



Art and Art History Faculty of Arts



BFA VIST Curriculum Review Report November 2022

Judy Anderson, *Every time I think of you I cry*, 2021.
Size 8 Miyuki seed beads, porcupine quills, white deer hide. 6'x 9'.
Images 1 and 3 photo credit: Gerald Saul.
Image 2 photo credit: Don Hall.

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Acknowledgments

The work of this Curriculum Review was undertaken during the social and health crises of the ongoing COVID19 global pandemic. The capacity of faculty, staff, and students to contribute to this project was affected by this novel context in both marked and unmarked ways. As such, this report was prepared through a gentle balance of thorough and efficient engagement, and compassion for the additional labour these projects involve. To note the way in which members of the department and supporting units came together to think through and engage with curriculum questions at this time is to highlight the potential, strength, and ongoing commitments of this unit moving forward. Thank you to all participants for your contributions during this time.

Guiding Questions and Executive Summary

CURRICULUM REVIEW CENTRAL CONCERNS:

- Sustainability and Growth
- Self-identification
- EDI, Indigenization and Decolonization

GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. What are the strengths of the program?

The department has a multitude of strengths identified through the numerous data collection activities undertaken during this curriculum review process. In many ways, these strengths can be summarized by **community** and **potential**.

For students generally, the biggest strengths in the department and its BFA programming are the support of faculty and small class sizes that allow for interactions between and partnerships among students. Specifically, students note that such supports enable high levels of collaborative learning opportunities, academic challenges, and reflective and integrative learning (NSSE, 2017). Students highlight the ways in which many of their classes involve self-reflection and engagements with materials that change and provide insights on real world problems, a testament to how the department is explicitly contributing to UCalgary's strategic plan, *Growth Through Focus*. Importantly, students emphasize the small class sizes and quality of teaching in classes and labs were integral to their capacity to learn and be satisfied in that learning (Student Survey, 2021). So too they highlight the knowledge gained from interdisciplinary activities, specifically classes in Art History, Museum and Heritage Studies, and Art Education, invited guest lecturers, and integrative studies that transcend disciplinary boundaries as essential to their training and enjoyment of the BFA degree programming. The composition of the department, which includes Studio Art, Art History, Museum and Heritage Studies, and Art Education, provides students multiple ways of thinking and working into art practice through the integration of critical, theoretical, historical, and technical approaches. Students are collectively eager to learn more about Indigeneity, decolonization, and anti-racist content, and see the importance of these areas of understanding (Student Survey, 2021).

Faculty echo many of these strength areas and are generally committed to encouraging and growing them. New faculty hires since the last Curriculum Review in 2015 have added new and specialized areas of expertise that bolster the established programming, and offer exciting avenues for growth that build on and branch from what is already present in the curriculum. These areas of expertise and growth identified by faculty include the need to involve more Indigenization, decolonialization, anti-racist, and inclusive content in all classes, content that

has been improving since the last review, but that faculty believe could be enhanced further with new hires and internal supports (Curriculum Mapping, 2022). To be sure, more training for current faculty in these areas, as well as, and most significantly, more faculty are needed in order to provide extended areas of expertise essential to studio arts programming in the contemporary moment. However, the current cohort presents opportunities to grow toward an enthusiastic community in producing and sustaining an engaged, rich, and informed curriculum to meet many of the current needs of students.

To be sure, while the potential of faculty is one of the strongest resources in the department, it is not the only human resource with strength potential. Technical support staff are consistently highlighted as one of the main strengths of the curriculum (Student Survey, 2021). These technicians offer deep and wide expertise in the art areas involved in the BFA and are essential to the effective and successful execution of the BFA program. Moving forward, the department needs to find better ways to utilize the technicians' skillsets without overburdening them with work and teaching expectations that are not part of their work portfolio. Along with the technicians, people in connected units—the Nickle Galleries, Taylor Family Digital Library, and the Faculty of Education—benefit from and contribute to the department's BFA curriculum, and are eager to be better utilized and integrated into the programming. These units and the people in them offer opportunities for collaborative growth moving forward. The administrative staff in the Department of Art & Art History are all very new to this unit, having come into their position after massive administrative upheaval and restructuring over the past two years. The removal of in-house staff specifically assigned to the department is a loss felt internally to this unit, as well as, presumably among all departments within the Faculty of Arts. However, the current cohort of administrative staff offers much expertise and knowledge, and are a consistent strength to the unit, despite their increased workload and portfolios.

In sum, the current strengths of the department consistently presented throughout the process of the Curriculum Review are the people—faculty, staff, and collaborators—and the potential areas of growth. New faculty hires in targeted growth areas are needed to facilitate the sustainability and trajectory of the BFA program, and training workshops should be planned to ensure current faculty can continue to evolve and contribute productively to the areas they collectively have identified as essential, particularly those directed toward Indigenization, decolonialization, anti-racist, and inclusive content in all classes. These actions would build on the current strengths highlighted in the current BFA curriculum and help ensure the program's sustainability in the contemporary art world market.

