

## UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA

**Department of Visual Arts**  
**External Program Review**  
**April 27-29, 2022**

### **Members of the Review Committee:**

Helga Hallgrimsdottir, Chair of Review Committee, Dean of Human and Social Development, UVic  
Nadia Myre, Assistant Professor, Studio Arts, Concordia University  
Samuel Roy-Bois, Associate Professor, University of British Columbia, Okanagan Campus

### **Executive Summary**

The program review committee would like to extend our thanks and gratitude to the students, staff, and faculty of the Department of Visual Arts, for their time and engagement with this important process.

Overall, the academic program review revealed a community of scholars and practitioners deeply committed to providing a stellar learning environment, to research excellence, and to meaningful engagement with the community. The reviewers found many strong synergies with institutional strategic plans, including the University of Victoria's Strategic Framework, the Indigenous Plan and Aspiration 2030.

The reputation of the department is substantial, and rests on the significant research contributions of internationally and nationally recognized faculty. The culture of the department is positive and inclusive, and highly collegial. We found significant attention to promoting and fostering equity throughout departmental practices, including admissions processes and funding allocations to students. The department has a strong commitment to furthering EDI objectives and goals, and to decolonizing and to Indigenizing its curriculum and culture.

The faculty represent a diverse set of research and practice interests, and this provides a solid foundation for the breadth and depth of the curriculum that is provided at the BFA and MFA levels. Faculty members have a high level of commitment to teaching, to pedagogical and curricular innovation, and to fostering excellence in research.

The BFA and MFA provide an immersive and practice-based education with significant and rich exposure to studio and practice. A Faculty-level student advisor supports undergraduate students in navigating program requirements. The program is structured around a cohort model, that emphasizes building relationships with students and faculty, and there is a considerable focus on one-to-one mentorship, particularly at the graduate level.

Students in the MFA program have access to private studio space, which is a significant competitive advantage over other similar programs. An iterative admissions process works to ensure the best match possible between students and supervisors. MFA students have the opportunity to provide teaching assistance in their first year, and to teach once they are in their second year. There is in general a high level of student satisfaction with the program, in particular with the engagement and support of faculty mentors and access to studio.

In addition to administrative support staff, the department includes two dedicated technical staff (one shared with the Faculty) that are responsible for supervision and training on equipment as well as a building manager. These staff members provide instruction to students as well as part of their regular duties. In general, staff felt valued by both faculty and students for their skill and expertise.

The physical space that houses the department is well-used and functional. The above-mentioned studio spaces for graduate students are jewels, as are the purpose-built sculpture studios.

The department has a large contingent of continuing sessional instructors that provide valuable support to the unit's teaching program. From our visit with the department, it is clear that sessional instructors are highly valued by faculty, and there is interest in 'regularizing' some of these positions (i.e. creating regular teaching faculty positions). Sessionals that we spoke to noted that they felt valued by both students and faculty.

### **Summary of Recommendations**

1. That the department design and offer theory course(s), perhaps double-coded at the 400/500 level, that addresses theory from an artist perspective.
2. That the department develop a structured orientation to the BFA (perhaps offered over several days) to provide context for students on organization of the program. As well, a self-guided professional development module online could be developed that integrates professional development advice and training throughout the BFA and MFA degrees.
3. That the department explore offering summer courses in particular areas of practice that are of high interest (such as print-making and photography). These summer courses could double as non-credit bearing micro-credentials open to community members. This recommendation is predicated on appropriate staff complement (see below).
4. That the department hold a retreat (including students and sessionals) to discuss how obligations to equity, anti-racism, decolonization, and Indigenization, will be taken up by the department as a whole and by all faculty members.
5. Prioritization (through the annual capital investment budgeting process) of some urgent maintenance matters for the building.
6. That the department and the Dean create a capital development plan to create a dedicated on-campus gallery.
7. That capital planning for an on-campus gallery should include planning for research space for VISU faculty to create and support synergy between research and teaching within the program, and further foster mentorship and community within the department.
8. That the department recruit immediately one additional member to the technical support team.
9. That technical experts should not be engaged in building management or equipment check-out duties and to ensure that any gaps previously created through redeploying staff as instructors be filled.
10. That the department work to be more inclusive of the sessional instructor community, through offering opportunities and access to professional development (such as workshops, mentorship, and access to critique space) and including them more fulsomely in department governance.
11. That the department, with the support of the Dean and the Faculty Director of Administration, use a

collaborative and transparent process to explore bringing the teaching load to 2/2 for research faculty.

12. That the department, with the support of the Dean and the Faculty Director of Administration, use a collaborative and transparent process to explore how funds from the Faculty's sessional allocation to VISU could be repurposed towards creating a permanent faculty position, funded through program and curricular changes (such as larger class sizes where appropriate).
13. Work with the Dean and VPAC to support a targeted program expansion in areas of high student demand and interest, such as the planned theory stream or the double major.
14. That the department and the Faculty develop a partnership agreement with Camosun in access to their facility, so that individual faculty members do not need to pay for access. On the longer term, and as noted above, capital planning for the department should include faculty research space, in order for faculty to have access to research equipment at the University of Victoria.