

Review of the M.A., M.S. in Art

Classification of Instructional Program (CIP) Code: 50.0701
Art/Art Studies, General

The M.A., M.S. 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 Bachelor of Fine Arts (B.F.A.) in Art (studio arts), and a Master of Fine Arts (M.F.A.) in Art (studio arts).

The M.A., M.S. in Art program offers advanced study in art education or visual culture. The art education sequence is designed to help elementary and secondary art educators expand their knowledge of the field and advance in the profession. As a new interdisciplinary field, visual culture emerges out of several established disciplines including, but not limited to, art history, anthropology, cultural studies, history, literature, media studies, music, and theatre. The visual culture sequence is designed to prepare students to pursue careers in numerous art-related professions, including curator, gallerist, archivist, librarian, museum and gallery registrar, and positions within publishing, editorial work, media studies, and cultural studies. The program is also designed to prepare students for doctoral study in visual culture, visual studies, art history, or related fields.

As has been experienced by fine arts programs across the country, enrollment in the M.A., M.S. in Art program has declined in recent years. Fall census day enrollment dropped from 17 students in 2010 to 11 students in 2014. To address this decline, faculty and staff of the School of Art have instituted aggressive recruitment strategies. Those efforts have already helped stabilize and slightly increase enrollment in the program.

The M.A., M.S. in Art program at Illinois State is one of four programs at public universities in Illinois assigned CIP code 50.0701. The visual culture sequence of the program is unique in the state.

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. The M.A., M.S. in Art program offers two sequences of study: art education (M.S. only) and visual culture (M.A. only). Students in both sequences complete a common core that includes a graduate seminar in art history, an introduction to research methodology, and a course in critical theory. Students enrolling in the art education sequence must complete at least 32 credit hours including a master's thesis and a comprehensive examination. In addition to the core courses, required art education courses include foundations of art education, contemporary issues in art education, and curriculum in art education. Art education students who have a bachelor's degree in studio art but are not licensed to teach may work toward initial licensure in Illinois while completing the M.A., M.S. program. Students enrolling in the visual culture sequence also complete at least 32 credit hours including a master's thesis and a comprehensive examination. Beyond the requirement to take the three core courses in the program, visual culture students are required to take at least nine credit hours of art history or visual culture in the school and at least nine hours in related fields, such as history, literature, and anthropology, outside the school. Each student in the visual culture sequence is responsible for working with the program coordinator to design an interdisciplinary program of study.

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. Objectives of the M.A., M.S. in Art program are to provide an opportunity for advanced study in art education or visual culture; to prepare students for careers in elementary, middle, or high school teaching or museum, gallery, or archival work; to support educators seeking to build on their professional expertise and advance in their chosen career; and to prepare students for doctoral study. Among the quality indices used by faculty to compare the program with aspirational programs at other institutions are uniqueness and rigor of the curriculum; the quality of out-of-classroom opportunities, such as study abroad, available to students; the national prominence of faculty in their discipline; the quality of faculty and student scholarship; and the rate at which graduates of the program are employed.

Student learning outcomes assessment plan and process. School of Art faculty has adopted six student learning objectives for the M.A., M.S. in Art program: students will demonstrate and apply a higher level of critical thinking; students will evaluate and use critical theory in their writing and research; students will produce an original thesis based on primary research; students will articulate critical position within the field; students will plan, develop, and implement long-term projects; and students will gain practical and pedagogical skills through graduate assistant or teaching assistant experience. Students are deemed to have achieved the learning objectives if they successfully master the material and content in coursework; participate, prepare, and engage in seminar-level instruction; master critical thinking, writing, and research skills; and develop a written thesis and pass a comprehensive examination.

Specialized accreditation. The School of Art and its programs, including the M.A, M.S. 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 encourage all eligible faculty members to apply for full graduate faculty status so they can fully participate in graduate education in the school. In fall 2014 the Director of Graduate Studies at the University reported that the process used by the School of Art to nominate its faculty for full graduate faculty status differed from the process adopted by other units at the University. The School of Art had been seeking waivers to allow associate graduate faculty members to chair capstone committees when other units were nominating their faculty members for full graduate faculty status to allow them to do so. The school has since changed its process and has nominated all associate graduate faculty members for full graduate faculty status. All nominations have been accepted by the Graduate School. The committee also recommended that faculty analyze graduate art programs, nationally or internationally, with qualities to which the program at Illinois State might aspire. Faculty teaching in the art education sequence has embraced this recommendation through its work to revise the art education curriculum informed by connections with an education initiative in New South Wales, Australia. The work of the art education faculty is also informed by a research initiative of the National Art Education Association, which keeps

pace with art education initiatives of Tier One postsecondary institutions. Using the New South Wales curriculum model, students and faculty of the art education sequence are working collaboratively to create a curriculum text for national publication.

