

## **The Visual Arts Department written response to the AUR Report.**

Dec. 3, 2021

The Visual Arts Department External Review Committee—consisting of Dana Claxton from UBC (Chair), Benedict Fullalove from the Alberta University of the Arts, and Anna Mudde from the U of R—met with the Visual Arts Dept. by Zoom on March 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> 2021, and delivered their report in August, 2021. In addition to two days of online meetings, the Committee reviewed our self-report and a video (18 min.) showcasing our facilities. The Committee recognized that 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.” Rather than reiterate our strengths, which are amply demonstrated in our self-review and the Committee’s Report, I will launch right into the Committee’s recommendations and our responses.

### **Territorial acknowledgements**

The Committee noticed our lack of territorial acknowledgements in various Visual Arts public documents. We are embarrassed by this oversight. We have corrected this in our undergraduate and graduate handbooks and will be vigilant about including territorial acknowledgements in all future documents where relevant. This issue is also being addressed on the MAP website.

### **Minor corrections**

The Committee commented on the claim in our video that “the Fifth Parallel gallery is the only student run gallery in Canada,” and that faculty studios on campus “are one of the only ones in the country.” In fact, in the video David Garneau says that “we are one of the only Departments with studios for faculty.” This is true. Very few universities have studios for faculty. Several have student galleries, but few are as autonomous (completely student managed) as the Fifth Parallel gallery is. We will fine-tune our claims in future documents.

### **Art history**

The Committee recognizes the importance of filling the art history position vacated by Francesco Freddolini two years ago.

The VA Dept. is in full agreement. With only two art historians, Art History is coping, but building a robust program while short-staffed is challenging. The vacant position belongs to Luther College; there is little we can do but encourage them to fill it with an art historian. We support First Nations University’s Indigenous Art faculty’s desire to rehire an art historian there.

VA Dept. is working on a plan that will build up Art History by increasing our engagement of sessional instructors, and deepen the Area by focusing on our strengths: curatorial studies. For a small city far from larger centers, Regina has a surprisingly rich range of art galleries and artist-run centres. These are sites of both curatorial and teaching talent and of work placement opportunities. While VA has engaged these institutions in the past, there have been many personnel changes on both sides. It is time to renew and deepen these relationships. Our plan includes a name change from the rather broad and confusing Cultures of Display, to the clearer Curatorial Studies. We believe that this more familiar title—along with curricular and communication improvements—will attract students interested in a practical major.

The current director of the Mackenzie Art Gallery, and many of their staff, as well as the Director and the curator at the Art Gallery of Regina, the Director of Sakewewak, and a curator at the Dunlop Art Gallery are all VA grads. There is a need and demand for a curatorial studies program, especially one with a work placement and practicum component. Several local curators have taught art history and curatorial studies courses for us in the past. We are looking to increase their participation.

The Committee noted “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.”

We have recently cleared up some confusion regarding terminology (BAs in Art History were recorded as BAs in MAP rather than Art History in Visual Arts). In the second sentence the Committee may be noting that because we don't require students to declare a studio major until their final year this may give the appearance of fewer majors. This is true. Few students register as majors before their third year, but they eventually do. They often take their time because they are sampling options. Nevertheless, this is an issue. It would be better if they declared earlier. We are discussing implementing a mid-program mandatory review and advising session. We tried this for about four years in the mid-2000s. It took up a good deal of faculty time and made some students anxious but it did improve advising and communication.

[The drop in BFA and BA studio majors may also be due to some students opting for the relatively new Certificate programs.]

The Committee wonders if “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?”

Our art historians have expressed interest in, for example, in a post-baccalaureate. Our Art History sub-committee will work on visioning for these sorts of programs.

The Committee wondered if there was **scholarship funding for students in Art History?**

We have four scholarships for which Art History students are eligible: Jack Sures Memorial Award; Donald Stuart Richan; Kate Davis scholarship in Curatorial Studies, and Betty L. Barootes Scholarship. However, apart from the Kate Davis, these scholarships are open to all VA students (including art history majors). We agree, there should be more scholarships specifically for Art History students and will work with the MAP Dean and Donor Relations to see what is possible.

## **Partnerships**

The Committee wondered if Cultures of Display could “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?”

The Art Historians have considered these options and feel that, given their current limited capacity, introducing museology and curating across disciplines would be very difficult and pull energy from their first purposes. However, once the Curatorial Studies program is running partnering with other Areas could be pursued.

**The Committee recommends “the University retrofit an existing building or build a purpose-built professional Class-A facility university museum.”**

Visual Arts had a strong relationship with the Mackenzie Art Gallery. For decades they hosted our undergraduate and graduate exhibitions, and occasionally mounted Faculty exhibitions. While faculty maintain connections with the Mackenzie—as curators, speakers, committee members, and artists—a recent agreement has seen them drop the above mentioned exhibitions. We have an excellent relationship with the Fifth Parallel Gallery. They now host the undergraduate and many graduate exhibitions. However, it is a student-run space independent from the Dept.

