BFA Visual Studies
Curriculum Review Report
Public Version

Department of Art
Faculty of Arts
University of Calgary
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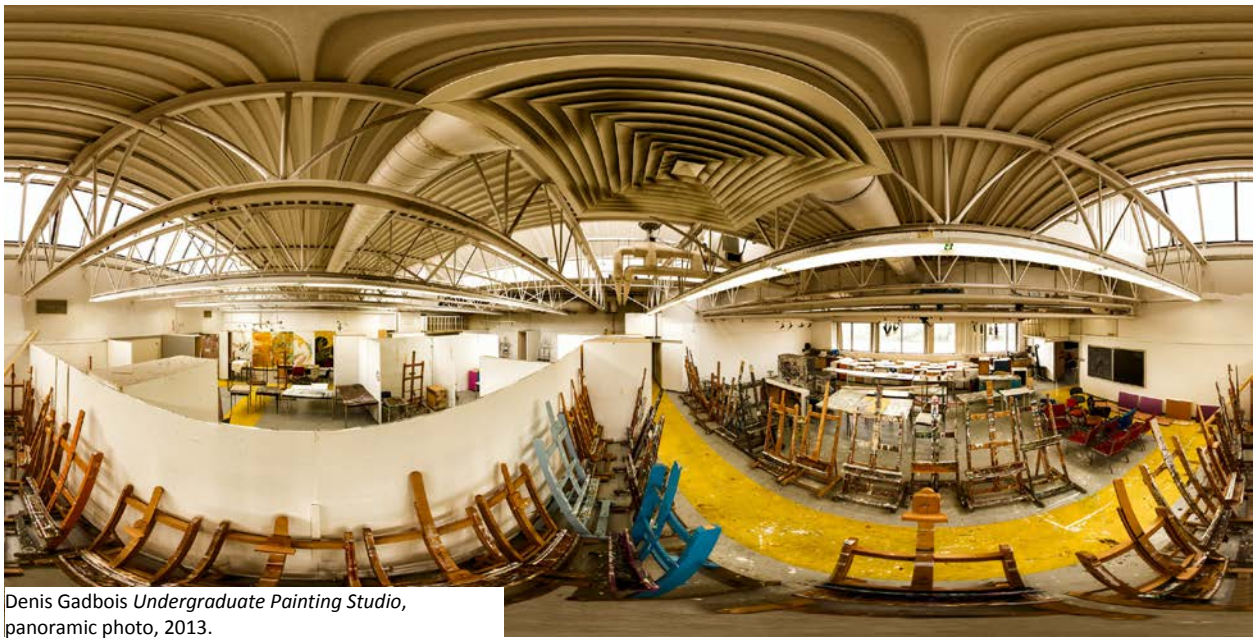

Denis Gadbois *Undergraduate Painting Studio*, panoramic photo, 2013.

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Curriculum Review Team

BFA Visual Studies Curriculum Review Team

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Executive Summary

The Department of Art offers graduate and undergraduate degrees that encourage creative research and study in the visual and media arts. Housed on two floors of the University of Calgary's Art Building, it provides comprehensive technical preparation in the fundamentals of studio art practice, and sophisticated engagements in art history and critical art theory. Access to photography, sculpture, ceramics, printmaking, electronic and digital art facilities provides students with foundational experiences in traditional art media and emerging art practices. Such resources coupled with the pedagogical skills of award winning instructors, and practicing artists with international exhibition experience sustain the Department's reputation.

The Department is distinguished from other art programs in the region by its high GPA on admission, student access to a full university curriculum, an emphasis on fundamental visual arts knowledge, and the ability to complement its BFA degree with professionally oriented minors like Museum and Heritage Studies or Architecture.

The Department's undergraduate programs were revised a decade ago based on concerns about sustainability. Stand alone BFA major degrees in a variety of visual media (drawing, painting, photography, sculpture, and printmaking) were replaced with the general BFA in Visual Studies that is under review here. Stand alone BFA major degrees in Art Education and Art Honours were replaced with enhancements to the BFA Visual Studies: an Art Education *Concentration* and a Studio *Concentration*, respectively. In addition to the undergraduate BFA degree in Visual Studies, art students can take a 5 year, BFA degree concurrent with the Faculty of Education's BEd. degree. Beginning in the 2015-16 academic year, the Department will offer a Coop BFA in Visual Studies. This degree provides students with the opportunity to include paid work terms within their BFA.

