We Need”

Integrating assessment into faculty practice and using assessment findings to guide pedagogical change and improved learning outcomes are as yet unrealized goals on many campuses

(Kuh & Stanley, 2009, p. 27)

Assessment of Learning in the Creative Arts

1. *Knowledge Building*: Fundamental knowledge necessary for the field of study (e.g., reading music, movement and dance);
2. *Creative Production*: To the extent “the student executed the productive elements of the craft and in what ways he exhibited creative abilities consistent with the goals of the assignment...”;
3. *Integrative Contextualization*: The student’s “ability to place production within a broader intellectual and social context;
4. *Critical Communication*: The ability to articulate the nature of a work within a context and framework through speaking, publication and writing, film, etc.

Assessment in the Theatre Arts

- Primarily course level assessment (Belluigi, 2009; Fryer, 2010; Mello, 2007; Orr, 2011; Parkes, 2010);
- Course-level study on assessment in theatre arts Mello (2007);
- Robert's (1995) and Dorn and Orr's (2008) –theatre arts assessment in department/program, but not empirical.
- Creative and performance activities are often considered difficult to assess because of the challenge in identifying assessment criteria and indicators in traditionally affective and subjective domains (Belluigi, 2009; Gale & Bond, 2007; Mello, 2007; Orr, 2011; Parkes, 2010)

Purpose & Research Questions

1. How do musical theatre arts bachelor's programs assess student learning?
2. What are the range of methods used in assessment?
3. How do faculty and programs more generally assess the more affective and subjective domains of learning?

