



CHESTER FRITZ AUDITORIUM REPORT

“Because auditoriums serve as a force for uplifting the human spirit, it is my hope that this building will be an additional means by which future students at my Alma Mater may gain clear visions of truth and beauty and integrity; and that the added opportunities for weighing comparative values will inspire listening students to rise to higher plains of world understanding, purpose, and stewardship.”

– Chester Fritz

Preliminaries/Introduction

The Chester Fritz Auditorium (CFA), located on the University of North Dakota campus, opened in 1972 after its namesake donated 1 million dollars toward its construction in 1965. As a center for the performing arts, the CFA hosts a number of events yearly, including recitals, concerts and musicals. With a capacity to seat 2,384 visitors, it has brought a number of nationally acclaimed performers and Broadway shows to the Grand Forks area and draws visitors from the surrounding states and Canada. The venue also hosts a number of University of North Dakota events such as summer and winter commencement, speaker and lecture series, civic events like Flickertail Girls State and presidential inaugurations. The CFA mission states:

The Chester Fritz Auditorium (CFA) promotes the performing arts and provides the region with a facility to accommodate a wide variety of uses. The CFA enhances the life of the University and region by sponsoring shows, hosting regional events and supporting local productions.

The vision of the CFA is to be a leader in the region for cultural activity. This is accomplished by promoting shows and partnering with area arts presenters to bring the finest in live entertainment to the area.

Working Group Charge, Membership, Stakeholders and Resources

The Chester Fritz Auditorium Working group held its inaugural meeting on May 9, 2016. The charge given to the CFA working group by Alice Brekke, UND Vice President for Finance & Operations, was to:

- Utilize existing resources to educate members on relevant financial and historical information.
 - » Achieved through meetings with Betty Allan, Tom Swangler and Odella Fuqua.
- Identify and communicate with stakeholder groups, use input in making final recommendations
 - » Achieved by meeting with variety of on-campus stakeholders and through survey.
- Identify and validate campus and community needs for a performance venue of this type.
 - » Achieved through survey.
- Consider financial realities associated with current status and any proposed options.
 - » Completed, addressed in recommendations.
- Identify opportunities and alternatives to meet existing and future needs.
 - » Addressed in recommendations.

The group was charged with an examination of the Chester Fritz Auditorium and its operations in relation to its current mission and the recent efforts by the University to implement the MIRA budget model (Model for Incentive-based Resource Allocation) as well as a master plan and a space management plan. The working group was also charged to issue a report that would:

- Develop recommendations for the vice president of finance & operations regarding the CFA
- Identify metrics to be used to monitor success of recommendations

The CFA Team Members

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UND Division of Finance & Operations

Les Bjore
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Zachary Forschen
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Grand Forks' Public Arts Commission
UND Department of Art

Katherine Norman Dearden
UND Department of Music

Cheryl Swanson
Alerus Center

The working group initially met May 19, 2016. The working group met as a whole either by phone or in person a total of nine times with additional smaller group meetings occurring to draft these recommendations. The working group was asked by Alice Brekke to complete their work by early October 2016.

Tom Swangler and Betty Allan of the Chester Fritz Auditorium met with the working group to provide historical information and share current practices, challenges and opportunities. The group toured the CFA facilities. Deferred maintenance reports were shared with the group that outline facility needs. Odella Fuqua presented information to the group regarding the new MIRA budget model which will have a significant impact on the need for university financial support due to the actual costing of support services including maintenance and utilities. Additional stakeholders interviewed by working group members included Dawn Botsford and Fred Wittmann, UND Office of Ceremonies & University Events, James Popejoy, UND Department of Music, Matthew Wallace, North Dakota Museum of Art, and a former CFA employee. Additional research was conducted by working group members through personal contacts and internet searches.

The working group determined a survey would be the most appropriate method for gathering information from the diverse group of stakeholders identified (students, staff, faculty and community members). The survey tool was designed to gather feedback related to attendance, future activity, use of the facility, and priority of amenities. Questions were suggested by working group members, the survey was assembled and distributed by Lisa Earls and reviewed by the working group before distribution. The email was set up to be anonymous. An incentive of two pairs of tickets to the musical *Once* at the CFA was offered if participants wished to provide an email address through a separate form.

The survey was distributed via Qualtrics internally to UND through a variety of means including emails to students, staff and faculty and publication in the UND newsletter. Additionally, a variety of existing databases were utilized including the Chester Fritz Auditorium and through external groups including Greater Grand Forks Convention and Visitors Bureau, Greater Grand Forks Young Professionals, the Grand Forks Chamber of Commerce, Empire Arts Center, and North Valley Arts Council. The survey was opened on August 10, 2016 and closed on August 18, 2016.

The survey received a total of 2,948 total responses. Self-identified: 794 current student, 731 staff or faculty, 1423 community member. This data is available online UND.edu/finance-operations/process-improvement/cfa-survey. Of the 2,948 respondents, 90.31% indicated they have attended an event at the CFA.

Metrics

Core to the efforts of the CFA working group was the consideration of metrics to understand how the operations of the Chester Fritz Auditorium's align with UNDs current academic and service missions as well as how improve alignment going forward. The survey instrument included a number of evaluatory questions. Among these questions, stakeholders reported:

- The quality of their experience
- The perceived value of pricing
- Their frequency of attendance

Other indicators that can be derived from the survey include the utilization of the facility by campus groups, stakeholder utilization of competing local and regional venues and stakeholder perceived value to the campus and community.