The BFA Visual Studies is a general 40 half course (120 credits or units), 4 year degree in studio art and creative research. Students develop conceptual understanding in visual art with a technical foundation leading to independent art practice. Admission requires a portfolio review and minimum GPA (in recent years, between 78% and 80%). The majority of degree requirements are concentrated in first year, 200 level courses. Senior course requirements in both studio art and art history are at the student's discretion. Beginning in the 2016-17 academic year, however, students in this degree will be required to take *specific* senior level art theory and art history courses (such as ART 399, ART 301 or ART 401).

The programs offered by the Department of Art and in particular, the BFA Visual Studies have significant alignments with the University's Academic Plan: they make a distinctive contribution to the Plan's focus on research and scholarship by providing access to creative research paradigms; in so doing they enrich the breadth of learning at the University by offering students the experience of studio-based pedagogy. They also provide multiple opportunities for students and faculty to integrate these creative research activities with the community.

The curriculum review took approximately nine months to complete and involved a committee of seven with additional administrative support. The committee developed a series of guiding questions for the review and clarified program outcomes for the BFA Visual Studies. Both students and faculty were surveyed on different aspects of the program. At different stages, data were circulated back to the Department prior to the next stage of data collection being completed. Students were surveyed about their experience of the program with particular emphasis on the review's guiding questions. Faculty members were asked to map their individual courses with a follow-up survey regarding their views of course prerequisites. The combination of data from these sources provided a comprehensive view of the program and its curriculum. The surveys were supplemented with data from the Office Institutional Analysis, and results from the National Survey of Student Engagement.

Findings from this curriculum review of the BFA Visual Studies were developed as the committee reviewed, analyzed, and integrated data from these various sources. The review provides detailed analysis and discussion of the data from each of the sources. The committee made specific recommendations emerging from these data sources that supported or suggested similar findings. The overall findings of the review were presented as responses to the specific guiding questions that shaped the review. The review concludes with an action plan that aims to implement the findings over the next five years.

The following is an abridged summary of the findings and recommendations of the Curriculum Review committee:

1. The strengths of the program include flexibility in course selection, the quality of instruction, access to facilities, and the sense of cohort and community that it provides. Students do however understand the value of art history and theory to advancement in the field and, as such, degree requirements should include requirements in those areas while trying to maintain the program's flexibility.

2. Teaching art whether informally at a community level or formally at an institutional level was a career path that a majority of students anticipated. Either the content of a foundations course or a separate required course should support this.

3. Training in fundamental studio techniques (drawing, design thinking, etc.) is a strength of the program but consistency in the learning outcomes and their relationship to senior courses should be improved.

4. The program has few requirements beyond the first year which limits students opportunities for advanced learning. The addition of specific requirements related to contemporary art and art related theories would advance students' abilities to contextualize their own work in relation to contemporary creative practices.

5. In the present program, BFA students are required to take only two junior level art history courses and they may do so at any point in their program. Requiring that these be taken earlier in the program and having them as prerequisites for core 300 level courses would provide a foundation for the students' developing studio practice.

6. Although students can take a professional development course (ART 599) towards the end of their degree and have informal opportunities for professional development through extra-curricular activities (such as the various student organized events and exhibitions), there is a need for professional development earlier in the program. This may take the form of a specific course, or the use of assignments related to field trips to galleries and museums, or more course based exhibition activities.

7. Breadth and option requirements for the BFA Visual Studies are derived from the common practices in the former Faculty of Fine Arts. Students aren't encouraged to seek options for their degree beyond the Dance, Drama and Music courses. The option requirements for the degree can take better advantage of the courses across the Faculty of Arts, in particular courses in language and culture, philosophy, Greek, Roman and Religious Studies, Communications, Media and Film, etc.