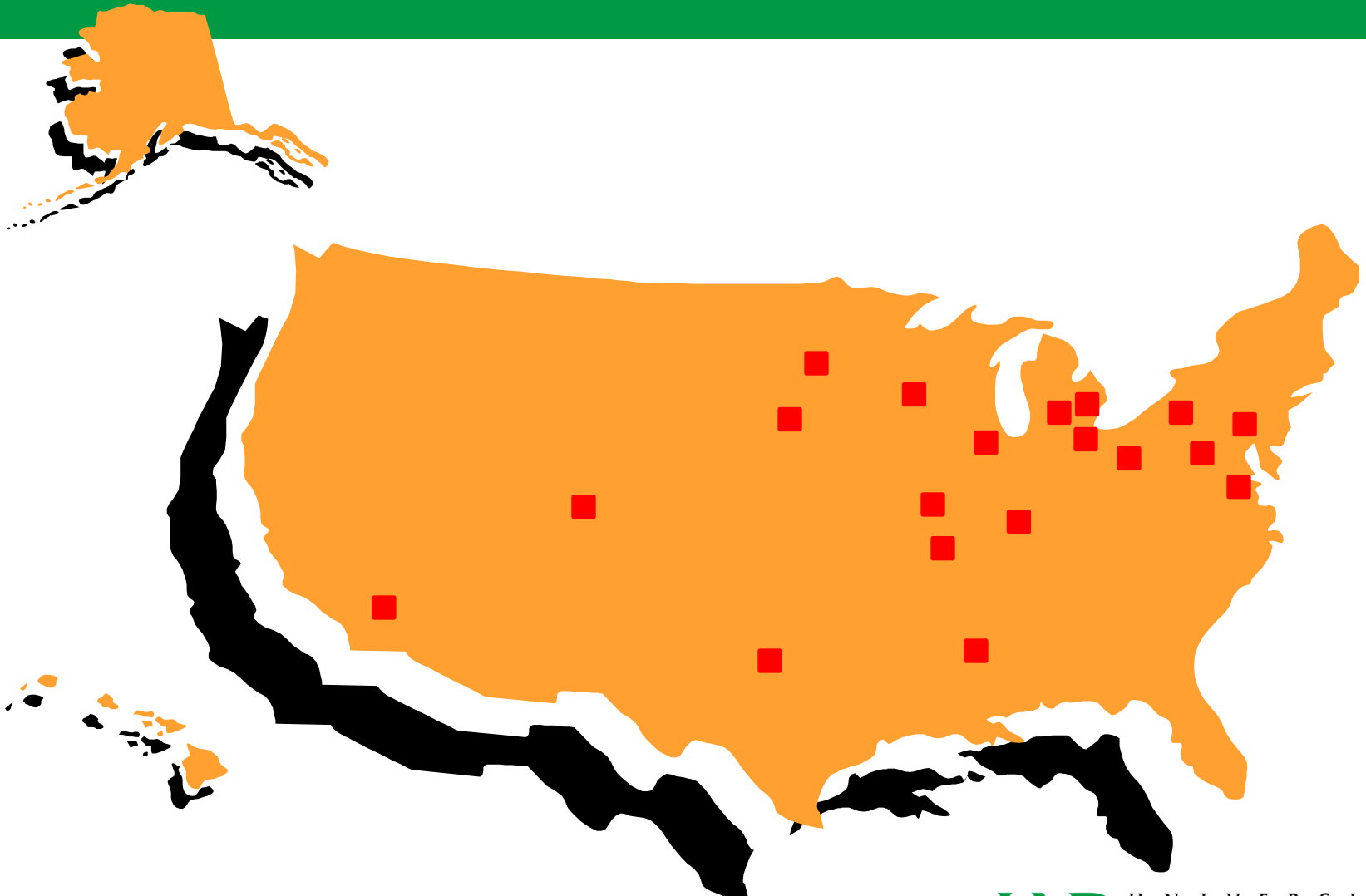
Survey

- Mixed Method, Exploratory 31-item survey focused on assessment of learning practices in BFA and BA in Musical Theatre Arts programs;
- Developed with educational, assessment, and musical theatre experts;
- Six Sections:
 - Program Logistics
 - Student Learning
 - Performance Requirements
 - Student Expectations
 - Review Process
 - Senior Project
- Asked to evaluate assessment policies in program/department

Study Design

- National;
- 48 institutions offer BFA or BA (Dept of Ed);
- Emailed to all programs via listserv or direct invitation. Compared with NAST accrediting member list;
- 20 institutions responded—41.7% response rate
- Analysis:
 - Quantitative: Descriptive frequencies, means, standard deviation, crosstabs;
 - Qualitative: Pattern and theme development, analysis of responses within each category.

Participating Institutions



Participating Institutions

Public	75%
Private	20%
Institution name not given	5%
Total	100%

Baccalaureate	5%
Master's	35%
Research	55%
n/a	5%
Total	100%

Bachelor of Arts (BA)	20%
Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA)	70%
BA and BFA	10%
Total	100%

NAST accredited	67%
Not NAST accredited	33%
Total	100%

Results

- Overview
- Knowledge Building
- Creative Production
- Integrative Contextualization
- Critical Communication
- Professionalism and Career Preparation

Overview:

Assessment in Musical Theatre

Perceptions of Assessment:

- Very Important: 66.7%
- Somewhat Important: 23.8%

Have a Formal Assessment Plan in Place (90.5%):

- Fully: 61.9%
- Partially: 23.8%

Guiding Criteria: [multiple responses allowed]

- Program-specific: 80.0%
- NAST: 70.0%
- Institution-Specific: 30.0%

Assessment in Musical Theatre: Considerations

Student Expectations	Mean	SD
Complete the curriculum outlined for the Musical Theatre degree program	5.00	0.00
Complete the essential studies or core requirements for the institution in which the student is enrolled	4.86	0.53
Serve on at least one crew position in an on-campus theatre arts production	4.43	1.09
Prepare and pass all yearly performance reviews	4.29	1.49
Audition for on-campus theatre arts productions	4.00	1.41
Complete a senior capstone experience	3.93	1.69
Audition for professional/summer stock theatre arts productions	2.43	1.60
Serve on at least one crew position in an off-campus arts production	1.29	0.61

Knowledge Building

*Level of Importance for Areas of Learning when Evaluating
Musical Theatre Students*