Changes in the academic discipline, field, societal need, and program demand. Enrollment in fine arts programs across the country, including fine arts programs at Illinois State, has declined in recent years. The School of Art is instituting more aggressive recruitment strategies to reverse this trend. In recruiting students to its M.A., M.S. in Art program, the School of Art will continue to stress the opportunity to study visual culture, still relatively unique in graduate art education. Numerous art history programs across the country are adding the term “visual culture” or “visual studies” to their plans of studies, which suggests growing acceptance within the American academy of visual culture as a viable and vital area of inquiry. With its visual culture sequence, the M.A., M.S. program has the opportunity to grow its enrollment and achieve prominence in contemporary scholarship in the field.

Major findings of this program review self-study. The program review process has afforded faculty a forum to discover aspects of the M.A., M.S. in Art program that are deficient and to imagine and discuss ways the program can be improved to create a more student-centered experience. An ongoing challenge for the program is recruiting and enrolling a diverse student body. In the coming years, student recruitment strategies for increasing enrollment will need to include strategies for increasing the percentage of students from traditionally underrepresented racial and ethnic groups.

Initiatives and plans for the next program review cycle. Developing a more rigorous and aggressive recruiting plan for each sequence of the M.A., M.S. in Art program is a priority. Faculty and staff are already deep into developing such a plan, including strategies for recruiting a racially and ethnically diverse applicant pool. This program review has confirmed what was previously known anecdotally, that the M.A., M.S. program must strive to be more competitive. School of Art faculty and staff will continue to engage in vigorous, thoughtful, and introspective conversations about how to build a program that is responsive to the contemporary art world while retaining the values of a comprehensive art program.

PROGRAM REVIEW OUTCOME AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE ACADEMIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

The Academic Planning Committee, as a result of this review process, finds the M.A., M.S. 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 M.A., M.S. in Art program that is unique in the state and Midwest, particularly with the introduction of the visual culture sequence and with ongoing revision of the art education curriculum to incorporate urban education and aspects of the New South Wales, Australia, art education model. The committee also commends the school and its faculty for the quality and rigor of the curriculum, which includes core courses in visual culture, critical theory, and research methodology; emphasizes social justice; and requires completion of a thesis and a comprehensive examination. Quality of the program is further evidenced by its reaccreditation in 2015 by the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD), by the many scholarly and creative achievements of its faculty, and by the many successes its passionate and talented students have had after graduating from the program, including acceptance into Ph.D. programs at the University of California Irvine and Boston University.

Keys to student success include individualized attention to students and opportunities to collaborate with faculty on research and grants. The school maintains a student-to-faculty ratio conducive to one-on-one mentoring of students. 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. Since 2009 students have made 10 research presentations with faculty, collaborated with faculty on three grant-funded projects, and co-authored two peer-reviewed publications.

In its discussion of aspirational programs, faculty has identified several measures it feels are appropriate to evaluating quality of the program, including the rate at which program graduates are employed, the rigor of the curriculum, the quality of students and faculty, and their visibility and prominence in their field. Faculty has also identified several programs at other universities that excel with respect to these or other 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 31, 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 for both curricular and co-curricular activities 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 program review self-study report identifies several issues related to program enrollment, including enrollment stability and student diversity. The committee recommends that the program first formalize enrollment targets and capacities for each sequence for the next program review cycle, in doing so considering faculty resources, curriculum, and facilities. The committee further recommends incorporating enrollment targets in a student recruitment plan that identifies strategies for attracting students from the Midwest and other regions of the country, increasing show rates, maintaining and further improving the quality of students enrolling in the program, recruiting students from racial/ethnic groups traditionally underrepresented at the University, and recruiting for gender balance.
- 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 a graduate catalog entry that accurately and clearly describes available plans of study and graduation requirements.
- The program continues to attract students who prefer to complete the program part-time. The committee encourages program faculty to explore expanded use of distance education to facilitate timely program completion by its part-time students and to potentially attract more. Program faculty might consider focusing its distance education efforts initially on art education, to serve art teachers in elementary and secondary schools. Program faculty might look to other master's-level teacher education programs at the University for models of distance education.

- The program review self-study report identifies the number of assistantships currently available to the program as a factor in student recruitment and program enrollment. The report mentions initial discussions among faculty about developing assistantship opportunities in other programs and units at the University. The committee encourages the program to continue those efforts. The committee also recommends that the program contact the Graduate School for assistance investigating the feasibility of establishing assistantships with organizations outside the University.
- 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.