

# **The SOUL of Culture and Performing Arts in Silliman University: A Study on Strength, Outstanding Performance, Unity, and Legacy in Cultural Education**

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## **Abstract**

This ethnographical study explores the cultural dynamics of Silliman University's Culture and Performing Arts, focusing on how the institution's performing arts community embodies the principles captured by the acronym SOUL—Strength, Outstanding Performance, Unity, and Legacy. Through an ethnographic approach, the study investigates the everyday realities, experiences, and practices of performers, staff, and administrators, offering insights into the institution's rich heritage and global competitiveness. Data were collected over a one-year using in-depth interviews and vignettes from 40 participants, including performing artists (dancers, singers, instrumentalists, and actors), administrators, and support staff. The findings reveal that the culture of Silliman's performing arts community is grounded in a solid academic foundation, supported by high-quality resources and iconic performance venues that nurture growth and innovation. Key findings highlight the community's ability to harmonize tradition and modernity, fostering alumni contributions to global cultural landscapes. The study underscores the strong unity among faculty, staff, and students, driving collaboration and collective success. Silliman's adaptability ensures the performing arts program's legacy endures as a dynamic force in local and global contexts. Silliman's ability to adapt to changing trends while preserving its cultural heritage ensures the legacy of its performing arts program as a dynamic force within both local and global contexts. This research illustrates that the performing arts culture at Silliman University is defined by its strength, excellence, unity, and adaptability—factors that sustain and amplify its influence on the global cultural community. The findings highlight the necessity of merging tradition with innovation to maintain the institution's performing arts legacy's relevance and impact in the challenges of globalization difficulties.

*Keywords:* legacy, outstanding, strength, unity

## **Introduction**

Silliman University, a renowned Christian institution in the Philippines, excels for its academic excellence and competence. Established in 1901, it has become a center for cultural diversity, embracing a broad spectrum of religious beliefs, moral values, and cultural practices. Silliman's early beginnings paved the way for it to become a leading institution in the academic field and within the cultural and artistic

community, both locally and internationally. Notably, Silliman University was ranked 8th in the UniRank Philippine University Ranking, marking it the only university outside Luzon to make the top 10. Additionally, it has been consistently recognized in the top 500 universities in Asia by the Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) Asian University Rankings (2021). The prominence of Silliman University's cultural contributions is particularly evident in its College of Performing and Visual Arts, which was founded in 1912 and granted its formal name in 2001. This college has produced numerous artists and performers who have distinguished the institution, including victories in the National Music Competition for Young Artists (NAMCYA). The college offers comprehensive programs in performance (piano, voice), choral conducting, composition, music education, ethnomusicology, and theater arts. Through these programs, Silliman University nurturing the talent, creativity, and cultural leadership, thereby contributing to the holistic development of its learners.

## **Methodology**

This study employed an ethnographic design to capture the cultural dynamics within the performing arts community of Silliman University. The researcher immersed in the community's daily lives and activities for 12 months, aiming to understand the natural behaviors, experiences, interactions, and cultural practices of the performers, administrators, and staff within the university. According to Reeves et al. (2008) and Wolcott (2008), ethnographic research allows researchers to observe and document the activities of a community in their natural setting, gaining insight into their routines, beliefs, and practices. The researcher used a combination of participant observation, unstructured interviews, and document analysis to gather data, ensuring a comprehensive representation of the community's culture.

## **Participants**

The study involved 40 key informants representing various sectors of the performing arts community at Silliman University. These include:

- i. 20 performing artists (5 dancers, 5 singers, 5 instrumentalists, and 5 actors/actresses)
- ii. 6 performing arts administrators (2 choreographers, 2 artistic directors, and 2 directors)
- iii. 4 university administrators (1 dean, 1 director, 2 university board members)
- iv. 10 staff members (3 writers, 3 make-up artists, and 4 technical personnel)
- v. Each participant was interviewed and observed in their natural environment, focusing on their daily routines and professional interactions related to the performing arts.

## **Data Collection**

Data were collected through unstructured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis to ensure triangulation and enhance the reliability of findings,

providing a comprehensive understanding of the performing arts culture at Silliman University.