Area of Student Learning	Mean	SD
Understanding of the musical theatre genre and strong familiarity with the cannon	4.60	0.50
Understanding and application of proper theatre etiquette including rehearsal, performance and audition etiquette	4.50	0.89
Mastery of theatre vocabulary and its application	4.45	0.69
Growth and development in the foundations of theatre including history, analysis and theory	4.05	0.83

Knowledge Building

Additional Areas of Programmatic Focus

- Technical aspects of theatre
- Musical theory and sight-reading
- Knowledge of theatre history and repertoire

Students are asked to demonstrate

- knowledge of musical theatre literature including scores
- Knowledge of the development and history of musical theatre
- mastery of audition/interview skills
- understanding the business/marketing aspects, limited opportunities available, current trends and styles within the field

Creative Production

*Level of Importance for Areas of Learning when Evaluating
Musical Theatre Students*

Area of Student Learning	Mean	SD
Growth and development in the performance concepts of acting, vocal performance and dance	4.75	0.72
Advancement and growth throughout four years in the areas of acting, vocal performance and dance	4.70	0.92
Ability to apply coursework to production work	4.70	0.57
Ability to work independently in production	4.40	0.82

Creative Production

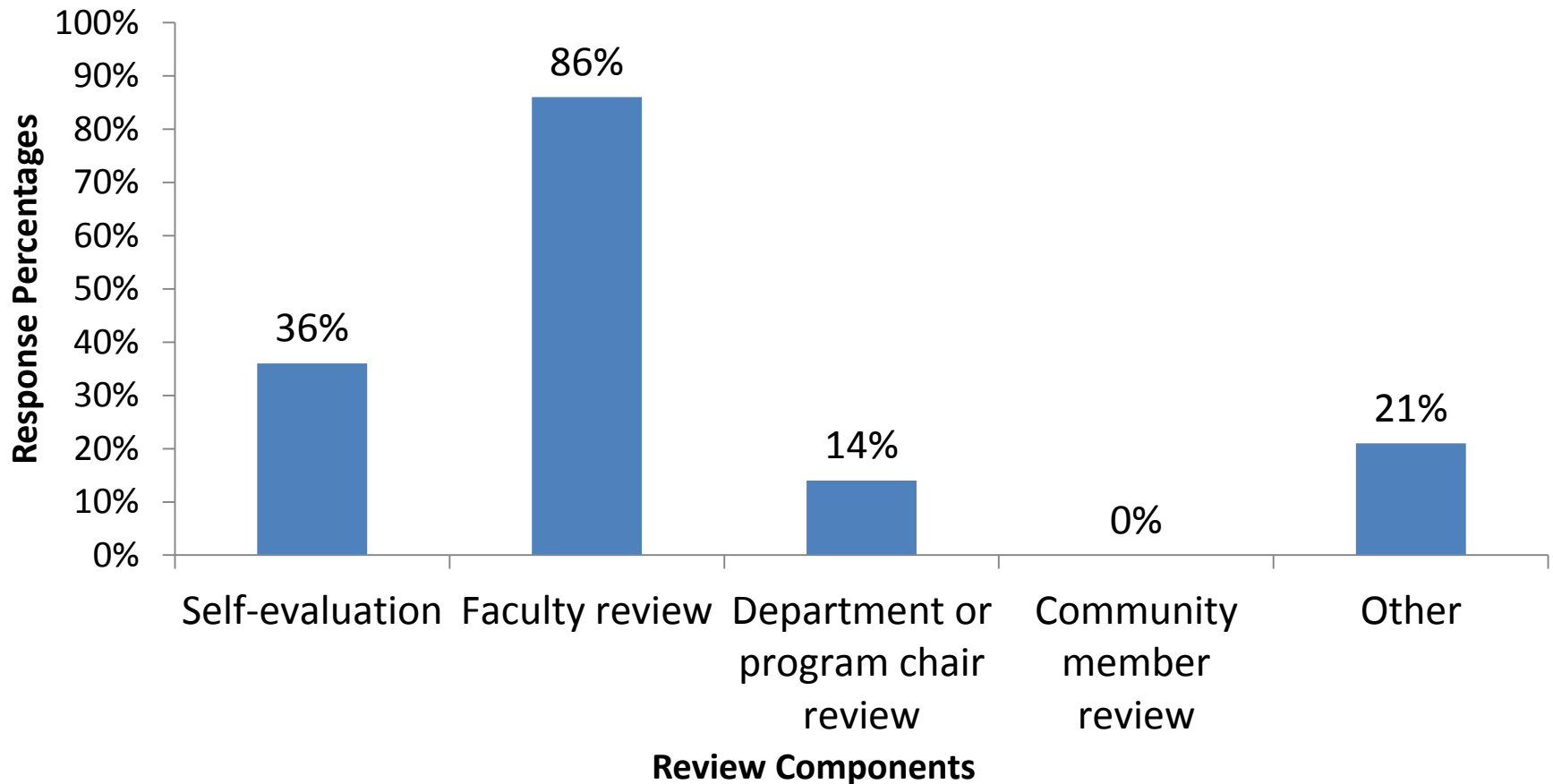
Students are asked to demonstrate ability to

