

External Review of the Department of Art History and Visual Arts (including Film Studies)

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External Review Committee

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Executive Summary

It has been a privilege to review the Department of Art History and Visual Studies (AHVS), formerly “History in Art,” at the University of Victoria, with its long history as a Canadian leader in the social history of art in global and local contexts. These traditions have continued up to today with a strong faculty that currently covers a great range of areas of study, including Indigenous and settler arts of the Pacific Northwest; Islamic art; Byzantine and Mediterranean art; art of the Indian subcontinent; and medieval, Renaissance, modern and contemporary Western art. The art history component of AHVS is complemented by faculty members with expertise in Film Studies, Museum Studies, and, most recently, a salutary appointment in Indigenous Studies to supplement another joint (0.3 FTE) position in this area with Visual Arts. With a dedicated faculty, who cover a wide range of areas and fields, and with recent changes to the breadth requirements of their undergraduate programs, AHVS provides its students with excellent programs that embrace visual culture in its broad sense and respond to ongoing changes in the field. It should also be noted that AVHS’s success over the past five years is evidenced by increased EETs and enrolments of majors, which is remarkable given decreasing humanities enrolments across the country over the past decade. We considered both the undergraduate program and the smaller graduate MA and PhD programs.

We note with appreciation the many ways the AHVS faculty has integrated itself into the wider community of the city and the island. One of the important roles of the department is its contribution to UVic’s stated commitment to advancing and strengthening community engagement and partnerships. Besides its broad coverage of areas and fields of visual culture and its acclaimed faculty, AHVS is distinctive in its commitment to local culture of the Pacific West Coast and important local partnerships both within and outside the university. Partner organizations include the Jeffrey Rubinoff Sculpture Park, the Legacy Art Gallery, the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria (with Asian Art curator and adjunct faculty member Dr. Heng Wu), and UVic Continuing Studies, whose longstanding and unique collaboration with AHVS offers Cultural Resources Management programs, which support the AHVS Minor in Museum Studies. We were particularly struck by the latter and would encourage the removal of barriers to the development of a Museum Studies major, which was proposed in the previous review but is still not in place. The same goes for a major in Film Studies, for which there is an even stronger case since most elements for this already exist; what it requires now is appropriately dynamic and visionary leadership. These two areas present major opportunities for the department to better serve student demand and substantiate its self-identification in its self-study as a “world Art History department with additional strengths in Film Studies and Museum Studies” (Appendix 16, AHVS Teaching Plan 2023-2028). Growth

in enrolments due to these majors would potentially enable future hiring to replace imminent (and eminent) retirements.

In general, we found several opportunities to expand and rationalize undergraduate program offerings through creative collaborations. However, the active involvement of upper-level administration will be required to shepherd these. At the graduate level, funding is a major concern as this will impact the department's ability to attract and retain excellent students.

Recommendations

1. Institute a Film Major in collaboration with the Faculty of Humanities.
2. Upper administration should work with AHVS to facilitate cross-listing courses with other units and faculties and formulate an equitable way of sharing EETs credits. This would align with the University's strategic plan, which calls for more collaboration between faculties and academic units (p. 4,11).
3. Convert part-time positions to full-time and apply for a CRC position in Film Studies (possibly in Indigenous Cinema).
4. Work with the Faculty's Development Officer and the UVic library to fundraise for a viable exhibition space on campus and accessibility improvements to the Legacy Gallery.
5. Increase graduate student funding and ensure greater transparency in offer letters and baseline equity across cohorts. More can also be done to acquaint graduate students with supports and resources beyond AHVS, especially in the Office of the Dean of Graduate Studies.
6. Research-stream faculty should work more closely with the Faculty of Fine Arts Research Facilitator to apply for internal and external awards.
7. Continue to reduce the high number of AVHS courses in the UVic undergraduate calendar, especially those not taught regularly.
8. Develop a major in Museum Studies, if resources are available.