

PROGRAM REVIEW REPORT

Department of Visual Arts and Art History

Florida Atlantic University

February 9-10, 2017

Review Team

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OVERVIEW

This report was prepared at the request of Eric Landes, Chair of the Department of Visual Arts and Art History, and Linda Johnson, Associate Dean, Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts & Letters. The Review Team understands the report to be in fulfillment of the university's requirement for review of all institutional programs by teams of internal and external evaluators on a regularized, seven-year cycle. It is also best understood as a vehicle for initiating strategic change with an emphasis on action plans to provide a direction for the programs over the next 5-7 years.

PROCESS

The report is largely informed by a Self-Study prepared by the Department of Visual Arts and Art History and a site visit on February 9-10, 2017. The visit included a brief tour of the Boca Raton campus art and design teaching facilities, exhibition spaces, graduate studios, and administrative offices. While on campus the Review Team met with (in chronological order):

- Linda Johnson, Associate Dean, Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts & Letters
- Department of Visual Arts and Art History faculty (eight)
- Russell Ivy, Associate Provost for Programs and Assessment; Debra Szabo, Assistant Director of Programs and Assessment
- Liana Smith, Assistant Dean, Degree Completion Services, Graduate College
- Department of Visual Arts and Art History students (three graduate; five undergraduate)
- Ed Pratt, Dean of Undergraduate Studies
- Dan Flynn, Vice President for Research
- Barclay Barrios, Assistant Dean, Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts & Letters
- Eric Landes, Chair, Department of Visual Arts and Art History
- Michele Hawkins, Vice Provost; Debra Szabo, Assistant Director of Programs and Assessment

The Review Team offers an essential consideration as FAU weighs the findings and recommendations contained herein. Comprehensive external reviews of art and design programs usually involve an assessment of student work to discern whether it meets or exceeds nationally accepted competencies within each disciplinary specialization. This assessment of work typically constitutes the most significant finding of a site visit. Student work reviews were not planned as a feature of this process; the institution should be mindful of this not-insignificant fact.

REPORT CONTENTS

I. Summary Observations + Strategic Actions

A summary of issues associated with program strengths and areas for improvement. These observations are listed within four categories borrowed from the format used by the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD) for accreditation site visitors' reports: (A) Strengths; (B) Recommendations for Short-Term Improvement; (C) Primary Futures Issues; and (D) Suggestions for Long-Term Development. Observations, suggestions, recommendations, and/or questions are listed by priority order of importance within each category.

II. Questions for Reviewers

The Review Team's responses to questions prepared by the department and included within the Self-Study.

REPORT FINDINGS

I. Summary Observations + Strategic Actions

After careful consideration of the department's purposes and of the local context, the Review Team offers this overall analysis:

A. Strengths

1. Faculty members are appropriately credentialed and have successful professional careers with ample evidence of scholarly and artistic/design production.
2. Students expressed deep appreciation for the faculty's dedication to the educational mission and values. Students and faculty are to be congratulated for such dedication and effort. The institution can be rightfully proud of the teaching and learning at FAU.
3. Undergraduate students are highly appreciative of scholarships, internships, and research opportunities. Graduate students appear to be equally appreciative of teaching opportunities.
4. It appears that interest in and activity across collaborative research projects had been established and is increasing across segments of the faculty.
5. The gallery programs in general, and the Schmidt Center Gallery in particular, appear to provide excellent exhibitions, superb student work experiences, and opportunities for institutional outreach.
6. The current art studio facilities on the Boca Raton campus appear to be generally well designed, centrally located, and suitable to their respective proposed purposes. It appears that select and strategic upgrades, maintenance, and enhancements could yield stellar facilities.

7. The use of emerging art and design technologies appears to be embraced by faculty and expanding across disciplines with 3D printers and digital output facilities. The faculty appear to be engaged in learning, maintaining, and developing curricular or entrepreneurial uses for these technologies including but not limited to current courses and future projects such as university- or community-wide 'pay-as-you-go' fabrication lab. This lab could provide an important and much needed revenue stream for the department.

B. Action Items: Recommendations for Short-Term Improvement

Issues or areas for short-term improvements that might be addressed immediately by the department, college, or university.