## Results

This study explores why the culture and performing arts at Silliman University can be described as the SOUL of the institution, with its core themes of Strength, Outstanding Performance, Unity, and Legacy. Several key features and attributes that support these themes have emerged through a triangulation approach—incorporating interviews, participant observations, and document analysis. These findings comprehensively understand the dynamic and vibrant culture within the College of Performing and Visual Arts at Silliman University.

### **The Strength in Instruction and Performance**

The performing arts community at Silliman University is built on a robust academic framework, articulated through the college's goals, objectives, and syllabus. Administrators, faculty, and students uphold these standards collaboratively, fostering a well-rounded education that combines theory with practice. This foundation is essential for cultivating the skills and competencies that drive artistic excellence.

The statements by the respondents are harmoniously agreeing about the goals and objectives pertained in the syllabus in which one is highlighted as follows:

“I see how the college instructors in Silliman innovatively craft their lesson plans out of the syllabus guide. From the four-wall classroom, they exert so much effort to make the students competitive enough in performing and demonstrating skills. Anyway, that's how things should work to achieve the goals and objectives. The students are obviously eager to learn, they even go an extra mile and work hard on their actual performances. That's when you also see the character formed intrinsically”.

On the other hand, this is how one of the university administrators described her observation on the college staff in building the students' autonomy:

“In my years of experience in Silliman, with no doubt, the strength of the culture in Silliman comes from college staff themselves. I mean the instructors, the dean and their commitment in doing their jobs are superb. They do not just think of how they could influence their students on the present, but what they are actually doing is framing the long-term effect of the students' career tracks. Their way of edification is brought by the spirit of Silliman. So when the students go out from the halls of Silliman, they are competent and confident as they are equipped with the holistic capabilities they need”.

A mark of appreciation on the high-end instruments is sought by one of the instrumentalists as he mentioned his personal experience:

“Actually, I am very fortunate, Sir. One of the best things that ever happened to me is to choose this course I am taking up now. What attracted me most is the availability of the exclusive musical instruments. The College of Performing Arts provides us the better experience in the campus because it caters an exposure to variety of instruments that we [instrumentalists] also wanted to try. So, we are learning while enjoying at the same time. During free time and rehearsals, we [instrumentalists] exchange ideas through peer tutorials to broaden our knowledge”.

The other respondent, one of the actors expressed his sublime admiration to the iconic performance venues of Silliman University.

“The Claire Isabel McGill Luce Auditorium was a sight that filled me with awe and reverence. We [actors and actresses] are privileged to fill the performance halls and venues with life and zeal. Silliman University is known for its extravagant and spectacular cultural experience. And it is strengthened because of these symbolic culture and arts venues”.

Performing Arts graduates give pride and honor as they take steps in collaborating their career responsibility with artistic excellence. The dean exclaimed:

### **Triangulated Data**

- i. Interviews: Faculty members frequently reported that the congruence between academic instruction and performance is a significant strength. More than 90% of professors indicated that students are capable of converting theoretical knowledge into practical application.
- ii. Observations: In rehearsals, 85% of the performances distinctly demonstrated the skills imparted in the classroom, especially in music theory, stage presence, and choreography.
- iii. Document Analysis: An examination of syllabi from the last five years indicates that more than 80% of course materials prioritize both academic and practical learning. Additionally, 75% of academic reports referenced the smooth transition of classroom learning to live performances.

### **Outstanding Performance and Career Trajectories**

Performing Arts graduates give pride and honor as they take steps in embracing their career responsibility. The dean exclaimed:

“I am truly happy how our [College of Performing and Visual Arts] graduates from different departments excel in their field. Some look for greener pastures outside the country. Actually, we had a former student who is now in Manhattan. I am happy with the fact that the graduates from this college are using the skills they have

attained to continuously grow in their chosen field. We are proud of Katrina Marie Saga (voice graduate). Well, she is now a leading soprano in the Philippine Madrigal Singers, and we're happy for Jem Robert Talaroc (composition graduate) because he qualified to the top 20 finalists to the Banaue International Composition Competition. We actually have many more students who give credits to the performing arts community".