8. The final three findings are linked. Many courses in the program formed the basis of the former, discipline specific major degrees (drawing, painting, etc.). Curriculum needs to reflect faculty research, and be more interdisciplinary. Focusing medium specific courses at the 200 and 300 levels creates the opportunity to develop thematic and interdisciplinary studio courses at the 400 level. If these were program requirements, they would help students develop advanced skills in creative work that integrate technical processes and conceptual objectives.

9. Only a small percentage of students take courses at the 500 level. Students focus their studies on 300 level courses limiting the opportunities for challenge and advanced learning. The development of 400 level required studio courses and a review of 500 level courses beyond the honours requirements is recommended.

10. Courses in the program have either clear technical and content objectives (net art, 3D fabrication, lithography, anatomical drawing, etc.), or they are part of a studio sequence with course outcomes that vary with instructor (Drawing III, Sculpture IV, etc.). Developing medium specific courses with clear outcomes at the 300 level is recommended.

Context of the Bachelor of Fine Arts (Visual Studies)

The Department of Art offers graduate and undergraduate degrees that encourage creative research and study in the visual and media arts. Although the Department has had several locations on campus over the last fifty years, since 1987, it has been housed on two floors of the University of Calgary's Art Building where it provides comprehensive technical preparation in the fundamentals of studio art practice, art history, and critical theory. Access to photography, sculpture, ceramics, printmaking, electronic and digital art facilities provides students with foundational experiences in traditional art media and emerging art practices. Such resources coupled with the pedagogical skills of award winning instructors, and practicing artists with international exhibition experience sustain the Department's reputation.

The Department's courses and programs provide opportunities for graduate students, undergraduate majors, and non-majors from across the University to engage in knowledge generation through creative, studio-based research and the study of international traditions of visual art. The Department is distinguished from other art programs in the region by its high GPA on admission, student access to a full university curriculum, an emphasis on fundamental visual arts knowledge, the ability to complement its degrees with professionally oriented minors like Museum and Heritage Studies or Architecture, a concurrent degree with Education, and a BFA COOP degree option.

The Department is a Campus Alberta destination for transfer students from regional post-secondary institutions that grant art diplomas and degrees such as the Alberta College of Art and Design, Grand Prairie Regional College, Medicine Hat College, Red Deer College, and the University of Lethbridge. Graduates of the Department's MFA program have significant instructional and leadership roles at many of these institutions.

