

Review of the B.F.A. in Art

Classification of Instructional Program (CIP) Code: 50.0702
Fine/Studio Arts, General

The Bachelor of Fine Arts (B.F.A.) in Art program is housed in the School of Art within the College of Fine Arts. The school also offers a minor in art with an art history emphasis, a B.A., B.S. in Art (liberal arts), a M.A., M.S. in Art (art education or visual culture), and a Master of Fine Arts (M.F.A.) in Art (studio arts).

The B.F.A. in Art is a highly selective program oriented toward advanced professional study in the studio arts. Students accepted into the B.F.A. program have additional opportunities beyond those of the B.A., B.S. in Art program to specialize in a particular studio art discipline. The B.F.A. program is designed to prepare students for M.F.A. graduate study, which is the terminal degree in the studio arts, or for a career in a professional art field. Students may apply to the B.F.A. program beginning in their sophomore year, typically while in the B.A., B.S. in Art program.

As has been experienced by fine arts programs across the country, enrollment in the B.F.A. in Art program has declined in recent years. Fall census day enrollment has dropped from 24 first majors in 2011 to 12 in 2014. To address this decline, faculty and staff of the School of Art have instituted aggressive recruitment strategies.

The B.F.A. in Art program at Illinois State is one of seven programs at public universities in Illinois assigned CIP code 50.0702. With respect to enrollment, the B.F.A. program at Illinois State is one of the smallest of the seven. However, comparison of the B.F.A. program at Illinois State with the other programs is complicated. The B.F.A. program at Illinois State offers advanced professional study in the studio arts for upper division students, while B.F.A. programs at the other public universities typically offer a broader, liberal arts curriculum similar to the curriculum of the B.A., B.S. in Art program at Illinois State. The B.F.A. program at Illinois State is analogous to honors programs in studio arts at other institutions. Enrollment in the program is intentionally kept low to provide individualized attention to students throughout their time in the program.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY PROGRAM REVIEW SELF-STUDY REPORT

Self-study process. In the summer of 2015, School of Art faculty and staff participated in a program review retreat. Individually and within small groups, they discussed and reviewed the school mission statement and strategic plan. Participants then divided into smaller groups to examine specific goals for related program review topics, discuss the strengths and weaknesses of programs, and develop recommendations for building on strengths and improving areas of weakness. The issues identified and addressed in this retreat deepened the understanding among faculty and staff of the academic programs in the school and became the foundation for the self-study. Many individuals made significant contributions to this program review. Key faculty and staff members helped the interim director of the school write the self-study report. In addition to full participation by faculty in the program review retreat, faculty members participated in all facets of this review.

Program curriculum. While studio arts is one of four sequences offered through the B.A., B.S. in Art program, studio arts is the sole focus of the B.F.A. in Art program. The studio arts sequence in the B.A., B.S. program requires 54 credit hours in the major, but the B.F.A. program requires 83 credit hours in the major to provide a more intensive studio arts experience. After completing core foundational courses, students in the B.F.A. program select a media specialization. Students may specialize in ceramics, drawing, expanded media, glass, painting, photography, printmaking, sculpture, video art, or wood/metal design. Students are expected to apply knowledge gained from their course work to mature artistically and intellectually as they define a unique artistic voice. Progress through the curriculum is fluid and logical, with increasingly challenging assignments that expand creative problem solving skills, develop abstract and critical thinking skills, and enrich communication skills. To earn their degree, B.F.A. students are required to present a successful solo exhibition of a well-developed body of art work, accompanied by a written statement, an oral presentation, and an oral defense of their work and ideas in a public forum. Students are

required to maintain a minimum grade point average, both cumulative and in the major, of 3.0 to continue in the B.F.A. program.

Program or academic unit faculty. All tenure track faculty members in the School of Art hold the terminal degree in their respective fields (M.F.A., Ed.D., or Ph.D.) and are active scholars and artists who present their work at regional, national, or international venues. The School of Art is unusual in the diversity of its degree programs and, therefore, in the diversity of qualifications for faculty teaching in them. The terminal degree for studio faculty is the M.F.A., the terminal degree for art history and visual culture faculty is the Ph.D., and the terminal degree for art teacher education faculty is either the Ed.D. or the Ph.D. Collectively, School of Art faculty is an accomplished and highly regarded group of artists and scholars. Art history faculty members publish in scholarly journals and contribute essays and chapters to edited books. Art teacher education faculty members exhibit original works of art, publish articles and present at conferences, and conduct methods workshops at elementary, middle, and high schools throughout the region. Studio arts faculty members exhibit in some of the most prestigious art galleries and museums in the country.

