

Graduate Program Review Appeals Committee
Informational Session: June 22, 2006

Art M.F.A.
Art M.A.

Program representatives: Richard Depeaux (professor), John Link (professor), Margaret Merrion (dean), Phillip VanderWeg (director)

Faculty Representatives' Appeal Summary: M.F.A.

The School of Art appeals the decision to close the M.F.A. in Art. The basis for the appeal rests upon the dearth of supporting evidence for the closure decision. In fact, there is evidence of strong support for the program by the provost that lasted until May 1. The sudden unexplained change of direction is perplexing. An earlier recommendation for "suspension" was rejected by the Faculty Senate and provost. In March 2003 it had been opposed in the strongest manner by an esteemed outside Program Review consultant.

Contrary to one characterization of the visual arts as being weak, the same external consultant described the School of Art as strong with the potential to be not just competitive with schools in the immediate region, but as good as any of their type in the country. Yet we seem to be held to an unwritten code or inappropriate performance standard, perhaps intrinsically impossible for a non-performance unit to achieve.

Most importantly the School of Art is disadvantaged by compounding factors of a magnitude and scope seldom found anywhere. Clearly, the recent progressive losses of graduate resource support have created a predictable outcome. Faculty transitions have not had time to evolve to new paradigms in the time allotted, but we had hoped others would share our optimism. Closure is particularly vexing as we are about to open a dedicated new/renovated facility costing well in excess of \$25 million that is specifically designed to provide all the needed programmatic support. Our recent new faculty hires and prospects in the near future further support these evolutions, and newly devised community support mechanisms underway. These are extraordinary factual converging positive influences that we feel should have been taken into account.

The closure announcements are impacting us in multiple venues and audiences daily. If we are to remain competitive, we must move forward now with positive certainty and purpose.

Faculty Representatives' Appeal Summary: M.A.

The School of Art appeals the decision to discontinue the M.A. in Art Studio. The basis for the appeal rests upon the misinterpretation of data that may have influenced the closure recommendation. We also seek to reiterate our rationale for continuation of the program based upon our understanding of the stated goals and criteria for the original GPR. We now hope to establish much better understanding with decision makers regarding several significant positive factors already underway: a dedicated new facility specifically designed to provide all the needed programmatic support, a recent faculty hire that uniquely brings with it on ongoing student audience, and added recent faculty hires uniquely interested and qualified in this graduate teaching possibility. These are extraordinary converging influences.

The School of Art had been developing options to create a stronger program identity and other measures when the GPR process brought all efforts to a halt. The M.A. in Art (Studio) can serve an audience that is much different than students who do not wish to finish the M.F.A. or want to pursue the M.A. in Art Ed. This degree would serve the needs of those that want to expand their studio skills and personal creative

studies, but are neither qualified nor interested in pursuing the terminal degree in studio (M.F.A.), nor are they primarily engaged in K-12 teaching. This program has the capacity to bolster and support both the M.A. in Art Education and M.F.A. in Art by ensuring sufficient enrollments in course offerings these two programs require, while generating sufficient tuition income to sustain GAs and visiting artist/scholar activities for all programs. Our proposal included a Summer program that took full advantage of facilities otherwise not in use.

We continue to hear that much greater emphasis is to be placed upon enrollments and enrollment potential than we had previously imagined or understood. Closure does not result in any resource saving, in fact it results in lost resources. These are even greater reasons for this M.A. in Art (Studio) program to be given serious consideration. Yet, we find no evidence that these features and attributes played any role in the decision to close.

Dean's Statement

I have read the School of Art's appeals and regretfully cannot support them. In my professional judgment I continue to think it best to close the M.A. in Studio degree program and suspend the M.F.A. degree program. The bases for those judgments are (1) the current programmatic conditions; and (2) an analysis of what is best for our students.

1. What are the current programmatic conditions?

The School's reports chronicle that it lacks a graduate coordinator; a critical mass of students; a recruitment plan; sufficient graduate assistantships; and sufficient faculty to revise curriculum, guide graduate studies, supervise exhibitions, and serve on student committees. The faculty rated each program as a "3". The School has lost faculty positions. The College of Fine Arts has lost nearly 20% of its assistantship funding.

Commenting on the disappointing graduate work, our last accreditation team "found very little to suggest that the graduate program exhibited the level of ambition, energy and standards of achievement which should characterize a Master of Fine Arts program." Three independent evaluators for the National Association of Schools of Art and Design reported that there did "not appear to be a healthy premise for the existence of the M.A. in Art" and "the institution should take whatever steps are necessary to invigorate the M.F.A. program and raise standards of performance."