An on-campus gallery—a regular feature of most universities (the U of Saskatchewan, with a program similar in size to ours, has four galleries and a dedicated director)—would be welcome. Even a modest space would be a boon for faculty and students. We would be able to host travelling exhibitions and artists; develop exhibitions and special projects; provide more space for student exhibitions and for our Cultures of Display courses. This is a wonderful idea. While it exceeds the capacity of the Visual Arts Dept., we are very interested in the possibility. Given the Canada Council for the Arts push for digital arts and display, we are also interested in increasing our engagement of non-physical display spaces.

## **Course material fees**

“We highly recommend that the University allow the department to levy course material fees at their own discretion and manage those fees.”

Several courses require essential communal materials for students. Currently, Instructors are not permitted to levy course fees to cover, for example, plaster for sculptors, or clay for ceramic students. Instead, courses that can resort to fundraisers to cover these necessary materials do. Numerous other courses at the U of R levy these fees, including in MAP. This perennial irritant seems an easy fix. [Printmaking has a small materials fee, collected by the Art Store, for inks, emulsions, and cleaners, but still relies on Dept. Pool funding to cover the short fall.]

This is a sustainability and equity issue. A small example, in a 200 level drawing class, each student purchases a pad of large cartridge paper or newsprint but typically uses only a half a pad. In a 200 level sculpture or 2D design class students are often asked to purchase a set of acrylic or gouache paints. They only need a small quantity of each colour but need to get a complete set.

Students who are not continuing in classes requiring paint and paper often complain about the waste (materials purchased but not used up in the class).

Individual newsprint packs cost \$8.83 x 20 students = \$176.60. A large roll of newspaper that would last several semesters is \$50. A small set of acrylic/gouache paints \$13.27 x 20 students = \$265.40. A set of large tubes of essential colours that would last many semesters cost about \$140. A small course fee in these classes would reduce waste and increase accessibility as the course costs would be reduced. This is similar to the Open Textbook model.

The MAP Dean has agreed to work with the VA Dept. to remove the obstacles that prevent us from administering course fees. In the meantime, one of our sessional instructors noticed a 2017 provision in the Collective Agreement that provides \$250 for course materials per each sessional course. That sessional and another have used the money to provide shared expendable materials to great success. It has cut down on shopping time and waste.

### **Sustainability**

The Committee acknowledged the VA Department's Contributions to the University's Vision, Mission, Goals, and Priorities. Especially focussing on sustainability.

The Department has procedures in place in all areas for the safe and sustainable use of materials and their disposal wherever possible, ranging from the recycling and mixing of clay, to upgrading wash-stations for brushes in painting, the use of found, recycled, and natural materials in sculpture, and disposal and handling of materials as per or better than OHS/University/City guidelines. The Dept. has long integrated sustainable practices but it has not been part of the general departmental conversation for a few years and could be refreshed.

### **First Nations University**

**The Committee recommends greater partnerships with First Nations University.**

The focus of our Self-Study was our Department. We did not fully reflect on our good and long-term relations with the Indigenous Fine Arts program at FNUNIV, the Committee's recommendations mostly covered ground already tilled.

Indigenous Fine Arts has had a strong collaborative relationship with the Visual Arts Dept. for several decades while respecting their independence. Two of VA's ten permanent faculty are Indigenous. The Director of the Program, Audrey Dreaver, is one of our recent MFA graduates. She and Lionel Peyachew attend our Dept. meetings regularly and we consult with each other frequently. Many of their students take our courses and our students take theirs.

Our Undergraduate Handbook identifies degrees and certificates in Indigenous Fine Arts and Art History; the University Calendar rubrics also locate these program requirements in the Visual Arts section, and all main campus and FUNIV programs include courses (required and elective) delivered by both institutions.

There are many developments at FUNIV, and Audrey is sure to bring us up-to-date during our faculty meetings, which is helpful to faculty members when counselling students about course options. The Committee recommends cross-listing courses. We will look into increasing this.

### **Funding**

The Committee recognizes that “the Pool Budget has been static 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 acknowledge this and advocate for an increase.

### **Technicians**

The Committee noted that the Dept. has only two technicians (they serve the woodshop, metal shop, and ceramics). Students are hired to cover the short-fall in the other areas. This is manageable in Painting and Drawing, but Printmaking and Photography require full-time technical support. The Committee cites concerns about “potential burnout for faculty members.”

The Dept. has long-recognized the need for a full-time technician to support Printmaking and Photography, Areas which could grow and deepen with this capacity. Such technical support could also serve the evolution of computing applications in Painting and Drawing.

