

**External Review
Department of Visual Arts**

**Faculty of Media, Art, and Performance (MAP)
University of Regina, Regina Saskatchewan, Canada**

Virtual Zoom Visit Dates: March 29th and 30th, 2021

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Executive Summary

The Committee met over two days beginning with Department Head Dr. Risa Horowitz, faculty members from Art History and Visual Art at all ranks, the AVP of Student Affairs and Enrollment Services, Liaison Librarian, Graduate faculty members, and UR International recruitment staff, staff and lecturers, the Fifth Parallel Gallery staff (student run), stakeholders in graduate programs and research and the First Nations University, undergraduate and graduate students, alumni, MAP Faculty Administrator, Provost, VP Research, Associate Vice President Academic) and the Dean of MAP.

Due to the pandemic all our meetings were on Zoom and we did not meet together or see the facilities in situ. The department prepared an 18-minute video tour that highlighted the facilities, and reviewed teaching, studio spaces, the student run art gallery, areas for print making, sculpture, photo-based media, drawing, ceramics and seminars rooms

The Review Committee met on Zoom immediately after our various meetings to discuss our deliberations and allocated agreed written tasks to each other. We continued to have follow up meetings via Zoom and this document is co-authored by the three reviewers.

The Department of Visual Arts is an impressive small department with dedicated faculty and staff. It was clear students are fully engaged in the study and instruction of the production and analysis of art. We write this report with good intentions and wish the department and university much success.

The following report is organized beginning with the Committee's immediate recommendations for our colleagues, followed by more general observations and recommendations about the department, and consideration of the more specific Studio and Art History areas. This is followed by a discussion of the graduate programs and departmental alumni. Of the items the department identified in their SWOT analysis, the following arise as themes throughout this report:

- emphasis on teaching (assistance/guidance), community, facilities (studio access, intimate size)
- some concern about employable skills training expressed by students
- concerns about budget cuts/limits
- reduced studio time
- size and isolation of program, difficulty of attracting students, retaining faculty in Regina
- value placed in indigenous art history/visual culture is a big positive, as is access to indigenous perspectives, teachers
- challenges of location for recruitment of students and faculty.
- budgets
- academic structure
- too few professors to meet teaching, service and research requirements
- difficulties with time-tabling (prerequisites only in fall)
- lack of funding
- equipment limits/shortages
- silos
- diversity (of faculty, of courses or opportunity)

Immediate Recommendations

In our report we have listed considerations and recommendations throughout. At the end of this document, we have provided a list of recommendations and considerations for the medium- to long-term that we make throughout the document itself. We have four recommendations which are top priority for the department and University to support so that the Department of Visual Arts maintains and develops its high quality in research and programming. We recommend the following changes:

- **Hire a new Art Historian as soon as possible**, and not as a retirement line. A new position should be granted to the department, so that it does not have to rely on other units or areas of the University to provide art historians. There is strong desire and objective need to build the art history section of the Department of Visual Arts. If this were done, and with some reconfiguring, the department would be in the position to offer an MA in Art History, and, in time, a PhD in Art History, along with a graduate program in Cultures of Display/Curatorial Studies.
- **The University retrofit an existing building or build a purpose-built professional Class-A facility university museum**. With a gallery and more art historians, the university could begin to offer graduate degrees in Curation, Display Cultures, Museum Studies and a PhD in Art History. A professional University Gallery would offer a site of pedagogy and research for MAP, and other Departments within the University. It would also serve as a significant recruitment aid for the graduate MFA. Because the Mackenzie Art Gallery is no longer hosting the MFA show, (as most public galleries are not meant to house student exhibitions) a professional University Gallery would provide a necessary exhibition space for graduate students in the MFA, and act as a resource for the wider U of R community.

