

TO: Mike Mahon
President and Vice Chancellor

DATE: March 4, 2014

FROM: Robert A. Boudreau
Chair, Academic Quality Assurance Committee

RE: Department of New Media, Academic Quality Assurance Review

In accordance with the U of L *Academic Quality Assurance Policy and Process*, the Academic Quality Assurance Committee approved the review of the Department of New Media at its January 24, 2014 meeting.

The Self Study Committee for this review was comprised of James Graham (Program Review Coordinator), Bob Cousins, Anna Pickering, and Dan O'Donnell. The review produced four documents:¹

1. *Department of New Media Self Study Report* (received August 6, 2013) – Developed by the new Media Self Study Committee.
2. *External Review Report - University of Lethbridge, Department of New Media* (received November 21, 2013) – External Review Report by Christopher Moore (Concordia University) and Richard Smith (Simon Fraser University), based on their site visit of October 1-2, 2013.
3. *New Media Self-Study Committee Response to Moore/Smith External Review Report* (received January 10, 2014) – response of the Self Study Committee to the external review.
4. *Faculty of Fine Arts Dean's Response to the New Media Self Study Committee Response to Moore/Smith External Review Report* (received January 20, 2014) – response to the review, written by Ed Jurkowski, Dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts.

¹ All documents are available upon request.

Self Study

The Self Study Report identified the following strengths of New Media:

- The department has “carefully and aggressively developed its curriculum.”
- The department successfully integrates students into professional practice while giving them the foundation for advancing to graduate studies.
- New media companies place a high value on the New Media program.

The following issues were noted in the report:

- Ongoing space issues are challenging. There is a lack of adequate lab space and New Media-specific teaching space.
- Tenure-track positions have been replaced with term and sessional positions.
- The degree program is losing its uniqueness, due to imitation by other institutions.
- The program is a generalist degree that has comparatively few courses in New Media.
- There is a lack of support staff.
- Enrolment has dropped.

The report highlighted two major future initiatives:

- The Destination Project, which aims to develop a new science building and free up space in University Hall, may alleviate some of the space issues facing New Media.
- New programs (B.A. in New Media, B.Ed./B.F.A. New Media, and B.F.A./B.Mgt.) may boost enrolment and funding opportunities.

External Review

In their External Review Report, the External Reviewers noted the following overall strengths of the Department:

- The New Media program is responsive to the changing needs of industry and cultural institutions.
- The program builds on a liberal education model.
- The program blends applied learning, professional experience, and intellectual development.
- Students work with different mediums and techniques, which makes them broadly knowledgeable and adaptable.
- The program prepares students to work in collaborative, multidisciplinary teams.
- Faculty have varied interests and background.
- The department has shown effective fiscal management in the face of budget reductions.
- Technology resources are high quality and are renewed through an effectively managed lifecycle plan.
- Advising and career planning for students is excellent.
- Several faculty members have received major research funding and their work has been published in major books and journals. Their creative works have been shown at major

exhibitions and on television and at film festivals. Faculty members also contribute to national and international conference and to the local arts community.

- The New Media internship is well known among employers, particularly in Alberta.
- The curriculum is well thought out and responds well to changes in new media and digital media.

The body of the report made the following commentary on the New Media department:

- The department is consistent with the U of L Strategic Plan, and is well aligned with the Fundamental Principles from that plan.

The report noted the following issues and challenges:

- The department is small, with little redundancy in skill sets and teaching abilities. Small changes in the faculty complement have large effects.
- The department lost two tenure-track faculty members and these positions have not been replaced. Term appointments have been hired who teach six to seven courses, which leaves little time for research and administrative activities. This makes faculty recruitment and retention more difficult.
- Faculty have to teach courses that are outside their domain of expertise.
- The program lacks a consistent core of knowledge.
- There is a lack of gender equity in the program.
- Technology adoption by other Fine Arts areas has reduced the uniqueness of the program.
- There is a lack of resources and facilities to support the M.F.A. program.
- The department needs more and better-designed spaces. There are some serious gaps in teaching spaces, especially theatre-style space with proper projection and sound equipment.
- Challenges to expanding the graduate program include the contentious nature of methods of allocating graduate students to advisors, and graduate teaching and supervision being considered as above and beyond normal faculty workload.
- Requirements to take Fine Arts courses outside the department are viewed by students with mixed feelings.
- Administrative and technical support is overburdened.

The report made twelve recommendations:

1. Reduce or eliminate Music, Theatre, and Art requirements, and offer more New Media electives.
2. Develop a space plan to support the needs of the curriculum. Also, consider planning for a future move to University Hall with the development of the science building.
3. Hire new tenure-track faculty, considering joint appointments.
4. Add a mandatory programming course to the first year of the program.
5. Consider developing a Master of Arts in Critical Studies and investigate the feasibility of maintaining the M.F.A. program.
6. Revisit the departmental mission statement. Consider if the department can support such a wide variety of curricular areas and streams.
7. To provide greater leadership continuity, reconsider the use of rotating department Chairs.
8. Consider developing more minors, modeled on the minor in Management.
9. Consider developing a technology policy, like the existing technology renewal policy, and use it to bring in new technology and retire older technology.
10. Look at ways to ensure students and faculty better understand the whole curriculum.
11. Explore the use of large lecture classes and online courses, and skill development courses delivered through third parties.
12. Explore interdepartmental course offerings, such as a cross-departmental advanced studio.