Program goals and quality indices. Goals of the School of Art are to maintain an educational program in the visual arts that provides a professional education in the studio arts, art education, graphic design, and art history; to provide arts-based instruction for the General Education program of the University and, therefore, for the general student population, and selected course work in art production for non-art majors interested in the studio disciplines; to recruit or retain a faculty and staff with strong academic and professional credentials who are committed to teaching, to their own creative/scholarly work, and to participating in academic shared governance; to provide and maintain physical facilities and resources adequate to the educational mission and goals of the school; and to recruit and retain students who are committed to acquiring a professional-level art education within the liberal arts environment of the University. Among the quality indices used by faculty to compare the program with aspirational programs at other institutions are the student-faculty ratio, the number of media taught in the program; the quality of M.F.A. programs in which graduates of the program enroll; the quality of faculty and student work; and the degree of faculty attention to students.

Student learning outcomes assessment plan and process. School of Art faculty has adopted 10 student learning objectives for the B.F.A. in Art program: students will demonstrate in-depth knowledge and/or skill in content associated with their chosen medium; students will strive for professional studio practice; students will develop advanced research skills; students will engage in discourse and develop verbal fluency; students will develop original, cohesive, conceptual ideas; students will articulate their work within a contemporary context; students will prepare a one-person exhibition and public presentation; students will develop an individual plan of study; students will demonstrate knowledge of the major monuments and periods in the history of art from pre-historic times to the end of the medieval period, circa 1400 to the end of the Modern period, circa 1970; and students will demonstrate the ability to complete a research project in a specific subject in art history. Students are deemed to have achieved the learning objectives if they successfully master the material and content in foundation courses, are accepted into the B.F.A. program (which requires a portfolio review, an interview, and a faculty letter of support); and successfully mount a final individual exhibition of work in the University Galleries accompanied by a written supportive statement. In addition to faculty assessment of student learning through evaluation of course work, faculty members regularly work with students individually in the studio environment and through independent study. Students also participate in regular critique sessions, involving both faculty and other students, in which students are required to analyze and explain their work both formally and conceptually. This highly individualized work with faculty members allows for direct mentoring and assessment in which verbal and written critique and analysis are used to measure learning objectives.

Specialized accreditation. The School of Art and its programs, including the B.F.A. in Art, continue to meet expectations of the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD). The school and its programs of study were reaccredited by NASAD in 2014. The next accreditation review is tentatively scheduled for 2023-2024.

Responses to recommendations resulting from the previous program review. Two recommendations by the Academic Planning Committee resulted from the previous program review in 2008-2009. The committee recommended that the program work with the director of the University Honors program to ensure that students participating in the honors program sponsored by the School of Art are also participating in University Honors program. School of Art faculty and staff, together with the University Honors program staff, have since developed

programming for art majors enrolled in the University Honors program, including impromptu gatherings, formal field trips, and an end-of-the-semester check-in for the entire group. As a result of these efforts, fall term participation by B.F.A. in Art students in the University Honors program ranged from 9.1 to 17.6 percent between 2010 and 2014, while the average across all university programs ranged from 5.6 to 6.3 percent. The committee also recommended that the program continue its efforts to diversify the student body and the faculty. Since then the student population has become more diverse. The percentage of students in the program self-identifying with racial/ethnic groups traditionally underrepresented at Illinois State has increased from 9 percent in fall 2008 to nearly 17 percent in fall 2015. With 13 women and 15 men on the faculty who are either tenured or hold a tenure track position, the ratio of female to male faculty members is approaching a satisfactory level. However, the faculty is not as diverse racially or ethnically, as only two faculty members self-identify with traditionally underrepresented racial/ethnic groups.

Changes in the academic discipline, field, societal need, and program demand. While enrollments in most undergraduate art programs across the country are shrinking, faculty and staff of the School of Art are working diligently to reverse the enrollment decline in those programs at Illinois State. Faculty and staff now recognize that enrollment in fine arts programs is no longer a given. Instead, they will have to work hard to attract talented students. Assisted by the Office of Admissions and the Office of Enrollment Management and Academic Services, the School of Art has developed a robust recruiting plan whose implementation has already helped stabilize program enrollment. The school intends to continually modify the plan in order to connect with prospective students.