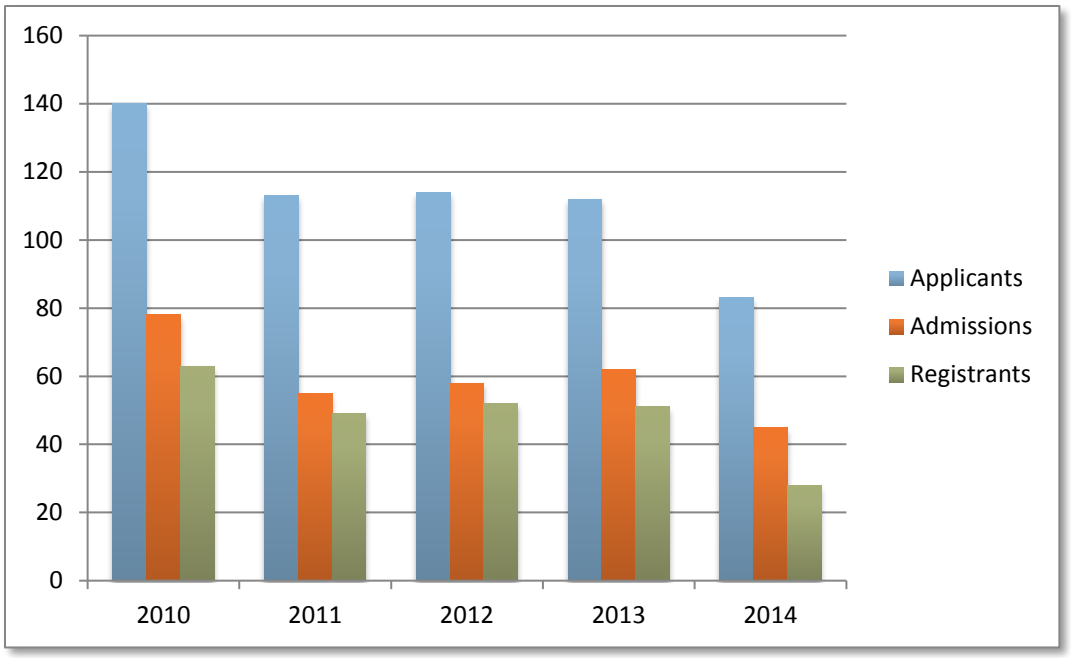

Figure 1: Relationship of the number of applications to the BFA degrees in relation to students offered admission and those that completed registration. The drop in applicants during 2014 may reflect an abrupt change in the university's application deadlines from May to March. Source is data prepared by the Faculty of Arts.

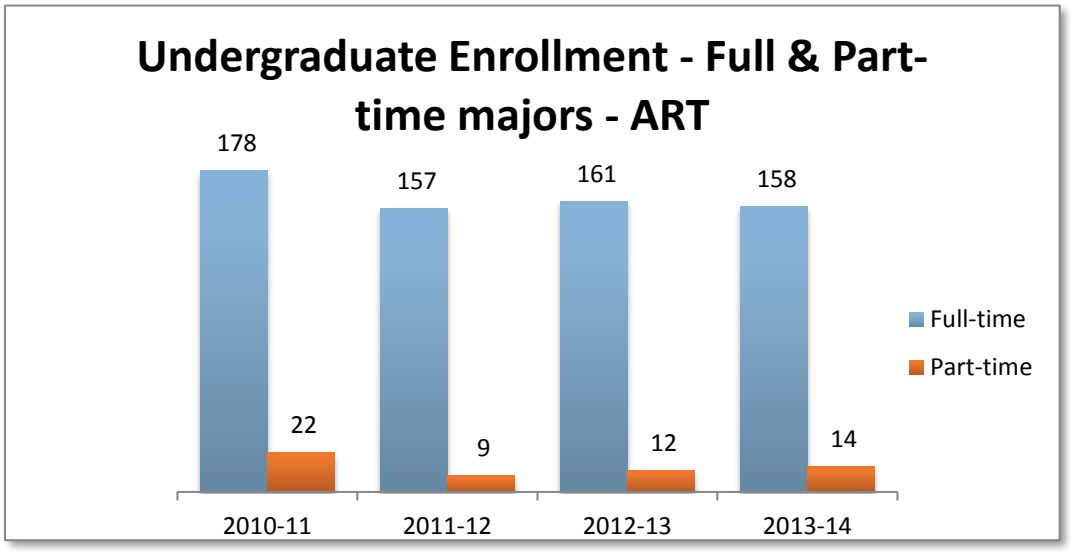

Figure 2: Undergraduate headcount reflecting both full and part-time students admitted into the BFA Visual Studies degree. This includes students enroled in combined or concurrent degrees. Source University of Calgary OIA Factbook.

Guiding Questions

The following critical questions and concerns were used to guide the curriculum review process.

1. What are the strengths of the program?

2. Should students be required to take a course that focuses on being an art educator?

3. What role should traditional introductory studio-based courses such as Art Fundamentals (231 and 233) and Drawing (241 and 243) play in the BFA program? Is their content relevant to all practicing Visual Art disciplines? Is there a common core of topics that should be consistent across multiple sections? Should there be agreement about topics taught at the 200 level to avoid duplication at senior levels?

4. Is there sufficient structure in terms of degree requirements beyond the 200 level? Should there be a requirement for courses in theory (Art 399 or 301)? Should there be specific, senior studio courses required?

5. Should (specific) art history courses be required as prerequisites for certain studio courses (eg. ARHI 209 as a prerequisite for senior studio courses)?

6. Do our junior-level courses provide students with sufficient grounding in professional development and professional practices to ensure success during the program (not just upon graduation with ART 599)?

7. Should the old “Fine Art option” requirements be revised to encourage students to explore Faculty of Arts courses more broadly?

8. Does the sequencing of generic, medium specific courses at the senior levels relate to the degrees that we offer given that there are no discipline-specific major degrees anymore?