2. What is best for our students?

We need an M.F.A. program with an invigorated competitive curriculum; an interested and willing faculty member to serve as graduate coordinator; a critical mass of students; faculty success in increasing and enhancing the assistantship base through external support; a staffing plan for graduate courses and graduate committees among extant faculty; and a studio solution so students may create art once East Hall is no longer available. Our students need each and every one of these elements in a high quality, competitive M.F.A. program.

Committee's Questions for Faculty Representatives *

1. What are the main differences between undergraduate and graduate teaching?

The levels of performance and expectations are different, but most of the time it's one-on-one teaching. The graduates strengthen the advanced undergraduate folk. And our B.F.A. is structured a lot like the graduate school experience. If you get accepted into the B.F.A., you have to take 85 credits in Art.

2. How much interaction is there between grads and undergrads? Do they critique each other's work?

Their studios are in same building, so they interact a lot. Mentoring is very important to B.F.A students.

3. Imagining a worst-case scenario in which you received no new resources, no new or replacement faculty hires, and no additional support for TAs, and had to self-fund 100 percent of your growth, what would these programs look like three to five years from now?
The M.A. program would be a significant player. We might be able to use the summer program in an entrepreneurial way. And as the Richmond Center goes online, the potential exists not only for other relevant learning experiences but also for revenue-generation. If those five faculty positions weren't replaced, however, I don't think there'd be a School of Art anymore.
4. How is a graduate education paid for?
We now have four GAs; we used to have six. There was a time when we offered fractional GAs. We've also been successful with graduate fellowships and Thurgood Marshall students. It's a fragile situation, though.
5. Do you have any plans to expand the M.F.A. beyond painting? Are the 11 new faculty going to do that?
Everyone we've hired expressed a willingness to devote themselves to graduate education. There have been times when we've had a lot more diversity than just painting, and that will happen again. In fact, the only other time the graduate program was devoted solely to painting was in the '80s when the GAs were taken away. That it's happening now is anomalous. And things have been changing since the data was generated. These days, it's all about breaking down the barriers between media, and we're accommodating that in our five-year plan and in the construction that's going on. Students of painting need to be able to do other things as well—and they do. The Richmond Center will serve those kinds of functions.
6. You point out that the KIA is not an accredited degree-granting institution. Does it really make a difference whether or not a studio course is accredited?
It depends on the student. Some people specifically want to earn a degree.
7. The dean recommended suspension; the provost recommended elimination. Why did the team report support suspension even before the provost had had her say, especially when the Richmond Center was under construction?
We don't know. We didn't request that. The Senate upheld our appeal not to suspend.
8. Without replacement faculty hires, how would the program come out of suspension in 2008?
As we said, the School of Art would close if those retirees weren't replaced.
9. And if your resources *weren't* limited, would you still be piggybacking the M.F.A. program?
We'd still do piggybacks. The interaction is very helpful for both groups.
10. Which master's classes aren't piggybacked?
The only M.F.A. example is the seminar class. If money were no object, we'd probably teach some art history classes on a rotational basis. But we believe that we're moving away from the kind of critical mass that Dean Merrion is talking about [see "Committee's Questions for Dean Merrion" below]. The model is less about single media.
11. Talk of suspending the M.F.A. has gone on for three years. What would you need to do to prevent suspension from being a death sentence?
That's why we don't think suspension is a good idea. Not a day goes by that an alumnus or donor doesn't comment on the dissonance between the suspension threat and the fact that we're constructing a new building. Some unique things will be possible when the Richmond Center is ready and Kohrman reopens. Closure or suspension would be a detriment in many ways. If termination hadn't been announced, we'd already have 13 students, but negative publicity has prevented that from happening.
12. What's the accreditation status of the M.F.A.?
In 2001, we were reaccredited for the full 10 years. In 2003, the reviewer talked about the program's potential.

Committee's Questions for Dean Merrion *

1. So you don't support termination of the M.F.A. at this time?
Correct. I believe that we should suspend it, look at the accreditation terms, and build a resource plan. Piggybacking has been taking a toll.
2. What are you envisaging when you talk about critical mass?
A critical mass would be at least 15 full-time students. In order to get that critical mass, we'd need to limit the program and offer only an M.F.A. in Painting.
3. If the program were suspended, where would the resources come from?
The College of Fine Arts doesn't have them.
4. Please summarize your response.
As I stated in my appeal summary, I believe that the M.A. should be closed and the M.F.A. suspended. I agree with the accreditors and the GPR review team. We need to return after suspension with a more competitive, high-quality M.F.A. I see this as a positive opportunity to say that we're under construction and that something new is coming along.

** Q&A text is not verbatim*