1. Facilities Review - Undergraduate students expressed numerous facility maintenance issues such as pest infestations and HVAC temperature control issues. The department might survey students and begin addressing areas of concern. If the department is not already doing so, it should work with campus health and safety professionals to implement annual safety inspections and air quality evaluations, especially in areas using solvents and/or other chemicals such as the photography, painting, and printmaking studios. These inspections should review issues to include but not limited to ventilation, chemical disposal, respirator areas as needed, storage, safety egress; etc., followed by a regularized program of annual inspections—or more often as needed—and faculty training.

C. Action Items: Primary Futures Issues

Issues or areas with potential for significant impact that might require long-term strategic approaches (in priority order):

1. Accreditation: The department's Self-Study details numerous areas of concern within current programs and operations. While the unit wishes to target areas for improvement and act strategically over the long term to sustain and improve programs, it does not appear to have identified metrics sufficient to guide and frame this planning. The Review Team believes the department would benefit from immediate and ongoing access to pertinent data, appropriate assessment processes, and other planning resources derived from established standards and norms in the field. Toward this end, the department would be well advised to seek institutional accreditation with NASAD. This accreditation would provide a framework for ongoing review of program competencies, operational conditions, and institutional accountability.

An accreditation consulting visit appears to be the logical first step. This would allow the department to identify the advantages and challenges related to accreditation; detail the steps and processes ahead; and determine a timeline for an application decision. It is the team's best estimate that the department could host a consulting visit in the 2017-18 academic year and be prepared for an accreditation site visit within the next three years.

While this current program review is undoubtedly useful for purposes of internal FAU planning, the review team believes the comprehensive studies and preparations for an

accreditation application will prove more beneficial to the department and supersede any other recommendations in this report.

There appear to be numerous and specific reasons accreditation might enhance the department. Those appear to include gaining national and international peer recognition; garnering information related to health and safety issues; regularizing data collection and normalizing the application of national standards/metrics for planning purposes; taking advantage of opportunities for student recruitment; peer support in developing new and innovative curricula; understanding emerging trends in art/design technologies; participating in national advocacy efforts on behalf art and design interests; benefitting from organizational policy analysis efforts; and more.

These benefits, and others, would promote the best possible teaching-learning environment for students and faculty at FAU. Overall, seeking accreditation seems the most purposeful and meaningful action the department can take at this time.

2. Staffing: The Review Team notes a lack of technical support in art studios, posing numerous challenges to meeting/maintaining minimal health and safety standards and limiting student access to facilities and equipment necessary for successful completion of coursework. The faculty currently add these responsibilities for managing and maintaining facilities onto their work assignments. The school might study the feasibility of re-deploying faculty and hiring full-time technical support staff to assure safe operations of studios and to keep pace with technological developments in fields such as 3D digital fabrication.
3. BFA Curriculum: There appear to be numerous impediments to delivering the current curriculum. Students express concerns about not being able to advance toward graduation in a timely fashion because of scheduling conflicts between advanced-level studio courses; an over-reliance on Directed Independent Studies for advanced credits; certain courses being offered in only one location within the multi-campus system; concern about one-person 'areas;' and the overall lack of faculty. It perhaps make sense for the department to now reconsider its definitions and delineations of specializations within the BFA program, perhaps identifying fewer 'tracks' of specialization. This might open pathways for more consistent and predictable scheduling of courses and fewer directed independent studies.

Students also voiced a strong desire for certain aspects of the senior seminar to be expanded or adjusted, perhaps beginning prior to the senior year. As one example, there appears to be a strong interest in earlier exposure to professional development activities (career pathways, resume preparation, job search strategies, etc.).

4. Location-Specific Curricula and Research: There appears to be both opportunity and expertise for the department to propose programs, courses, and research projects with profound relevance to FAU's locale, cultures, and populations. As just one example, the graphic design area appears to possess expertise to lead in areas such as visual communications, data visualization, and public policy projects on issues related to aging populations, Hispanic and/or Cuban cultures, and sensitivity to the natural environment. These creative capacities of the

department might be incorporated into projects across a wide range of disciplines.

In addition, the department should consider the feasibility of an art education undergraduate program. Many institutions develop highly successful programs with deep levels of community engagement, often including a 'Saturday Art Program' component taught by pre-internship students in the undergraduate art education program.