- create characters convincingly and perform vocally in various musical styles ... and in various musical theatre dance techniques
 - Use technical skills of a specialty of theatre [and] ... exploit all appropriate tools in creating integrated production elements
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- 86% indicate performance requirements
 - 92% require students to audition for all on-campus productions
 - 83.3% *do not* require professional or summer auditions

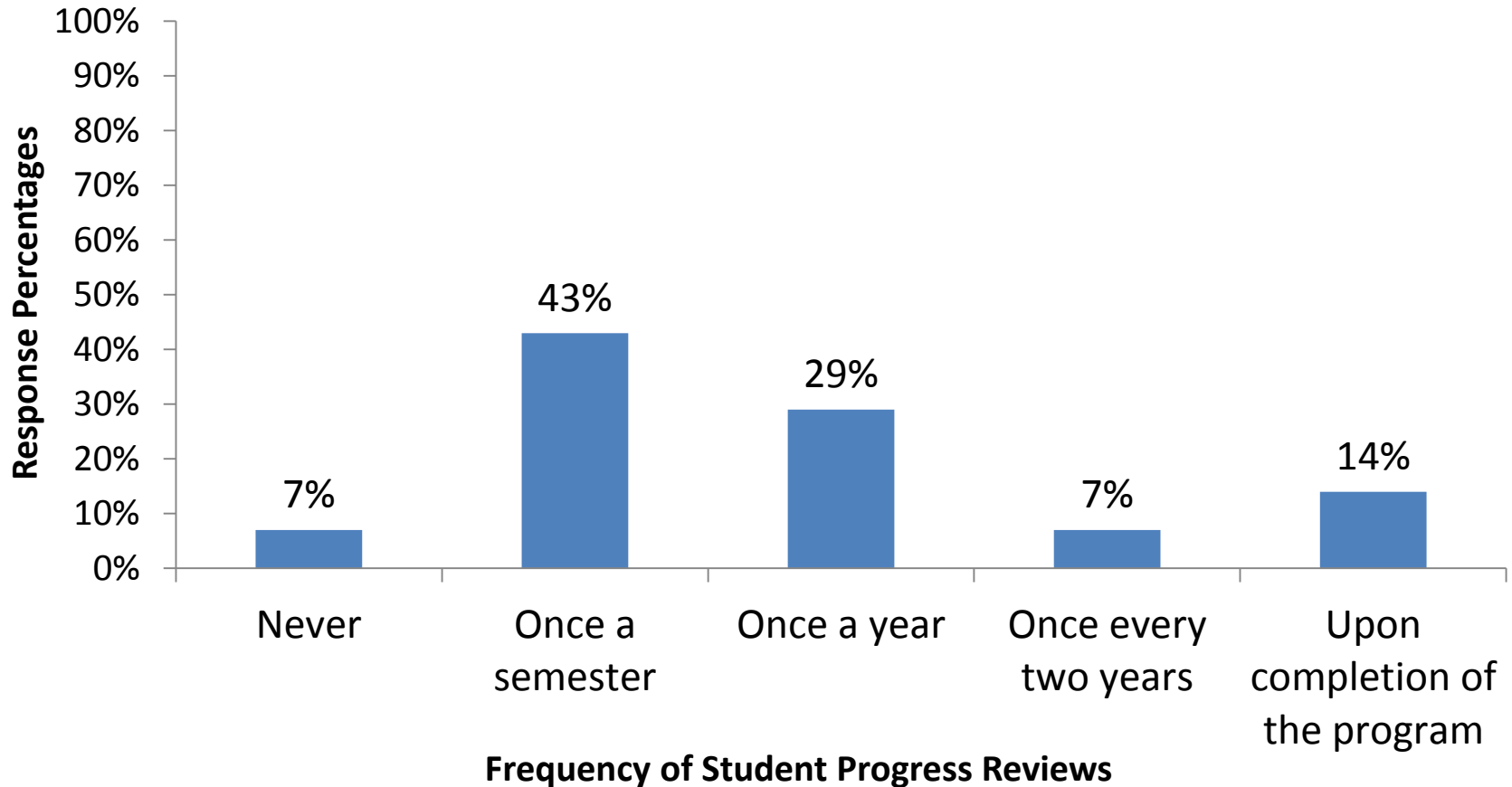
Creative Production

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Creative Production: Review Process



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Creative Production: Review Process

“Musical theatre students must undergo an acting and a vocal jury each semester, and a dance jury once a year. The juries consist of monologues and scenes, vocal selections both from classical and musical theatre literature, and requisite dance combinations within abbreviated routines.”

