Art

A department in the College of Humanities and Fine Arts offering the M.A. degree in Art Education; and the B.A., B.F.A. and M.F.A. in Studio Arts.

The Review Process

The Department is accredited by the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD), which places primary emphasis on demonstrated compliance with a set of artistic and design-based academic criteria for the programs an institution offers. NASAD is the recognized accreditor for U.S. freestanding institutions and units offering art/design and art/design-related degree programs.

The NASAD-AQAD cycle in 2014-15 provided the first opportunity for external review of the newly-named Department of Art after its organizational split from the Department of Art, Architecture and Art History. The results of the 2014-15 NASAD review of the Art Department are reported here. NASAD reviewers were:

Robert Milnes, University of North Texas, Team Chair
Jack Risley, University of Texas

Main Issues

The external report described a “well-developed” Department that reflects strengths in strategic planning, program development, new governance structures and new facilities that benefit the students and teachers, particularly in light of the recent division of one department into three standalone units, including the Department of Art. The committee remarked on the Department’s interdisciplinary studio arts focus, notably how it seeks collaborative opportunities with theater, dance and music programs. It also commended the Department for its track record of placements of its students in the academy and other teaching careers, as well as careers in the fine arts and animation industry.

Among the highlights chronicled in the NASAD review were the commitment and quality of the faculty; new governance structures vis-à-vis the departments’ split, which have boosted morale and created a new vision of excellence for the academic programs; significant hires that added diversity, expertise and a new curricular focus on contemporary technology and staffing in visual resources, and in particular the hire of a new Department of Art chair from outside the University after a national search; ample provision of time for faculty research and professional development opportunities; selective admissions policies at both the bachelor’s and master’s level; excellent financial support along with teaching opportunities for graduate students; new facilities for studio art that includes faculty studios and offices, and a state-of-the-art health and safety infrastructure; evidence of student-faculty interaction in the programming, including at the Department’s diverse and active gallery exhibition space; and ample access to pre-foundations studio art courses for prospective majors.

1 NASAD declined to include the third sub-unit—the Department of Architecture—in its 2014-15 review. NASAD had previously evaluated the Interior Design program of the combined, three-unit department but since the departmental split in fall 2014, all of the programs offered by the new Department of Architecture no longer fall under NASAD’s purview.
The review team determined that the Department is in compliance with all fifteen standards required for NASAD accreditation. It did question why there did not appear to be sufficient content in studio art for a B.F.A. in Art Education, and encouraged the Department to garner further evidence of the curriculum before it seeks approval. It also questioned whether the online bachelor’s degree program in Arts Management run by the University Without Walls (UWW) through Continuing and Professional Education should be included in future NASAD reviews. Finally, pertaining to the Department’s studio arts concentrations, the committee noted inconsistencies between information provided on the website and in the self-study.

The review committee’s report made a series of recommendations for short-term improvement, to point out a set of primary future issues about which the Department should remain vigilant, and to offer suggestions for long-term development strategies. A summary of the comments from these three categories follows:

- **Recommendations for Short-Term Improvement:** Diminished enrollments over the last two years should be addressed through increased recruitment efforts; additional exhibition opportunities for advanced and graduate students are needed; the Department should review the process by which library purchases and requests are made, especially given the reliance on individual faculty members’ libraries to aid student research; there is an acute need for additional space to house three-dimensional courses including foundation courses, sculpture and ceramics; there needs to be increased transparency in describing how advanced placement (AP) credit is awarded.

- **Primary Future Issues:** The three newly-established Departments (Department of Art, Department of History of Art and Architecture, and Department of Architecture) are encouraged to maintain close connections to develop further synergies, especially through its shared Foundations course; recent recruitment problems should be monitored and new strategies created if enrollment numbers do not rebound; robust engagement with the University-wide strategic planning process may help to address priorities and illuminate new funding opportunities.

- **Suggestions for Long-Term Development:** Enhancements to the diversity of faculty, student body and programs will address changes in the art and design world; greater coordination of exhibition facilities on-campus will help clarify missions, avoid duplication of shows and purposes, and help accelerate student learning and engagement; and a greater level of interaction with nearby communities will help expand student recruitment.

### Results of the Review

The Department of Art discussed the report prepared by the external reviewers and offered a number of responses to their recommendations. Given that no circumstances of non-compliance were found by the NASAD committee, these responses generally corrected typographical errors and only offered minor clarifications and reinforcement to especially important points.

### Outcomes Assessment

The Department of Art has an established set of student learning objectives for the undergraduate major and graduate program, which include developing an understanding of the visual language of style; the terminology, technology and diversity of artistic media; the nature of the creative process and the role of artists who have shaped the history of visual arts; and many other competencies. The department primarily relies on one direct measure to verify the extent to which students have met learning objectives: assessment of their performance in
critical writing, through evaluation of an assignment from the junior-year writing course and the senior-year integrative experience course.

■ Student Retention and Graduation Rates

As a newly independent unit, data for the Department of Art are limited to records beginning in 2010. The data that have been gathered are too limited to draw robust conclusions. Since 2010, enrollments by first-year B.A. and B.F.A. studio arts majors has varied from a high of 21 in 2010 to a low of eight in 2012. During this same period, retention rates for the combined B.A. and B.F.A. programs remained steady, with only one or two students leaving each year to pursue other majors. Since 2007, the Department has witnessed improved four-year graduation rates, from a 40.9% low in 2004 to an 80.6% high in 2009. The Department’s commitment to advising, as evidenced by the hire of a part-time undergraduate advisor in June 2009, appears to parallel improved four- and six-year graduation rates.