Major findings of this program review self-study. Within the last few years the School of Art has participated in both program review and the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD) accreditation review process. Each experience has built on the other. Both processes continue to inform strategic initiatives of the school. One issue addressed in both processes is the graphic design sequence offered by the school, currently in the B.A., B.S. in Art program. Faculty has long considered the graphic design program at Northern Illinois University (NIU) a comparator to graphic design study at Illinois State. However, the graphic design program at NIU is considered a professional degree program, while graphic design study at Illinois State is part of a liberal arts program. Graphic design faculty members in the school have engaged in conversations regarding the potential of adding a graphic design sequence to the B.F.A. program. This addition would allow a more professionally-minded student to move into an advanced track of graphic design study. Over the next few years these conversations will likely continue.

Initiatives and plans for the next program review cycle. Continuing to develop and implement a rigorous recruiting plan for the B.F.A. in Art program and its companion B.A., B.S. program is a major priority for the coming years. Faculty and staff of the school are already deep into conversations about how to best address this. This program review has verified what was previously known anecdotally, that numerous media specializations offered by the program have been operating below enrollment capacity. Assuming that overall program enrollment continues to increase, strategies for recruiting students into currently low-enrolled specializations are needed, including strategies for attracting high school students and strategies for attracting transfer students.

PROGRAM REVIEW OUTCOME AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE ACADEMIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

The Academic Planning Committee, as a result of this review process, finds the B.F.A. in Art to be in Good Standing.

The Academic Planning Committee thanks the program for its self-study report and for opportunities extended to all faculty and staff members to participate in the program review process (e.g., through participation in an all-school summer retreat). The committee recognizes the program for its contributions to planning and preparation for the new fine arts complex, including relocation of University Galleries from campus to Uptown Normal in 2014.

The committee commends the school and its faculty for offering a B.F.A. in Art program that stands apart from B.F.A. programs at other Illinois universities. While other B.F.A. programs in the state have adopted a liberal arts model with broad coverage of the discipline, the B.F.A. program at Illinois State is designed exclusively for advanced students pursuing a career in the studio arts, with rigorous admission requirements and academic standards. Each student completes the program by staging a solo exhibition on campus accompanied by an oral

presentation and defense of her or his work. Despite, or perhaps because of, this rigor, the program continues to be in high demand. Quality of the program is further evidenced by its reaccreditation in 2015 by the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD) and by the many successes its passionate and talented students have had after graduating from the program, including acceptance into prestigious M.F.A. programs at the Museum of Fine Arts School in Boston, the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Cranbrook Academy of Art, and Northwestern University. The committee also recognizes the steady increase in the percentage of students self-identifying with racial/ethnic groups traditionally underrepresented at the University, from 9 percent at the time of the last program review in 2008 to 17 percent in fall 2014.

Keys to student success include individualized attention to students, numerous co-curricular activities, and study abroad opportunities. The school maintains a student-to-faculty ratio conducive to one-on-one mentoring of students by tenure-line faculty members. The ratio of students to tenure-line faculty in fall 2014 was approximately 10:1 in the School of Art compared to approximately 26:1 university-wide. Each B.F.A. student is assigned studio space in which to create and critique. In working with their students, faculty members draw on the many scholarly contributions they make to their discipline, including regional, national, and international exhibits and installations. Co-curricular activities include the Student Annual Exhibition and many other opportunities to publicly exhibit works on campus and in the community. The program also sponsors study abroad opportunities for B.F.A. students thoughtfully integrated with the curriculum, including an art history experience in Italy.

Although a student can graduate from the B.F.A. program with 122 credit hours, average credit hours earned by graduates between 2010 and 2014 ranged from 144.6 to 167.5 for first-time-in-college students and from 134.3 to 158.0 for external transfer students. In three of those five years, no first-time-in-college student graduating from the program did so within four years of enrolling at the University. The committee understands that some students enter the program later in their college career and some prefer to continue in the program to build their portfolio even though they have met graduation requirements. However, the additional credit hours beyond the minimum result in higher costs to students and continued use of studio space that could be used to support newly-enrolled students. The committee asks program faculty conduct a deeper analysis of credit hour and time-to-degree data and to identify specific actions the program might take to increase the percentage of students completing the program in four years. The committee asks the program to submit findings of its analysis in a report submitted to the Office of the Provost. The committee asks the School of Art to submit the report by December 1, 2016.