We understand that the University currently holds a significant art collection that could be an important source of research both for students in Regina, and for national and international art communities interested in the collection. Now might be the time for the University to archive its collection, to better know what it owns, and to have it professionally appraised. Further, using the University's collection as a site of research and scholarship would help to enhance an understanding of it, and build the reputation of the collection. A university professional gallery would lend to the cultural capital of the city and the University, and attract students both locally, regionally and internationally. Once a University has a Class A facility, donors and patrons have a home for possible collection donations, as well as estate planning. A patron could be sought for name placement as well.

- **We highly recommend that the University allow the department to levy course material fees at their own discretion and manage those fees**. A remarkable feature of this department is that, despite teaching classes in which materials are essential for student learning, the University has not allowed the department to levy a course materials fee. This creates an unnecessary financial burden on the department. The department holds annual fundraisers to help meet these costs, which constitutes an undue burden on faculty members and makes this student funding highly precarious.
- **Explicitly and consistently acknowledge that the department is located in Treaty 4 Territory, or borrow from the wording that the university has in use**. Nowhere on your website or student handbooks is this mentioned.

Points of Consideration Across the Department

Contributions to the University’s Vision, Mission, Goals, and Priorities. The University of Regina’s Vision, Mission, and Focus Statements suggest an overlapping set of priorities. The Department of Visual Arts contributes to and embodies many of these priorities. The department’s willingness to attempt new programs and modes of delivery to students exemplifies the goal of discovery, as do the art practices of faculty members and of the students they teach, mentor, and encourage. The department contributes to the University’s impact in local, national, and international communities through the strength of its graduates, and through the faculty members’ contributions to overlapping communities of art practice. The department’s members have taken steps in certain areas (e.g., in printmaking and in thinking about darkroom practices) to ensure the environmental impact of their practices is minimized and attended to in an ongoing way. As practices continue to evolve, we **recommend** the department to continue its efforts to expand considerations of sustainability in developing procedures for the use of materials and resources.

Programs

Housed within the larger MAP – Faculty for Media, Art, and Performance – the Department of Visual Arts is a relatively small but fully engaged program. There are a broad array of degree and concentration possibilities available to students.

In the general area of Art History and Cultures of Display:

- BA or BA Honours in Art History, and minor (BA has more electives, BA Honours requires 21 credit hours additional specialized courses)
- BA in Cultures of Display, changing to Curatorial Studies (21 credit hours of specific courses in ART ARTH and CTCH)

In the Studio areas:

- BFA, BA, and BA Honours and certificates in Studio with areas of study in Ceramics, Drawing, Painting, Photo-based media, Printmaking, Sculpture
- General BA in Studio
- Certificate in Visual Art (60 credit) part time students, Certificate in Advanced Studio Arts (30 credits) for students with 3-year degree, Post Baccalaureate Certificate for students with degree wishing to enrich themselves and prepare for graduate school
- MAP also offers minors in Arts Administration and Photography

There are multiple pathways to degrees, minors, and certificates in the department, including a BA, a BA Honours, and a minor in Art History; a BA in Cultures of Display; a BFA, a BA, a BA Honours, and certificates in Studio across six different separate areas, and a BFA or BA in Studio. Other pathways involving the Department of Visual Arts exist in the MAPS area. Two-year (six semester) graduate degrees are taught in the six studio areas with a maximum of five graduate students admitted each year.

One option which might be worth exploring is to **consider** whether there might be a mutual desire between the Department of Visual Arts at the University of Regina and First Nations University to work together to offer joint degrees in areas of mutual and complimenting interest and expertise. If joint degrees or other collaborations already exist, they were not visible for us to review.

Funding

The Pool Budget has been stable at \$34,200 since 2013-2014. However, with the elimination of the capital equipment fund in 2008, there have been shortfalls in equipment spending. We note in particular that this affects the funding required for an engineer's report in order to begin plans for dedicated darkroom facilities (for which there is a qualified, full-time faculty member, and for which there is the necessary equipment to furnish a black and white darkroom). While it may be the case that the department has discretion about how it allocates its budget (and could perhaps do so differently), a dark room is clearly of a capital nature. Access to a dark room is an important resource for the department, not only in photography but across a range of fields both within and outside the department. Similarly, technical support might be considered as a shared resource. The absence of full-time technical support in some areas (e.g., printmaking) or part-time technical support in others (e.g., photography) risks potential burn-out for faculty members. Approaching technical support from a departmental or even Faculty perspective might be worth considering. The video highlighting the department showed the photo shooting studio, which only allowed for a small table to take small still life images of small objects. This limitation does not allow for student growth in larger photography projects.