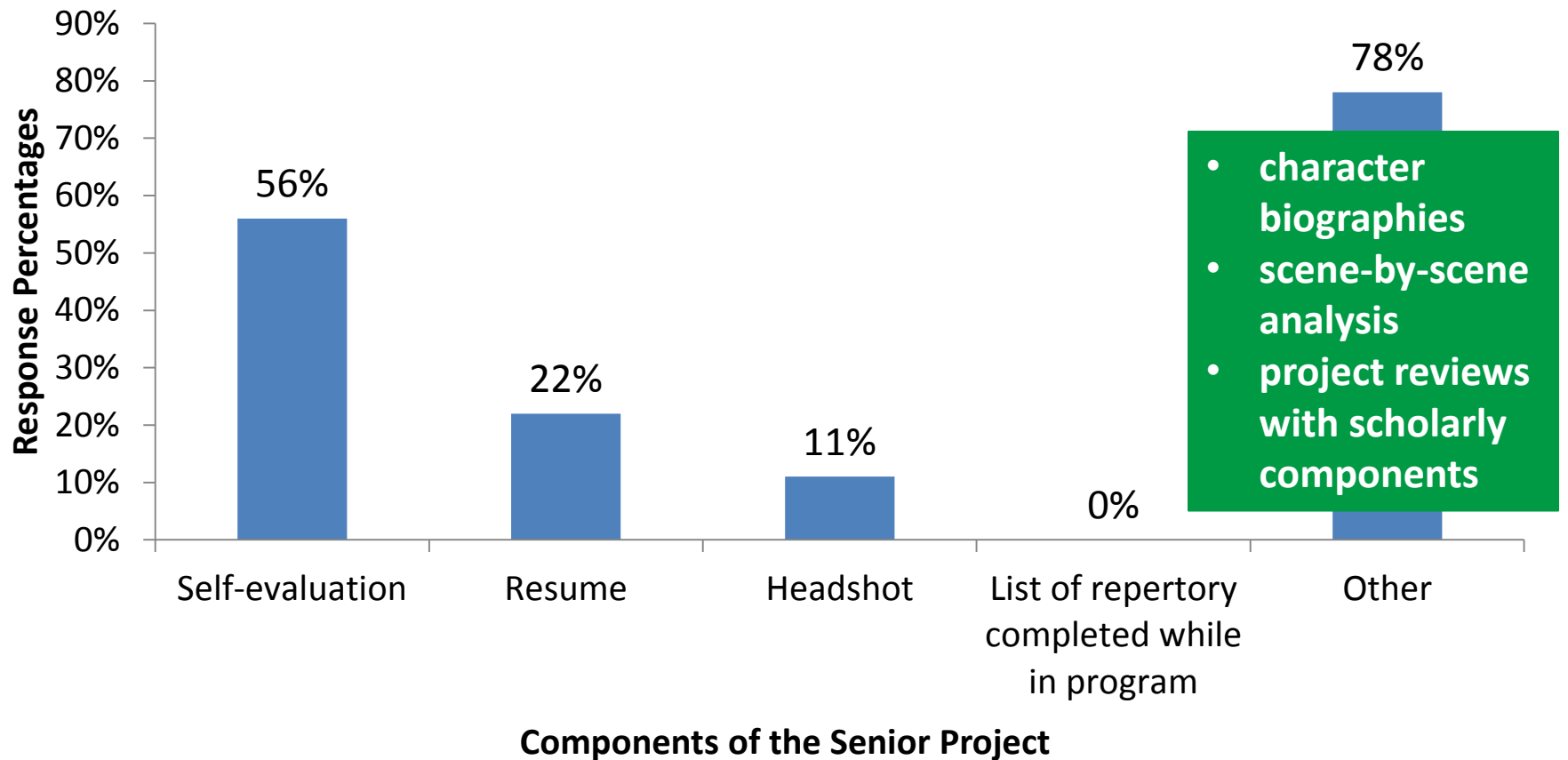
Integrative Contextualization

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