9. Given low enrollment in 500-level courses, should the 500 level be reserved for honours courses and directed studies?

10. Should technical courses be offered primarily at the 300 level with the 400 level reserved for thematic studio courses that are interdisciplinary?

Action Plan

Short-term: One year or less
Medium-term: Two to three years
Long-term: Four to five years

	Recommendation: Program Level	Action Items	Timeline for Implementation	Lead Responsibility	Evaluation
A1	Improve transferability of first year Art and Art History courses (e.g. by making historical coverage more comprehensive) and core senior courses with other institutions in Alberta	Research to ensure our foundation courses are transferable to avoid any disadvantage to transferring students. Adjust course content between ARHI 201 (Pre-history to Renaissance) and ARHI 203 (Post-Renaissance to current) with ARHI 209 as a companion course discussing visual methods (check with other Alberta Institutions to find how they divide historical surveys to ensure consistency)	Medium Term	ACAT sub-committee representative	ACAT Guide
A2	Offer fundamentals and foundation courses at the 200 and 300 level. 400 and 500 level classes should focus on classes that build more	Discuss with faculty how to ensure students have the opportunity to work	Medium Term	Curriculum Committee	

	theoretically and critically engaged art practices. For example: Create medium specific 300 level sculpture and painting courses.	thematically in senior level classes and how to best to receive the technical foundations they need in 200 and 300 level courses. Align 300 level sculpture course with the format of Printmaking or Photography to clarify for students which courses offer particular technical skills such as casting, mold making, acrylic painting, etc. Reserve 400 level courses for thematic studios; introduce new classes at 400 and 500 level.			
A3	Ensure students are getting advanced-level engagement at appropriate points in their program in all 7 Program Objectives a) Include more curriculum that connects art practices with social context and self-reflexivity;	As a department, review degree requirements and discuss whether or not students are being challenged enough as they progress through the program	Medium Term	Individual Instructors	

	b) Increase engagement with and connection to the community.				
A4	Develop a compliment hiring plan that supports our program objectives	Keep the complement hiring plan current	Medium Term (for implementation), hiring plan already developed	Curriculum and Planning Committee	
A5	Revise the "Fine Arts" option requirement into a Faculty of Arts requirement	Revise degree requirements in the Calendar and broaden the "Field of Art" options to include History, English, Philosophy and COMS courses, etc..	Medium Term	Curriculum and Planning Committee	
A6	Research how many students graduate without 400 level courses.	Submit a request for these data to the Registrar's Office	Short term	Department Head	Completed July, 2015: approximately 15% of students take 400 ART level courses
A7	Clarify how many 300 level studio courses actually need a prerequisite such as Art History or junior level ART courses.	Discuss with faculty who regularly teach 300 level studio classes	Medium Term	Curriculum and Planning Committee	

	Recommendation: Course Level	**Action Items**	**Timeline for Implementation**	**Lead Responsibility**	**Evaluation**
B1	Have a common explicit syllabus for junior level courses that clearly states how each connects	Have previous/current instructors meet and create a common explicit	Short Term	Undergraduate Program Director	Administrative review

	with subsequent courses for which they are prerequisites.	syllabus for all sections of the class.			
B2	Integrate Art Education into an existing required course such as ART 231, or require an existing Art Education class, such as ART 205, for all BFA students	Faculty discussion and consultation with the Faculty of Education on what a course of this nature should aim to accomplish, and implement.	Short Term	Undergraduate Program Director	Calendar change.
B3	Build a new Junior Level ARHI course to focus on art historical writing and methodology	Form an Art History Revision committee to discuss content of new course.	Medium Term	Art History revision committee	Calendar changes
B5	Offer Block Week courses or extra-curricular workshops on material or processes not covered in regular sessions.	Solicit suggestions from faculty for a variety of materials, techniques and processes outside of our regular course offerings. Add a budget item to the department's budget for workshop expenses and or develop expectations for International Visiting Artists to conduct a workshop.	Medium Term	Curriculum Committee	Enrollment numbers and course evaluations
B6	Build an explicit syllabus for ART 301 that requires professional development and community involvement.	Create explicit syllabus requiring gallery visits with a required assessment component. (This will aid in improving students written skills as well.)	Medium term	Curriculum Committee	Completed July, 2015