5. **Faculty Profile and Distribution:** The team notes two issues of concern that should factor in planning for future faculty. First, the number of students (majors) to faculty currently sits at a ratio above 30:1. NASAD operational norms suggest that "The overall ratio of full-time equivalent students to full-time equivalent faculty in undergraduate studio art or design departments or in art/design schools should be 15 to 1 or less, and not in excess of 20 to 1" (see *NASAD Handbook 2016-17*, Appendix II.D. Operational Norms; p. 221). In addition, the lack of diversity among the current faculty should be of concern and weigh heavily as the department considers future directions.

The department should develop a hiring plan that privileges long-term institutional goals and is based on candid assessments of current enrollments, plans for re-envisioned programs, and opportunities for cross-campus collaborations. Planning should probably not preclude the possibility of having fewer students enrolled in the department's programs.

6. **BA Curriculum:** The team notes a lack of purpose ascribed to the BA program in art. It seems essential for the department to develop a clear statement of purpose for each and every degree offered. In a related way, there may be many good reasons to institute an entry-level portfolio for admission into the department, not the least of which is affirming and solidifying the commitment by students to the department.
7. **MFA Program:** The team notes the MFA program has modest enrollments, a seemingly unsteady pipeline of applications, and is largely reliant upon faculty to teach 'overloads' to sustain the program. The department should assess the value of this program and the resources necessary to sustain it. One question ripe for evaluation is whether the department would be better served by transferring the resources for operating the MFA program into permanent and full-time technical staffing positions for art studios.
8. **Assessment:** It appears that assessment instruments might not be fully informing critical decisions in areas such as curriculum development. The department might review strategies for improving the relationship between data collection and long-term planning.
9. **Data Sources:** As the department considers accreditation it might begin to take advantage of key data sources available to art and design programs to support program planning and projection. One resource worthy of consideration is the Higher Education Arts Data Services (HEADS) data available through NASAD. The HEADS reports are useful tools for measuring national norms among peer institutions with respect to enrollments, enrollment trends, degrees earned, graduation rates, learning resources, student-faculty ratios, revenue sources, operational expenditures, capital improvement budgets, etc.

Another possible resource is the Strategic National Arts Alumni Project (SNAAP) data compiled by Indiana University. SNAAP data might provide essential insights about student satisfaction and alumni employment. It could also be a pathway to improved alumni engagement.

10. Benchmarking: It might make sense to initiate some benchmarking with peer institutions to assist in projecting priorities and investments in the context of FAU's marketplace of competitors. Overall, employing these inputs might permit a more effective and useful assessment of current activities and future opportunities.
11. Communications and Public Relations: Students expressed a lack of visibility and respect for the arts on campus. As to determine whether this a valid concern and an area to address, might the department conduct a study to better understand current representations of the arts on campus? Would it also make sense to track how information about arts events is being distributed across the campus? Regardless of the findings of any studies, it appears the department could benefit from utilizing social media to publicize events, achievements, opportunities within and outside of FAU, and to engage with alumni.

D. Action Items: Suggestions for Long-Term Development

Long range ideas and pathways that appear to hold great potential for the department.

1. Design Center: FAU appears to be in a moment of opportunity as it considers the development of a Design Center in Fort Lauderdale. The department could be a key player in this center perhaps offering academic programs while providing leadership in other areas such as design services, data visualization, and public arts projects. The department would be well served by finding a place within discussions about the center.

As a perhaps related aside, two other key decisions appear to be occurring simultaneously at FAU: the hiring of deans for the Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts & Letters and the College of Design & Social Inquiry. While commentary on academic alignments is clearly not at the center of this review, FAU might wish to consider whether an entirely new college at the Design Center—one perhaps centered in creative inquiry—might optimize the potential for teaching, learning, research, and outreach to successfully connect the center with the community. In a related way, opportunities for university advancement and fundraising for the department might be entirely recast by such a new academic college.