There were additional recommendations in the body of the report:

- Make a long-term effort to recruit and retain female students and faculty members.
- Consider developing a visiting artist/scholar program, perhaps linked to the existing Art Now and Architecture and Design Now programs.
- Apply better scheduling or resourcing to the equipment check in/check out system. M.F.A. students, for example, could fill some equipment monitor positions.
- Make developing a dedicated theatre with proper projection and sound equipment a priority. In the interim, the projection and sound in the teaching labs should be upgraded.
- Advocate for additional research funding, and consider seeking to hire a Canada Research Chair.
- Mobile technologies could be strengthened in the curriculum.
- Use communication and marketing to boost the visibility of the Management minor.

Program Response

The Program Response stated that the Self Study Committee agrees with the External Review's assessment of the program, facilities, staff, and students.

The Self Study Committee agreed with the External Reviewers' assessment of the major issues, which include: the need for more core and elective courses; lack of suitable lab and general purpose space; the need for more lecture and seminar space; reductions in tenure track faculty; teaching of courses by non-specialists; reduced core programming curriculum because of hiring restrictions; fluctuations in the number of MFA students; lack of continuity in department leadership; and issues related to mission and vision.

The response noted that many of the External Review Report recommendations are similar to those made in the 2005 external review of the New Media department. These have largely been unrealized for various reasons.

The Program Response addressed the 12 recommendations from the External Review Report:

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| <i>1. Reduce or eliminate Music, Theatre, and Art requirements, and offer more New Media electives.</i> | Agreed. Since 2005, the department has replaced three Art, Drama, and Music requirements with three New Media electives. New Media is awaiting approval of two new required New Media courses (Computer Programming for Fine Arts and Introduction to New Media Theory) and is converting a required course to an elective to remove redundancy. Changing the Art, Drama, and Music requirements to New Media courses will take time due to the effect of these changes on those departments. Before developing more New Media electives, the department will focus on enrolment difficulties in current electives. |
| <i>2. Develop a space plan to support the needs of the curriculum. Also, consider planning for a future move to University Hall with the development of the science building.</i> | Agreed. Space quantity and quality has been an ongoing issue that has never been adequately addressed. Developing a space plan will likely help considerably in moving forward on space needs. |
| <i>3. Hire new tenure-track faculty, considering joint appointments.</i> | The department strongly supports the recommendation to hire tenure-track faculty to replace two vacant positions. Departmental opinion on the efficacy of joint appointments is split, however. |
| <i>4. Add a mandatory programming course to the first year of the program.</i> | New Media has approved in principle a mandatory year one programming course. Further approval and implementations steps remain for this course. |
| <i>5. Consider developing a Master of Arts in Critical Studies.</i> | New Media does not support this recommendation. Internal resources are already struggling to maintain the current M.F.A. program. |
| <i>6. Revisit the Department mission statement. Consider if the Department can support such a wide variety of curricular areas and streams.</i> | Agreed. Revising the department's vision and mission statements will be challenging but necessary. And reviewing New Media's diversity of courses and interests will be worthwhile. |

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| 7. <i>Reconsider the use of rotating Department Chairs to provide greater leadership continuity.</i> | The department agrees that an appointed Chair who remains in office for a full term is needed. |
| 8. <i>Consider developing more minors, modeled on the minor in Management.</i> | The department will consider developing a minor in Computer Science and a minor in Film Studies. |
| 9. <i>Consider developing a technology policy, like the existing technology renewal policy, and use it to bring in new technology and retire older technology.</i> | The department must first clarify the definition of “older technology.” The External Reviewers could be suggesting that New Media develop an ongoing technology review process. Or they could be referring to interactive, non-linear, mobile media becoming predominant. Clarification is needed before the department addresses this recommendation. |
| 10. <i>Look at ways to ensure students and faculty better understand the whole curriculum.</i> | When New Media has finished reviewing its mission and vision statements, the department will use these statements to inform the curriculum review process. |
| 11. <i>Explore the use of large lecture classes and online courses, and skill development courses delivered through third parties.</i> | Large lecture classes may negatively impact existing service classes by drawing students and resources away. Online courses are a good idea, but require resources that the department cannot commit at this time. |
| 12. <i>Explore interdepartmental course offerings, such as a cross-departmental advanced studio.</i> | Many faculty members in New Media have great interest in interdisciplinary courses. A course in Comic Studies is under development for Spring 2016. There is good potential for a New Media / Digital Audio Arts collaboration. |

The Program Response also addressed additional issues raised in the body of the External Review Report:

- **New courses reflect faculty interests, while sessional instructors or Academic Assistants teach core foundational courses that may be outside of their expertise** – New Media will review the proposal and approval procedures for electives and topics courses to ensure they are focused on meeting the needs of the program and the students.
- **Consider a Visiting Artist program** – Departmental opinion is split on this recommendation.
- **Make a long-term effort to recruit and retain female students and faculty members** – Agreed. The initial high ratio of women to men in the department has slipped in later years.
- **Plan for the transition of the internship duties** – A binder of information on internship duties is being prepared. The hiring of additional staff to help with the transition process and ensure continuity is recommended.
- **Improve technical support** – Agreed. Strong technical support is vital to the program.
- **Boost mobile technologies in the program** – The department agrees that mobile technologies should have a larger role in New Media course offerings.