B7	Insure course content in ART 399 heightens relationship of students' studio practice with art theory and social engagement.	Develop explicit syllabus	Short term	Relevant instructor(s)	Will be completed by Fall 2016
B8	Clarify calendar information on ART 231/233 and ART 241/243. Considering value for non-majors discuss if they are necessary for all majors.	Calendar description should show connections between those courses as implied co-requisites. Discuss with faculty if these courses are all necessity as prerequisites for higher level courses.	Short term	Curriculum and Planning Committee	
B9	Offer ART 461 in the Fall instead of the Winter term.	Timetabling change to allow students to build a portfolio for application to honours program in winter term. Gives students time to acquire courses required for honours program.	Short term	Department Head, Undergraduate Program Director, and Office Manager.	Implemented Fall 2016.

	Recommendation: Assignment Level	**Action Items**	**Timeline for Implementation**	**Lead Responsibility**	**Evaluation**
C1	Add professional development practices to all junior level course syllabi, including incorporating more activities such as students helping with	Faculty discussion on how this could be implemented with a goal of giving students exposure to professional art	Short/Medium Term	Instructors of Junior Level Courses	Curriculum Committee

	exhibitions, research projects.	in the community.			
C2	Build curatorial assignments into existing required course content where appropriate (for example 301/401).	Review required courses to see where curatorial assignments can be incorporated.	Medium term	Department Head	Administrative Review
C3	Include a writing component in studio classes as a course outcome.	Instructors need to evaluate their courses to find a place for this requirement.	Medium term	Department Head and individual instructors	Course outline approval process
C4	Increase student awareness of quantitative reasoning in appropriate studio classes.	Discussion with faculty about how to incorporate this into current courses (re: OIA results).	Short Term		
C5	Create opportunities for feedback on projects prior to submission and provide more clarity on grading criteria.	Have discussion with faculty about creating opportunities for more summative feedback, practice "crit" sessions. Faculty can discuss implementing grading rubrics.	Medium term	Undergraduate Program Director	
C6	Clarify assignments, grading criteria and specific methods of assessment in course outlines.	Instructors need to be clear with students about how assignments will be assessed (ie. grading rubrics)	Short term	Department Head and Undergraduate Director	Course Outline Approval

	Recommendation: Program Identity	**Action Items**	**Timeline for Implementation**	**Lead Responsibility**	**Evaluation**
D1	Create and improve the identity of the program in relation to other	Identify specific strengths of	Ongoing	In consultation with Faculty of Arts	

	provincial programs as recommended in part through the Unit Review.	the program and promote them through online, print media and social media.		communication staff	
D2	Increase visibility of the Museum Studies program and integrate more fully into BFA.	Efforts to enhance the identity of the department should include MHST. Consider possibility of requiring students to take one of MHST or Art Ed courses			
D3	Increase visibility for our students of Architecture Minor program.			Arts Student Centre advising	Comparision of the number of students applying to architecture programs that have completed the BFA with the Architecture minor.
D4	Increase visibility of Honours program.	Clarify objectives and advantages of the program in its descriptions supported by coordination through student advising	short term	Undergraduate Program Director; Curriculum and Planning Committee	

	Recommendation: Faculty/ Professional Learning Development	Action Items	Timeline for Implementation	Lead Responsibility	Evaluation
E1	Integrate a research-informed approach to critiques throughout the department.	Review literature on studio pedagogy and critiques. Instructors should be more deliberate and strategic about critiques. Group discussion and education about how to run a critique and how to shape the kinds of questions students need to answer regarding their work.	Medium Term	Peer teaching review committee	
E2	Introduce faculty who have expertise in reflective and integrative learning (connecting learning to societal problems and issues)	Recommendation for future hires	Long term		
	Identify strategies to enhance teaching quality within the program.	Create and implement peer review process	Medium term	Peer Review Teaching Committee	
E3	The Student Survey and Unit Review noted that faculty members can discourage students and be negative about the program.	As a faculty, discuss reasons for student dissatisfaction with the program.			