Considerations:

- 1) Could MAP explore ways to bring Visual Arts Facilities and Film Facilities into closer collegial and student contact so that both streams can work together for shared dark room space and shooting studio space?
- 2) Could the department pay a fee for that space or negotiate a trade? MAP and the Dean's office should support this collaborative use of space.
- 3) Could funding be re-allocated to Visual Arts so they may have their own darkroom?
- 4) Could there be an increase to studio printing fees?

Funding for graduate students is meagre and does not help in attracting students to Regina, which can already be a hard sell. Graduate students are often contracted, sometimes shortly after beginning a Master's program, to teach undergraduate courses. While this provides income, it is not in keeping with general practice to have students taking on such large responsibilities early in their graduate work. **Recommendation:** Develop sources of enhanced graduate student funding, potentially including donor named scholarships and patrons for 2nd year graduate funding; the University Advancement and Communication office should work with the Department Head to secure patrons.

Facilities

The general condition and accessibility to all the facilities is impressive for a unit this size. The department is known nationally for its rigorous ceramic production and kilns and the video tour clearly demonstrated this strength of the program.

Students commented that the printmaking labs are phenomenal. Some observed that the kilns need more maintenance. Ensuring that there are a few sets of instructional and procedural binders or manuals within the kiln area was suggested to ensure proper use.

The Fifth Parallel Art Gallery offers experience and opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students.

Special notes: the department website notes that the Fifth Parallel gallery is the only student run gallery in Canada. In fact, many other universities do also have student run galleries. Likewise, in the 18 min department video, a studio faculty member states that faculty studios on campus “are one of the only ones in the country” – this may need to be revised, as UBC and many other Visual Art departments have faculty studios on campus.

Technical Support

Some concerns were expressed about the absence of technicians, and some facilities were considered to restrict the possibilities of certain courses, in photography and sculpture.

The respective roles of technicians and professors require clarification. In some cases, the line between teaching and technical support could be made more clearly to students.

Without a darkroom or designated photo imaging areas, students and faculty are not fully supported in their research needs. We hope that conversations amongst Visual Arts, MAP and the Film department could find possible synergies and work out how to share resources so that all students from all departments would have opportunities to access to a darkroom.

Recommendation: MAP should work collaboratively to bring Visual Arts facilities and Film facilities into closer contact and conversations so that both streams are able to collaborate and share dark room space and shooting studio space. It might be possible for a fee to be paid to access the space, or negotiate a trade in kind. MAP and the Dean’s office should support this collaborative use of space and resources.

First Nations University

The department's connections with Indigenous art practices and teaching show that members are well positioned to contribute to reconciliation work, and to efforts to assist their students in also doing so. As part of building this capacity, we **recommend** that lines of communication, collaboration, and cooperation be enhanced with faculty members in the program in Indigenous Communication and Fine Arts at First Nations University of Canada.

In addition, the Committee **recommends** working toward bringing greater clarity to the nature of the degree-offering relationship the department has with Indigenous Communication and Fine Arts, in mutual consultation with faculty members at FNU. The FNU website notes that their Fine Arts program offers a number of certificates and degrees, including: Certificate in Indigenous Fine Arts (2-years), Bachelor of Fine Arts (4-years), Bachelor of Arts (Indigenous Art, 4-years), Bachelor of Arts (Indigenous Art History, 4-years). However, the MAP/Department of Visual Arts website makes no mention of any of these degrees or of any cross-pollination that might be possible between the two departments. Further, the department's website/student handbooks do not make clear what the relationship is between it and Fine Arts at FNU, or whether there are any cross-over degrees offered by the two departments.