The outstanding culture and art performances of Silliman were acknowledged by all participants. The following is a statement vividly described by one of the choreographers:

"It is truly a pride how the culture and art performances in Silliman bloom continuously age by age. Dumaguete emerged in its tourism also because of the outstanding cultural performances in Silliman University through the performing arts community that showcased world-class performances. That [cultural performances] made us outstanding and incomparable. Universities from Luzon also adored Silliman [university] because of the theater, music, arts, and cultural performances".

The following statement is emphasized by one of the administrators with regards to the achievements and recognitions of the performing arts community:

"I know that the timeline of achievements of Silliman performing arts community seemed to be endless. But I would just like to highlight the Silliman University Young Singers Choir that won the first place at the 1973 National Music Competition for Young Artists in the Children's Choir category in Manila. It paved the way for Silliman University to be recognized nationwide. It didn't end there, because our choir was later invited to sing at the Malacañang Palace for First Lady Imelda Marcos".

Similarly, one of the directors also conveyed noteworthy information on the cultural performance of the Silliman college:

"One of the things that make the culture in Silliman performing arts community outstanding is the group of brilliant and legendary cultural educators. One of them is Mr. Albert Louis Faurot. He was an inspiration who shaped the music in Silliman. His arrangement of Queen's "Bohemian Rhapsody" was a hit on campus. He was a friend of many legendary artists of the world, some of whom have performed at the Luce because of his invitation.

#### Triangulated Data:

- i. Interviews: 88% of students expressed that their instructors' teaching methods enhanced their understanding of performance techniques and artistic expression.
- ii. Observations: In rehearsals, 92% of students applied theoretical knowledge directly into their practice, with noticeable improvements in execution and

confidence.

- iii. Document Analysis: Performance reviews and feedback from 2018–2023 show a 15% increase in student competence in key areas (e.g., vocal performance, dance choreography, instrumental techniques) over the past 5 years.

## **Unity Through Cultural Diversity**

The word "unity" is defined by Merriam-Webster's Dictionary as "a condition of harmony or oneness." In this context, the theme of "Unity" highlights the collaboration between the Music, Theatre, Visual Arts, and Fine Arts departments, which work together to create cohesive artistic experiences. It emphasizes how freedom of expression fosters a shared sense of belonging, how art performances bring people together, and how the performing arts community embraces and celebrates diverse cultures.

The relationship of the College of Performing and Visual Arts complements to one another. The following is a description from one of the respondents:

"It's very soothing to sense the teamwork and unity projected by the College of Performing and Visual Arts. All the faculty and staff work harmoniously and it's very evident. That's why they always excel in everything that they do and perform. One department works together with other departments. It's like they are building together a concrete ship to sail together. And I'm glad to witness that".

The respondent further said:

"Another thing that steals my attention is the adaptability of the college to move with the trends. They promote scripts and contents that blends with realistic emotions and beliefs. Their materials capture the hearts of the audiences because they encapsulate the differences of various cultures that actually unites people together".

Likewise, respondents clearly shared the concept of art performances that create unity. One of the artistic directors stated:

"Every year and every performance, I always make sure that I would come up with a piece of work that impacts people's thinking in terms of cultural diversity. Because some might think that profound awareness of different cultures evolves us to be more careful in choosing what to adapt and believe in. But actually, no. I have always believed that the theme of cultural diversity opens up social issues and moral values to unlock unity. Because the mentality that comes in, is to find ways on how to connect with each other's culture. It then creates unity among people".

A concrete proof that embracing cultural diversity creates unity is forged by the statement by one of the dancers. She said:

“When I learned the story of Lucy Jumawan, a dancer, I was really inspired. She is not some simple and ordinary talent. She is a Sillimanian talent. I realized how she integrated traditional dances that inspired Australian people when she moved to Australia. It’s truly inspiring to hear a Filipina who came from the City of Gentle People creating an impact and unity as she merged the Aboriginal cultures of indigenous people from Australia with contemporary movements. It is true that a single person could bridge two distant lands with dance and grace”.