Dean's Response

In his response to the review documents, Dean of Fine Arts Ed Jurkowski commented on the recommendations discussed in the review:

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| <i>1. Reduce or eliminate Music, Theatre, and Art requirements, and offer more New Media electives.</i> | Making this curricular change may be difficult. Moreover, we should consider if such a change is consistent with one of the hallmarks of the program, namely the study of other fine arts disciplines. The department should explore ways to maintain a strong core of both New Media and other fine arts electives. |
| <i>2. Develop a space plan to support the needs of the curriculum. Also, consider planning for a future move to University Hall with the development of the science building.</i> | The department must clearly identify specific space requirements and some concrete solutions, especially within the context of the Destination Project. |
| <i>3. Hire new tenure-track faculty, considering joint appointments.</i> | The department should propose a strategic hire within 1-2 years. |
| <i>4. Add a mandatory programming course to the first year of the program.</i> | The department should develop a proposal for a programming course that includes what programming language(s) should be taught, and considers the feasibility of having the course taught by a Computer Science faculty member or a joint appointment between Computer Science and New Media. |
| <i>5. Consider developing a Master of Arts in Critical Studies.</i> | The U of L's new budget model may relieve the current funding pressure for the existing MFA program. Over the next two years, the Faculty of Fine Arts will discuss the funding that graduate students in Fine Arts should receive. |
| <i>6. Revisit the Department mission statement. Consider if the Department can support such a wide variety of curricular areas and streams.</i> | Within the next year, New Media should reflect and define its mission and vision. |
| <i>7. Reconsider the use of rotating Department Chairs to provide greater leadership continuity.</i> | This problem should be solved with the larger number of continuing faculty now on staff. |
| <i>8. Consider developing more minors, modeled on the minor in Management.</i> | New Media should research how other similar programs in Canada approach collaborative degree programs. If this environmental scan finds that a collaborative degree is feasible, then the department should explore a joint faculty appointment between New Media and Math and Computer Science and the development of more minors. |
| <i>9. Consider developing a technology policy, like the existing technology renewal policy, and use it to bring in new technology and retire older technology.</i> | The department must first resolve its position on the dichotomy between mobile/internet technologies and film production. |
| <i>10. Look at ways to ensure students and faculty better understand the whole curriculum.</i> | The development of departmental mission and vision statements is critical in finding ways of understanding the curriculum as a whole. |

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| <i>11. Explore the use of large lecture classes and online courses, and skill development courses delivered through third parties.</i> | The department should be cautious about moving into online delivery. Online initiatives can have large initial costs, may have negative effects on traditional course offerings, and impact collaborative opportunities between students. |
| <i>12. Pursue interdepartmental course offerings, perhaps in advanced studio.</i> | A Fine Arts initiative will address interdepartmental course offerings. New Media will play an important role in this initiative. Fine Arts will pursue a Canada Research Chair in digital media, which can open interdisciplinary opportunities. |
| <i>Recommendations from the body of the report:</i> | |
| <i>Consider a visiting artist program.</i> | The Faculty of Fine Arts Alberta Foundation for the Arts grant application will include visiting speakers, artists, and musicians. |
| <i>Make a long-term effort to recruit and retain female students and faculty members.</i> | The department should develop its goal for gender balance and the ways to achieve this goal. Following this, the department should work with the Fine Arts recruitment officer to develop a recruitment and retention plan. |
| <i>Changes in the Internship office.</i> | A specific transition process is premature at this point. The department should articulate internship duties and responsibilities and study why there has been a decline in the number of students taking an internship option in their senior year. |
| <i>Improve technical support.</i> | The department should study the nature and role of technical support and how it relates to potential curricular changes and shifts in modes of delivery. |
| <i>Boost mobile technologies in the program.</i> | The decision to enhance mobile technologies should be part of an overarching program delivery strategy that is integrated with the departments' space needs. Mobile technologies and their place in the program should also be considered during the development of the department's mission and vision. |

The Academic Quality Assurance Committee is satisfied that the Department of New Media academic quality assurance review has followed the U of L's academic quality assurance process appropriately, and acknowledges the successful completion of the review.

Sincerely,

ORIGINAL SIGNED BY:

Robert A. Boudreau

Chair, Academic Quality Assurance Committee

Cc: Andrew Hakin, Provost and Vice President (Academic)