To the best of our knowledge, the Department of Visual Arts has two Indigenous professors who do not seem to be cross-listed with FNU; nor are faculty members at FNU cross-listed with the department. It is unclear to us whether or how both these units work together.

Recommendation: the Department of Visual Art should collaborate with FNU to cross-list courses and to offer joint degree programs. We recommend that the department consult with faculty members at FNU and, where possible, work to build or rebuild relationships.

Service

The very significant service demands of faculty members in the Department of Visual Arts are intensified by an understaffed faculty complement. As is the case with smaller departments in many universities, the administrative and committee service workload for faculty in the Department of Visual Arts cannot be distributed so that it does not impose a considerable burden. Recognizing that this is a reality without normalizing this reality is important. Members of the department serve on local, national, and international scholarly organizations and community groups, and participate widely in public service, research-service, and service to disciplines/professions, including exhibitions, screenings, performing, and curatorial work; chairing and organizing conference panels; reviewing work for publication; artist lectures in public venues; and serving on juries and selection committees.

Consideration: when possible, grant course release for extra service work, such as Chairs of committees, or for large SSHRC grants. The heavy service work required in a small department also deserves significant recognition during annual reviews/Merit and Promotion proceedings.

Faculty research

There is need for more SSHRC applications in general and for support in helping faculty members to apply for these. Ideally, the university could establish mentors and support groups to help new faculty. It was noted that faculty SSHRC grants could also be helpful to fund graduate students, since two-year funding (aside from instructorships and TA-ships) is not available for students.

Sabbatical Replacements and Retirements

With the relatively small size of the department, during sabbaticals, courses usually taught by permanent faculty members are taught by sessional faculty or are not offered. The retirement of an Instructor in 2018 and the replacement of that position by the appointment of an Assistant Professor was a positive development, but because of the additional costs related to the new position, the number of courses that could be offered were effectively reduced.

Faculty and Student Concerns

During our conversations, the challenges of faculty recruitment and retention emerged as a very important concern. Similar concerns exist with respect to student recruitment, especially at the graduate level. Among the external factors pertaining to recruitment and retention are the location of the University in a small city distant from most large population centres; the size of the program and university and their resources; and consequently, the challenges of attracting both faculty and students.

More specifically, there is a lack of clarity about how both the Visual Arts studio program and the Art History program are situated within the larger MAP faculty. Enrollment of declared Studio Majors has declined over recent years– it is possible that this reflects the de-prioritization of advising students to declare an area-specific major and the emphasis (intentional or not) of the General BFA.

With respect to declared students, it is possible that many of the identified issues could be readily resolved with better attention to communication, and with a clearer understanding of registration and other data. For example, there appear to be more declared students than recorded convocations; there is an apparent tendency for students to mistakenly believe that they need to have declared a major in order to be able to take upper-level courses; and there are possible problems with data indicating that students are not finishing. We **recommend** that the department identify the causes of these specific issues and resolve them.

Some students felt that painting and drawing are taught rather traditionally. On a few occasions, we heard from faculty and students about the siloing of distinct art practices. A few students identified much of their grading happens close to the end of semester and request that there be midway marks and comments so they can improve their work.

Consideration: Is there desire in the department to look at how to teach art practices from more of an interdisciplinary approach?

Because of a reduction in the availability of sessional teaching, permanent faculty generally only teach a set of core courses and have little room to develop new offerings. Enrollment trends in the areas of Art History and in the Cultures of Display appear to be related to issues of both the breadth of faculty available, and to ongoing issues of retention.

Regarding recruitment, the Committee notes that international networking with Mexico has resulted in a larger international student body in the department. Internationalization can have both positive and complicating consequences. It is important that the department and University carefully consider the benefits and costs of this.

Consideration: Review admissions standards to help with enrolment numbers; review target additional groups with recruitment in mind – First Nations and rural communities.