### **Darkroom**

The Committee notes that “Without a darkroom or designated photo imaging areas, students and faculty are not fully supported in their research needs.”

The constricted budget makes it difficult to be even modestly ambitious. Nevertheless, the Dept. is committed to building a darkroom. We have the black and white equipment, a full-time faculty member qualified to run this space, and are slowly building the capital required to develop the space. Happily, the Dean has initiated a conversation with Donor Relations to kick start this project.

### **The Committee wonders if Visual Arts and Film could share Film’s darkroom and shooting space.**

While the Dept. is committed to building a darkroom in Visual Arts, we are also open to share access to, and stewardship of, existing photography facilities. This could enrich photo-based curriculum across VA, FILM, and the MAP Photo minor. Such conversations have been had in the past, unsuccessfully, but these conversations will be renewed.

### **Course Releases for extra heavy duties**

The Committee suggests granting “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. This would be very nice, in particular for the Department Grad Program Coordinator role which demands high workload and responsibility.”

The Dept. agrees but funding this is beyond the Dept.'s means.

### **Student Concerns**

The Committee noted that “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.”

Painting and Drawing now have three full-time members and the range of teaching styles is richer. Because the Dept. is small, with many Areas having only one faculty member, disciplinarity is required just to maintain the Area. Interdisciplinarity can be a luxury given limited resources. We tried a six year + experiment with a Senior Open studio of the sort many larger schools have and the committee recommends. It didn't work for numerous reasons: most students preferred to stick to their disciplines, time-tabling, and difficulty in running the course when faculty haven't the capacity to teach beyond their committed course load or are on sabbatical.

The Committee noted a clear interest among some faculty to teach a more interdisciplinary approach which is hampered by the lack of capacity mentioned above. Because we are all committed to our core offerings, there is little room to develop new courses. Art History/Cultures of Display have had more capacity in the past, but until another art historian is hired, this is less possible.

One remedy, at least in Painting and Drawing was to take a required generic 300 level course and divide it into four rotating new courses. They are not interdisciplinary but do offer a greater range (Expressive drawing, Realism, Conceptual Drawing, etc.). The other solution is to engage, as many other universities do, more sessionals to spell faculty off to create new courses. This option is limited as most sessional courses are run through CCE which will not run courses with less than 22 students. Only a few 300 level and no 400 level studio courses reach that number.

### **Grading**

The Committee noted that “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.”

Yes. The Curriculum Committee will do an inventory to be sure Instructors are meeting this clear requirement.

### **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?**

Our weekly Art for Lunch program features up to sixteen guests each year. Many give a talk and also conduct studio visits. In addition, pre-COVID, we offered free studio space in the summer to artists who, in exchange, gave artist talks. ART 400 and 401, the professional issues courses, and

the graduate Group Studio, regularly bring in guests. When classes had budgets attached we had more guests. One positive that has come from the pandemic is our willingness to engage virtual visitors. MAP is currently working on a sliding fee scale that will make even more visitors possible.

**The Committee** noted that “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.”

Creative Technologies and MAP Interdisciplinary courses have been a boon to our students. While they have taken on some of the courses formerly taught in VA, it is not a loss to the Dept. but a gain for all MAP students. Both programs are currently in transition (three of the four faculty in C-tech have left). We look forward to greater cooperation in the future. This will be greatly aided by the new Creative Technologies hire, Lindsey French, who is housed in our Department.

### **Grad students**

The Committee noted that “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. 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.”

The number of TAs is allocated by FGSR and distributed by MAP. Some areas preferentially have grad student TAs (based on supervision and recruitment, and GPA); others do not (before this summer, photo-based media never had a TA). Separately, the Department received a student assistant budget, which it pads from the POOL budget, for TA II (technicians). That said, our students do not “lack” TAs. Most receive at least one, typically two, as well as sessional teaching.

### **Graduate Funding**

The Committee recognizes the importance of funding for graduate students and that ours 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.” The Committee recommends developing “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.”

The Dept. agrees. While this work is mostly beyond the Dept. we welcome the opportunity of working with FGSR to implement more attractive and predictable funding packages for graduate students, and to work with A&C to build patronate. This is of particular importance in attracting and retaining Indigenous graduate students.

**The Committee noted that “the graduate exhibition is not photo documented or archived.”**

As part of their Thesis package, MFA students are responsible for documenting their work. Professional documentation and archiving of their exhibition is an idea we support. Could MAP provide funds to ensure the U of R photographer documents grad shows? We have been uneven about archiving these photos and support papers. We can improve this, in part, by having MFA Grads upload their materials to the U of R OurSpace: <https://ourspace.uregina.ca/> Our Grad committee will take this on in partnership with MAP who have recently announced a new partnership in this regard with the Archer Library.

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