2. Facilities Locations: Students firmly believe the current multi-campus system undermines any sense of community and impedes informed judgments about available courses of study. While exploring the feasibility of a 'shuttle/bus' system between campuses is an obvious solution, perhaps the art and design programs should advocate a relocation of all programs within a single facility. The current separated facilities clearly beget compartmentalization, autonomy, specialization, and separation of activities. If collaboration and experimentation are valued, FAU might explore strategies for blurring physical and curricular boundaries. The creation of a single art and design facility and the inclusion of designated studios for advanced level majors, similar to those at many peer institutions, would likely strengthen the sense of common

purpose among students, faculty, and staff.

II. Questions for Reviewers

Q1: With the likelihood of limited growth in terms of resources, facilities, student numbers and faculty lines, what are the recommendations for strategic planning to increase the quality of our program?

A1: An accreditation application and review would support strategic planning across the entire range of the department's activities. *This should be the key takeaway from the program review.* The department might also wish to rethink the relationships between resources and programs, with future planning exercises focusing on sustainable programs and leveraging collaborative efforts. This would require candid appraisals of current curricula and might involve posing difficult questions. Areas for assessment might include but not be limited to:

- (a) BA Degree: Can the department identify the true purposes and articulate the value of the program? Is it currently being treated as a default degree? If so, what biases are contributing to this definition?
- (b) BFA Degree: Are the distributions and descriptions of specializations appropriately scaled to the resources and goals of the department? Is planning overly focused on resourcing this degree track? Can the department validate the assertion that this degree is preferred by institutions selecting candidates for MFA studies? How are peer institutions addressing the question of 'one person' areas?
- (c) MFA Degree: Given current limitations on resources, what are the reasons to maintain this program? Is there evidence to suggest the pipeline of applicants will improve? Should the program be reshaped to address issues of local relevance and value?
- (d) Art Education Degree: Might a program with a community-based 'Saturday School' be housed in the department and have lasting value to the South Florida region?

Q2: Is NASAD accreditation an appropriate goal for us? If so, what are suggestions for changes that would help us achieve this?

A2: Yes, the department would be well advised to seek institutional accreditation with NASAD. As previously stated (see I. C.1; p. 3), an accreditation consulting visit appears to be the logical first step toward identifying any issues related to accreditation. It is the Review Team's best estimate that the department could host a consulting visit in the 2017-18 academic year and likely be prepared for an accreditation site visit within the next three years. The team also believes the comprehensive preparations for an accreditation application will prove highly beneficial to the department and supersede any other recommendations in this report.

Q3: What are ways to leverage relationships within the university to create and maintain a high profile?

A3: As previously mentioned (see I.D.1; p. 6), FAU appears to be considering the development of a Design Center in Fort Lauderdale. The department could be a key player in this center, perhaps offering academic programs while providing leadership in other areas such as design services, data visualization, and public arts projects.

The department would be well served by finding a place within these discussions and any others that might support faculty research and student involvement across disciplines. As also previously mentioned (see I.C.4; p. 4), the department might consider to proposing programs, courses, and/or research projects with relevance to FAU's locale, cultures, and populations on issues such as aging populations, Hispanic and/or Cuban cultures, sensitivity to the natural environment, big data analytics, and others.

Q4: Are there any suggestions to maintain faculty and student satisfaction and retention in an environment of fixed resource support?

A4: Overall and long term, it appears that aligning with NASAD norms, review processes, and data services might increase faculty and student satisfaction across the entire range of programmatic, operational, and personnel issues. Also, and as previously stated, rethinking the overuse of the Directed Independent Studies courses might reduce some stress points, regularize faculty workloads, and be highly beneficial.

In addition, a few other strategies often employed by other arts institutions and organizations might be worthy of serious consideration:

- (a) Many art/design schools and numerous creative businesses have informal 'incubator spaces,' often taking the form of a food lounge, a coffee shop, or a restaurant. These spaces are designed to build trust among potential collaborators by reinforcing the three conditions considered crucial to making close friends: proximity; repeated, unplanned interactions; and a setting that encourages people to let their guard down and confide in each other. These spaces tend to be petri dishes for new ideas and hubs of creative activity at numerous colleges, universities, and art/design schools.
- (b) Would collaborations and partnerships with residence life create a greater sense of value within the campus community? Are there opportunities for art and design programs, events, and/or exhibitions?
- (c) Could offering non-credit classes create opportunities to enhance student retention and faculty satisfaction while creating deeper connections to the community?