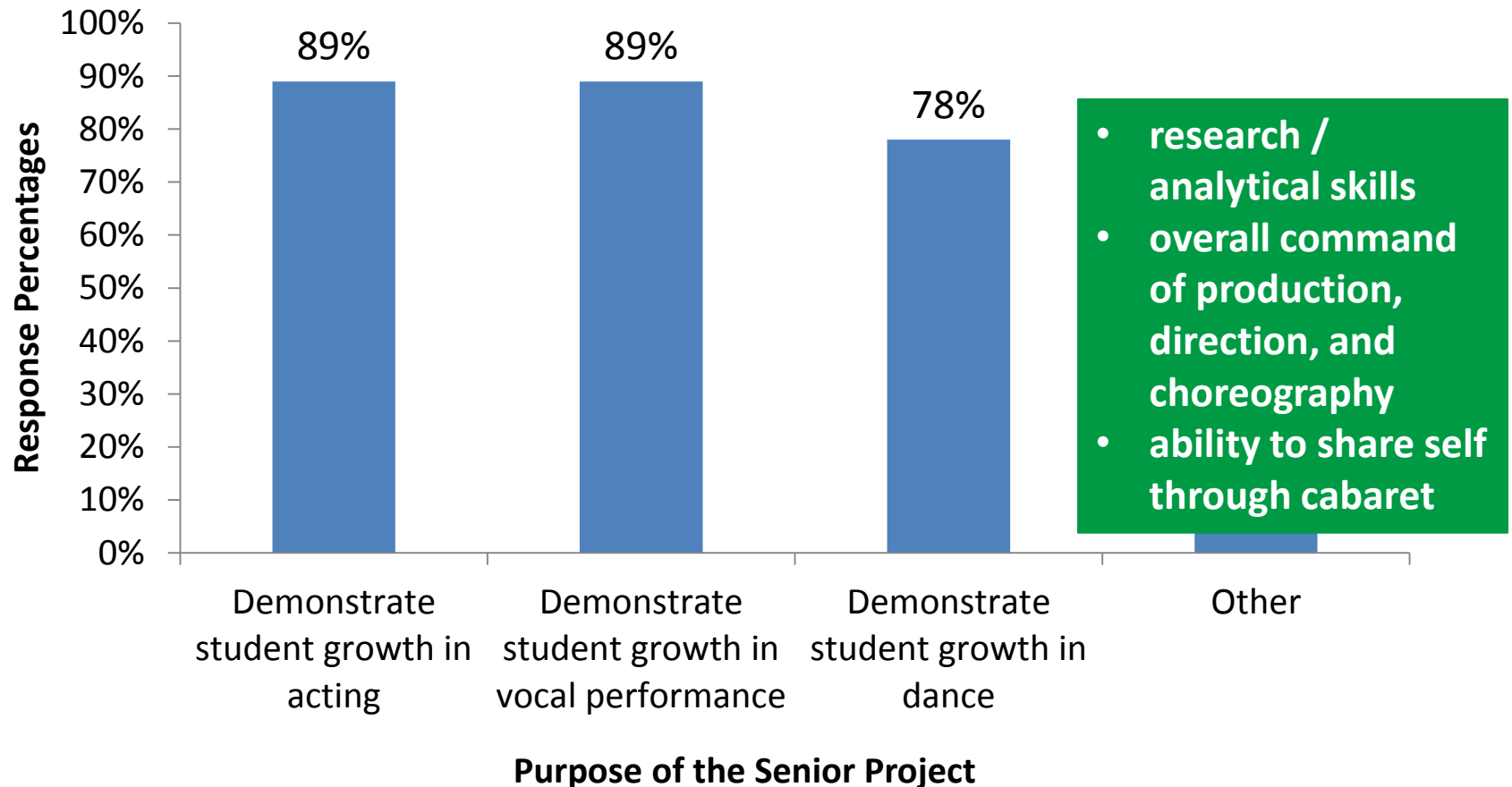
The Senior Project is a common assessment tool (64%)