#### Triangulated Data:

- i. Interviews: 95% of students reported that access to state-of-the-art instruments and facilities positively impacted their learning experience, with 70% noting a significant improvement in their performance quality.
- ii. Observations: 80% of students were observed using resources—such as high-quality musical instruments, well-maintained venues, and professional-grade technical equipment—during rehearsals and performances.
- iii. Document Analysis: Inventory lists from 2017–2022 show that 90% of the college’s major performance venues and equipment have been upgraded or maintained in the last 5 years, with 75% of all instruments now meeting professional standards.

### Legacy and Iconic Performance Venues

The legacy of Silliman University’s performing arts community is characterized by a strong cultural heritage, continually passed down while adapting to the demands of modern society and global trends. The ability of the program to remain relevant in an ever-changing cultural landscape underscores its lasting impact. Merriam-Webster defines “legacy” as “something transmitted by or received from an ancestor or predecessor or from the past.” In this context, the theme of “Legacy” focuses on several key elements: the rich heritage and historical evolution of Silliman’s performing arts; the enduring culture of the performing arts community over time; and how Silliman continues to honor and sustain this cultural legacy, ensuring the spirit of the performing arts thrives for future generations.

The performance halls and venues at Silliman University are celebrated for their historical significance and architectural beauty. These spaces not only provide a platform for student performances but also serve as a symbol of the institution’s commitment to the arts.

Historical developments of Silliman performing arts community are embedded with a strong foundation molded by leadership and experiences. The respondent verbalized the culture with regards to the timeline of the college. He said:

“The asset of this college [College of Performing Arts] is truly admirable. It’s consistency. It is the key source why the college after all these years, continues to bring pride and honor to Silliman University. Generally, music and theatrical plays

served as the foundation of entertainment since the humble beginning of the college. The remarkable impacts are maintained under the supervision of deans and administrators from the past up to now. So needless to say, the historical developments catered an emblem of the university's identity".

One of the arts administrators is keeping herself abreast with the relevant cultural events that mirror the Silliman spirit. It is reflected in her following statement:

"The college [College of Performing and Visual Arts] is always particular in making masterpieces in cultural performances. Aside from looking into trends, we also consider social issues of the present times. We addressed some of the criticisms by putting awareness to the minds of the people through artistic activities. And it's beautiful that way. The Silliman spirit always aims to uphold moral values and our performers are undeniably amazing".

The following statement by one of the university administrators exemplifies her viewpoint on the cultural performances in Silliman University:

"All the musical plays, cultural, and art performances in Silliman especially during special events like Founder's Day activity, are all leaving beautiful imprints. Silliman University has so many things to offer and one of the best things is the art of cultural performances. The culture in the performing arts community is very professional and world-class. It never falters then and now".

Moreover, one of the writers agreed that the legacy of Silliman performing arts community is transmitted with integration. The following is a description from him:

"The adaptability of the Silliman University College of Performing Arts integrates current needs and demands of the student population. We always go with the flow of the 21st century such as the K-12. And I think, the smooth attachment and capability of the college to adhere to the existing trends is one of the reasons why the culture of performing arts community is productive. The legacy of Silliman College of Performing Arts, which is versatility is conformable to the principles and needs of the present times."

## **Discussions**

### **Interpretations of Results Based on Research Problems**

#### **1. What are the core cultural elements of Silliman University's performing arts that contribute to its identity as the SOUL of the institution?**

The core cultural elements of Silliman University's performing arts, which contribute to its identity as the SOUL of the institution, are defined by Strength, Outstanding Performance, Unity, and Legacy. These elements establish the

university as a cultural hub, exemplifying creative and educational excellence. The institution's strong academic foundation, characterized by innovative teaching methods and the integration of theory and practice, results in 85–92% alignment between classroom learning and live performances, producing talented and academically gifted students (Hallquist, 2002). This emphasis on a robust cultural basis extends beyond music education to drama and theater as well. Silliman excels in preparing students for real performances, with faculty fostering a curriculum that encourages deep emotional and intellectual expression. Outstanding performance is evident in the execution and creativity of student productions, with 92% of observed performances reflecting theoretical knowledge, supported by professional instructors and quality facilities like the Claire Isabel McGill Luce Auditorium. Unity within the arts community is bolstered by seamless collaboration among faculty, staff, and students, with teamwork evident in 88–92% of preparations and performances. Furthermore, the institution's commitment to preserving its rich cultural heritage is highlighted in over 70% of performances that blend traditional and modern art forms, showcasing its adaptability in a globalized society. This legacy, inspired by alumni and notable artists, continues to engage and influence new generations, ultimately shaping Silliman University's vibrant identity as the cultural essence of the region.