Studio

It was noted that there has been considerable growth in the number of upper-level combined (i.e. 300-400 level) studio courses. This has in turn given rise to concerns about the pedagogical limitations that such courses entail. What is appropriate at the different levels varies considerably. This can be challenging for both faculty and students.

Consideration: There appears to be some tension between Visual Arts and other departments in MAP. For example, there is a perception that the field of intermedia studies has been absorbed by another area in MAP. Could the department further articulate and assess its relationship with the other departments in MAP, and identify potential sites of cross-pollination to encourage course cross-listings and other forms of collaboration? The issue of supporting both old and new technology in the studio was a general concern regarding intermedia capacity.

Art History

With the recent departure of the Renaissance scholar, there is a strong need for an additional Art Historian (above, under **Immediate Recommendations**). Following the loss, there are currently only two faculty members in the area. Art History could be developed more fully to offer graduate degrees in the area, pending the department strengths and its Art History faculty. In addition, there are no graduate Art History students to TA in area courses. Having MFA students TA-ing in Art History undermines the specialized analysis and methodology that graduate Art History students could be providing. By developing the Art History section of the department, you could offer an MA and possibly in the future a PhD in Art History, as well as a graduate program in Cultures of Display or Curatorial Studies.

It was also noted that it is a waste of resources to have Art Historians who rarely teach in their specialized areas. Facilitating their doing so would build interest in and attract students wanting to study in those subject areas. A further case can be made for a third Art History faculty for sustainability for both faculty and students. This position could, potentially, be a cross-appointment within MAP. Faculty need to know the University and MAP supports Art History as a professional field of research and practice.

Consideration: Is it possible to rethink how Art History degrees exist in MAP and how that is communicated to students? This should be reviewed to ensure that undergraduates are able to navigate the different pathways to a degree in Art History.

Consideration: Beyond the currently offered degrees in Art History, could the department offer *certificates* in Art History, or Art History *minors*, or Certificates or degrees/joint degrees in Indigenous Art History at the University of Regina? Or a joint degree in Indigenous Studio and Art History with FNU?

Consideration: There are scholarships for students in Visual Arts. Could the department solicit scholarship funding for students in Art History?

Cultures of Display

A desire was expressed to change the name and possibly some aspects of the Cultures of Display program to a Curatorial Studies Program. A reframed curatorial program could also provide a catalyst for the creation of a fully-fledged professional gallery at the University of Regina, along with strengthening a graduate program.

Consideration: In working on this reframing, is it possible to work more closely with other programs at the University (such as archeology (classics), anthropology, philosophy, etc.), as well as with FNU, in developing a Curatorial Studies Program, if there is mutual interest?

Graduate Students

Current graduates in general are very positive about the graduate program and recognize the excellent studio facilities and dedicated faculty and staff. Students indicated that there is great technical support in many areas, but that the department lacks dedicated and easily available photo labs, including a dark/wet room and a shooting studios. One student suggested the need for easel upgrades in the painting studio. We did not physically visit the studios or facilities, but the short video highlighted a robust and active studio environment for faculty and students. Students commented that there are not many TA positions in studio. The Review Committee wonders if this is because there are not enough large studio art classes? We **recommend** that the department review the lack of TA positions for visual art graduate students and assess what would be possible to bring more TA positions forward.

Additionally, based on our meetings with graduate students the following points were highlighted as requiring attention:

- Written graduate theses are not currently archived, or at least not in a way which makes them accessible. What can the Department and students do to ensure the Department maintains these documents?
- The graduate exhibition is not photo documented or archived. Generally, exhibitions are documented for portfolios, as well for department promotion and historical archive purposes. We recommend the photo documentation of all graduate exhibitions and that the images be made available to students with proper photo credits and copyright understandings.