- Reviewed by:
 - Musical theatre faculty (78%)
 - Faculty members from other departments (22%)

Integrative Contextualization



Integrative Contextualization



Critical Communication

Knowledge Building

- Communicate verbally with collaborators using vocabulary common in theatre

Creative Production

- Communicate verbally and physically a dramatic idea, situation, scene or character

Integrative Contextualization

- Programmatic assessment of research, analytical, and scholarly writing skills (senior project)
- Critical analysis was less present; not clearly linked to communication beyond writing

Professionalism and Career Preparation

Skills and abilities to prepare for a career in theatre

- Professionalism and skills specific to working as a performer
 - auditioning
 - interviewing
 - marketing
- Soft skills that are necessary for professional career opportunities
 - common sense
 - problem solving
 - working well with others
 - flexibility

Skills Specific to Working as a Performer

“We assess ‘professional disposition’ as a component of the evaluation process. Musical theatre students are expected to comport themselves at all times in a professional manner consistent with the demands and expectations of the professional field.”

Skills Specific to Working as a Performer

Students should understand

- Audition package and interview
- Auditioning for roles
- Business and marketing aspects of the field
- Limited opportunities available in the field
- Current trends and styles within the field

Soft Skills

Critical elements of student learning

- Working well with others
- Teamwork
- Working with professionals
- “Functioning as a responsible member of the creative team”
- “Going out into the work world to be excellent artistic collaborators”

Discussion

- Regardless of how programs interpret assessment or how its prevalence is represented in literature-- assessment is active and pervasive;
- Assessment as embedded and integral to the “work.”
- Step toward an empirical assessment of student learning in the arts and the first “test” of the applicability of the framework;
- Framework was useful, but also represented limited utility:
 - 1) Addition of a part--Professionalism & Career Preparation;
 - 2) Not all parts applied—possibly reflecting degree level;

Implications & Future Research

Research:

- More complex analysis;
- Deeper inquiry into systematic processes, thinking processes, tools, and influence of institutional context;
- Expand to more disciplinary areas of the arts and additional degree levels.

Practice:

- Utility of the frame for the development of best practices;
- Active consideration of how “integrative contextualization” actively relates to outcomes and is being assessed throughout a program’s curriculum;
- Address the “language gap” that exists between assessment jargon and creative/performance disciplines.

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