Recommendations

The following recommendations reflect the strong support for the CFA expressed by the University and Greater Grand Forks communities in a survey of nearly 3,000 students, staff, faculty, and community members. These survey results are referenced throughout the recommendations. These recommendations also recognize the unique role that the CFA has in bridging the University community and the community-at-large. The CFA brings the community to the UND campus as a facility of unmatched seating and stage size, and provides a venue for graduations, convocations, music performances, and other events that highlight student achievement.

General Recommendations

- The CFA serves a critical need as a cultural amenity and gathering place for the Greater Grand Forks community and University of North Dakota campus and should not be closed.
- The relationship of the CFA mission to the University mission and strategic plan must be examined, in recognition of continued financial support from the University.
- The Working group recommends that the CFA develop a three- to five-year strategic plan, identifying priority growth areas including fundraising, marketing, and community and University usage, and that metrics (such as revenue, attendance, and usage) be monitored to evaluate performance based on the identified growth areas.

Opportunities

MARKETING

- Improved marketing is necessary to grow the CFA audience base. Limited marketing of events was recognized as barrier to CFA growth in findings from discussion and survey results¹.
- Work with promoters to increase marketing and identify local marketing opportunities.
- Increase marketing of space to customers and think about different options for increasing usage. This may include marketing the CFA to promoters as a venue to start tours by highlighting the venue rental fee relative to venues in larger urban markets.

EVENTS & FACILITY USAGE

- Expand and diversify event offerings to attract a broader audience. Many survey respondents indicated that they are not interested in the types of events most often brought in by the CFA². Examples of new programming could include the Eye of the Hawk lecture series, movie screenings, additional concerts, production of original programming, etc.
- Expand service as a learning space by increasing usage by student and on-campus groups, hosting cultural events that contribute to a broader understanding of the world by the student body, expanding the Department of Music's concert offerings, and exploring the feasibility of offering large enrollment courses³.
- Increase facility use by community groups. This could include use by local churches for services, local nonprofit performing arts groups, public school districts, civic groups, etc. This could also include use for educational events directed to the student body.

¹ Response to question: If you have considered attending a recent event... 28% of total indicated unaware of what is available

² Response to question: If you have considered attending a recent event... 31% of total indicated not interested in programming that is offered

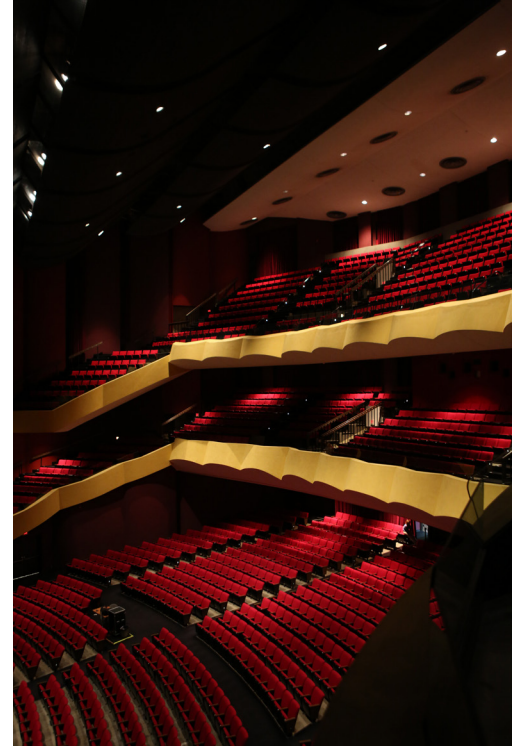
³ Examples of similar facilities utilized in this way include the University of Toronto's Convocation Hall, UC-Berkeley's Wheeler Hall, and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Grand Cinema). To reflect the CFA's use as a learning space, re-evaluate its space use code. See, for example, the current space code classification for the Josephine Campbell Recital Hall, Hughes Fine Arts, which is a mixed-use classroom and concert space.

FUNDRAISING

- Explore the potential for fundraising as part of UND Alumni Association & Foundation efforts. Based on survey feedback⁴, the time may be very good to request community support and align with the UND Alumni Association & Foundation to capitalize on such opportunities.
- Examine the option of allowing the CFA to fundraise independent of the UND Alumni Association & Foundation.
- Work with facilities to prioritize technology, deferred maintenance and capital needs to best impact improvements that will benefit the customer experience and marketability of the CFA to renters and performers.

MANAGEMENT

- Consider alternative revenue source opportunities following best industry practices for venues similar to the CFA including concessions, increased parking rates, alcohol sales, naming rights of spaces within the venue, ticket fees, etc.
- Examine current staffing and evaluate best use of time and talents of existing professional staff. This may include enhanced marketing duties, additional outreach to promoters, etc.
- Review opportunities for external management agreements such as a public/private partnership⁵.
- Appropriately cost usage rental fees. Consider a sliding fee scale based on affiliation to promote usage, especially among campus and student groups.
- Ensure that the cost of maintenance and utilities accurately reflects the level of services provided under the MIRA budget model.



Concluding Remarks

The Chester Fritz Auditorium is a long standing cultural asset to the University of North Dakota, Grand Forks and its surrounding communities as well as the state of North Dakota. To this end, its activities align with aspects of UNDs current academic mission, not the least of which include its emphasis on the contribution of creative endeavors to the public well-being.

Thus, it is vital to explore ways to innovate and improve the Chester Fritz Auditorium, including identifying areas to modernize, improving the stakeholder experience, better aligning the facility to UND's academic mission and seeking new or additional revenue streams.

⁴ Comments indicate a willingness of some respondents to make a personal donation towards keeping the CFA open.

⁵ The working group did not achieve consensus on this point, as concern was expressed that goal of public university is student learning and public good, which may not match mission of external management institution ... possibility for conflict with donor intent.