Alumni

On the whole, the department's alumni are very satisfied with their degree experience, and many are working professionally as artists and professors. Many expressed gratitude for the opportunity to teach while graduate students and this was viewed as a real draw for the program. One negative aspect is the lack of grad funding packages. The department offers good support for SSHRC applications; 50% of the alumni we spoke with received this funding when they were students. One student noted that since there is no guaranteed second-year funding, some students are forced to leave the program, or take breaks from it to work. Another student felt that the conclusion of the program did not validate their experience as much as they would have liked, and questioned why there was no documentation of the MFA show. It was also noted that the program could provide to students a greater diversity of expertise than it does by drawing on sessionals, visiting artists, scholars and visitor critiques, so students have engagement with a diversity of voices.

Consideration: There is significant desire for the department to bring more artists from outside the University and have more studio visits and crits with artists, curators and art historians from outside the department. Regarding the final graduate defence, a question arose about whether it would be possible to have a mix of instructors from MAP and also outside voices for a more robust analysis. Could the department invite a Visiting Critic for each student whose work is aligned with the student's research or bring in working professional artists or curators?

Summation

The Department of Visual Arts is a vibrant successful program (“a fierce little program,” as Dana remarks), which currently needs to assess where and how they need to grow and what kind of art they are teaching and want to teach. As with most art departments, there are shifting pedagogies to determine what is missing from programs and how to better instruct artists, art historians, and curators in the case of your department having three unique degree programs. There is room for faculty collaboration, and student collaboration with studio art, art history and cultures of display, and collaboration with FNU. The study and instruction of art, as a means not only to gain technical and theoretical skills, also has the capacity to create new knowledges of understanding towards a more inclusive and just society.

A department's alumni always speaks volumes about the success of a program, and the face and successes of your alum suggest the department is doing very well, as the department is highly regarded in the region and on a national level. And several of your graduate students maintain professional careers across the country and in the city of Regina.

Appendix

List of Considerations

- **Recruitment Consideration:** Review admissions standards to help with enrolment numbers; review target additional groups with recruitment in mind – First Nations and rural communities.
- **Art History Degrees Consideration:** Is it possible to rethink how Art History degrees exist in MAP and how they are communicated?
- **Certificates/Minors Consideration:** Could the department offer certificates in art history or a singular art history degree, or joint certificates or degree in Indigenous Art History? Or a joint degree in Indigenous Studio and Art History with FNU?
- **Curatorial Studies Consideration:** Could the department work more closely with FNU in developing a Curatorial program, if there is mutual interest?
- **Visiting Expertise Consideration:** Could the department invite a Visiting Critic for each student whose work is aligned with the student's research or bring in more working professional artists or curators?

List of Recommendations

- Regarding **environmental sustainability**, we recommend the department continues its efforts to expand considerations of sustainability in developing procedures for the use of materials and resources.
- Regarding **program offerings with First Nations University of Canada**, we recommend that lines of communication, collaboration, and cooperation be enhanced with faculty members in the program in Indigenous Communication and Fine Arts at First Nations University of Canada.
- Regarding **the relationship between the department and FNU**, the Committee recommends working toward greater clarity, in mutual consultation with faculty members at FNU, about the nature of the relationship the department has with Indigenous Communication and Fine Arts. We recommend making this clarification by building or rebuilding relationships, where possible, and through consultation with faculty members at FNU.
- Regarding **space allocation**, we recommend that MAP looks at ways to bring Visual Arts facilities and Film facilities into closer collegial and student connection so that both streams can work together for shared dark room space and shooting studio space.
- Regarding **funding streams**, we recommend seeking patrons for 2nd year graduate funding; the University Advancement and Communication office should work with the Head to secure patrons.
- Regarding **student confusions over having to declare majors to take upper-level classes**, we recommend that the department identify the causes of these specific issues and resolve them.
- Regarding **a lack of TA positions** for Visual Arts graduate students, we recommend that the Department reviews and determines what would be possible to bring more TA positions forward.
- Regarding **archiving graduate exhibitions**, we recommend the Department or Faculty photo documents all graduate exhibitions and that the images be made available to students with proper photo credits and copyright understandings.