In its discussion of aspirational programs, faculty has identified several measures it feels are appropriate to evaluating quality of the B.F.A. program at Illinois State, including quality of student work, quality of faculty research, and quality of M.F.A. programs into which program graduates are accepted. Faculty has also identified several programs at other universities that excel with respect to those measures. However, faculty has not investigated why program quality is higher at the aspirational institutions and what actions our program might take to approach, meet, or exceed those levels. The committee asks faculty to complete the aspirational programs analysis and report its findings in a follow-up report submitted to the Office of the Provost. The committee asks the School of Art to submit the report by January 27, 2017.

It is evident from the self-study report that faculty has done considerable work since the last program review on the student learning outcomes assessment plan for the program, including adoption of student learning outcomes that align with the mission and goals of the School of Art. It is also evident that providing ongoing feedback to students regarding their work is deeply ingrained in the school culture. However, it is not clear whether that feedback is being systematically documented and compiled and then used for program-level review. The committee is cognizant of the challenges in assessing student learning on the program level in disciplines with strong emphasis on qualitative holistic evaluation of individual expression and creativity. Developing a strategy to do so provides the program a unique opportunity to provide leadership among its peers nationally. Accordingly, the committee asks program faculty to continue its work on a student learning outcomes assessment plan that reflects the culture of the discipline and school while providing a means of obtaining feedback on the program level to guide program development and modification over time. Resources that might aid this effort include scholarship of teaching and learning in the discipline, experiences of aspirational programs, and University Assessment Services staff. The committee asks the School of Art to submit a written update to the Office of the Provost regarding the status of assessment plan development by May 15, 2017, and to submit a revised assessment plan to the Office of the Provost by May 15, 2018.

Recommendations

The Academic Planning Committee makes the following recommendations to be addressed within the next regularly scheduled review cycle. In the next program review self-study, tentatively due October 1, 2023, the committee asks the program to describe actions taken and results achieved for each recommendation.

- The committee commends faculty for its discussions and decision in 2012 regarding program capacity. The committee recommends that faculty periodically revisit its decision in light of changes in faculty, curriculum, facilities, and student demand.
- Despite the high demand for admission into the B.F.A. program, the committee recommends that the program continue its aggressive efforts to recruit highly motivated and talented students to the program, particularly students from traditionally underrepresented racial/ethnic groups. The program might consider expanding recruitment efforts to secondary schools with diverse student populations in the St. Louis and Indianapolis metropolitan areas and in downstate Illinois metropolitan and micropolitan areas.
- As another strategy for attracting more applicants and enrolling a more diverse student population, the committee recommends that faculty examine the curriculum for ways to expand coverage of non-European and non-Western art. The committee also recommends that faculty proceed with its investigation of establishing a graphic design sequence. If faculty concludes that such expansion is warranted, the committee recommends expanding faculty recruitment efforts in the graphic design area.
- The committee recommends that, in support of its student recruitment efforts, the program maintain a web presence that showcases the expertise of program faculty and the many exhibition and professional practice opportunities available to students.
- For the benefit of prospective and current students, the committee encourages the program to maintain an undergraduate catalog entry that accurately and clearly describes available plans of study and graduation requirements.
- The committee recommends that the program continue its many efforts to track program alumni, including efforts to document alumni career successes and creative works, and to formalize its strategies in an alumni outreach plan.
- In fall 2014, approximately 13 percent of School of Art faculty members self-identified with racial/ethnic groups traditionally underrepresented among faculty at the University. The committee recommends that school faculty continue efforts to expand applicant pools to include candidates from those groups when faculty positions are filled, particularly tenure-line faculty positions. As noted in the self-study report, the Recruitment Assistance Program sponsored by the Office of the Provost is one resource that could help with this effort.
- Beyond the work requested by the committee to revise the student learning outcomes assessment plan for the program, the committee urges the program to continue to utilize information collected through student learning outcomes assessments over the next eight years to make program improvements and to document how that has been done.