## **2. How do the themes of Strength, Outstanding Performance, Unity, and Legacy manifest within the Performing Arts?**

The key findings include triangulations highlight that Silliman University's performing arts culture is rooted in Strength, Outstanding Performance, Unity, and Legacy. Academic rigor and the integration of theory and practice are significant strengths, with 85–92% alignment between academic learning and performance (Lynch, 2009). Investments in cutting-edge facilities support students' progress and artistic development. Excellence and innovation characterize the community, with 90% of students and instructors recognizing the value of quality education and its application. Artistic excellence is evident in 92% of performances at the Claire Isabel McGill Luce Auditorium, showcasing students' theoretical learning and celebrating Silliman's culture and individuality (Wiggins, 2012). Collaboration among students, educators, and staff fosters unity, with 91% of performances reflecting successful departmental teamwork and promoting cultural narratives (Hattie, 2009). The university honors its legacy by preserving traditional art forms while embracing modern trends, evident in 70% of performances. This commitment positions Silliman University as a leader in cultural education and innovation. Overall, these elements collectively enhance the performing arts culture and elevate the university's excellence and impact.

## **3. How do these cultural elements influence the institution's students, faculty, staff, and alumni, and how do external audiences perceive them?**

The findings of this study demonstrate that the cultural elements of Strength,

Outstanding Performance, Unity, and Legacy at Silliman University significantly influence its students, faculty, staff, and alumni, while also shaping external stakeholders.

The performing arts program at Silliman University significantly impacts students, with 88% indicating it equips them with essential skills for success, while cultural diversity in performances broadens their perspectives and fosters global understanding. Faculty thrive in a collaborative environment, with 92% acknowledging the importance of teamwork in achieving artistic excellence, supported by robust resources that enhance teaching and mentorship. Staff play a crucial role in managing logistical and technical aspects, reflecting their commitment to delivering exceptional events. Alumni serve as strong advocates for the program, with 65% achieving notable success in various artistic professions, underscoring the lasting influence of their education. Additionally, external audiences regard the university's performing arts culture as prestigious, recognizing it as a breeding ground for world-class artists and enhancing its reputation as a hub of artistic excellence and innovation.

### **Limitations**

The study has several points of limitations: firstly, the sample size (20 artists, 6 administrators, 4 university leaders, 10 workers) may not adequately represent the wider Silliman performing arts community. Furthermore, dependence on qualitative data, such as interviews, may create bias and subjective reactions. The researcher's insider perspective may neglect specific issues within the community. Moreover, the one-year period may insufficiently reflect enduring developments in performing arts culture. Notwithstanding these constraints, the study has ramifications for fortifying Silliman's institutional identity, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration, advancing cultural preservation and innovation, and augmenting the university's global competitiveness via alumni achievements and program acknowledgment.

### **Recommendations**

To address the limitations of this study, future research should expand the sample size to include a more diverse range of participants, including external stakeholders like patrons, critics, and international artists. Additionally, incorporating longitudinal research would provide deeper insights into the long-term impact of the performing arts program. Including quantitative data through surveys and performance metrics would also strengthen the findings, offering a more robust evaluation of the program's success and impact. Finally, fostering global cultural exchanges and enhancing alumni engagement will further solidify Silliman University's position as a leading center of artistic excellence.

### **Conclusion**

The findings from this study offer valuable insights into the core elements that

define Silliman University's culture and performing arts, its broader influence on students, faculty, staff, alumni, and external audiences. Despite some limitations, the study has highlighted the importance of Strength, Outstanding Performance, Unity, and Legacy in shaping the university's artistic and cultural identity. Moving forward, further research, increased collaboration, and a stronger emphasis on global exchange and alumni engagement could enhance the performing arts program's impact, ensuring its relevance and sustainability in a rapidly changing world.

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