Action Items	Recommendation #1	Continued discussions on Curriculum Review
	Recommendation #7	Clear sense of department's identity and future directions
	Recommendation #14	Sustainability for all areas of practice/medium
	Recommendation #26	Set standard of planning for course offerings 2-3 years in advance
	Recommendation #27	More dialogues between teaching faculty and technical staff in the preparation and planning of courses

2. What kinds of pathways do we create in our curriculum for interdisciplinarity and interconnections within the Faculty of Arts and other faculties?

Interdisciplinarity is mobilized in two main ways in discussions within the BFA VIST curriculum: as incorporating multiple approaches, methodologies, and theories within the art classroom, and enabling students to take courses that expand their learning outside the ART curriculum. The BFA Visual Studies program has interest and enthusiasm in supporting and integrating both forms of interdisciplinarity (Student Survey, 2021; Curriculum Mapping, 2022), but has some work to do to make these integrations successful. Currently, the main areas of interdisciplinary activities represented within the BFA VIST involve Art History and Art Education because the BFA requires courses from both these areas as part of the major degree. While many courses indicate the content involves interdisciplinary elements (Curriculum Mapping, 2022) and thereby asserts the interest in this approach to learning as part of the degree program, there is a lack of outreach and partnerships being developed as a consistent curriculum strategy. However, students highlight growing interest and desire for partnerships beyond the classroom and department (Student Survey, 2021), and a dissatisfaction with the department's isolation from both the rest of the university on a disciplinary as well as on a support structure level (NSSE, 2017). Efforts toward outreach will be essential for the sustainability and growth for the unit moving forward.

Certainly, there are supports and enthusiasm inside and outside the university for such collaborations and partnerships. Certain Art History classes are already required for the BFA VIST and further opportunities in this area should be explored. So too, the contributions of Museum and Heritage Studies courses should be better integrated and encouraged as part of the BFA VIST curriculum. Outside the unit, there are multiple people and resources that are interested in creating collaborations and partnerships. Curators at the Nickle Galleries highlight the multiple learning opportunities and on-site resources for students, but current lack of faculty outreach to organize class access to them (Nickle Curators, 2022). As well, the art library has a multitude of research and source materials that could be better utilized with the classroom and teaching of the department, and staff there are eager to help make better partnerships and relationships with the department through workshops, tours, and access to holdings (Art Librarian, 2022). So too, the department, particularly those courses focused on Art Education, has an established and ongoing relationship with the Werklund School of Education which can be better fostered through more transparent and open communication between both units (Werklund, 2022). This latter relationship needs to be more finely tuned because, as it stands, students from both programs are having issues in getting the required classes in a timely manner, which makes this interdisciplinary pathway more rugged than we would want. Proposed changes to the Art Education concentration within the department will ease some of these constraints, but this relationship and its requirements need to be revisited to ensure sustainability moving forward.

While there is clear enthusiasm for additional and increased interdisciplinary pathways from students, faculty, and multiple units, there are marked obstacles in fully pursuing these opportunities. The course hours attached to studio art courses is double that of their humanities counterparts (6 hours in class vs. 3 hours in class per week). This timing can create a curriculum and scheduling issue that prevents students and faculty from pursuing interdisciplinary options. Another issue is the class sizes of studio classes, which means student progression through the program can be stymied due to lack of available seats, an issue highlighted repeatedly by students (NSSE, 2017; Student Survey, 2021). Because of the dwindling number of faculty in recent years, fewer courses and sections can be offered, resulting in fewer options for students and higher demand for those courses that are offered, particularly those required for the degree. Such tight scheduling and lack of flexibility of options makes it difficult for students to envision interdisciplinary options within their timetable.

One major issue is the heavy course load inside the discipline: a minimum of 69 units is required for graduation with a BFA VIST, with a significant time investment required by most studio art classes. Additionally, the specific course requirements of those 69 units tethers students to the in-house and somewhat confining required curriculum of ART courses; this arrangement precludes flexibility and creativity in course selection and interdisciplinary options. It is difficult to encourage and integrate other interdisciplinary options and partnerships when the current degree requirements are quite rigid. Rethinking the required courses of those 69-81 units would help open up pathways and interdisciplinary opportunities for students and faculty, as well as for the curriculum more broadly.

The answer to two of the guiding questions in this field would therefore seem to be: currently, there *are* few pathways, and while we would *like* to include more, particularly based on the enthusiasm and interest of other units at the university, the requirements and restrictions of our program means that we need to rethink some of these structures of our curriculum to open up further interdisciplinary opportunities.

Action Items	Recommendation #10	Further collaborations with the Nickle Galleries and TFDL archives
	Recommendation #11	Generate more opportunities for collaboration across academic units within the university
	Recommendation #12	Create more pathways for professional experiences within the Calgary community
	Recommendation #21	Updated options for the Art Education teaching area
	Recommendation #22	Role of professionalization within degree should be consistent and defined
	Recommendation #23	More interdisciplinary options within the degree requirements, specifically looking toward Art History, Museum and Heritage Studies, and Art Education
	Recommendation #24	More interdisciplinary options within the degree electives

3. How do we generate a flexible, streamlined curriculum that serves the students' needs?

The current structure and requirements of the BFA VIST prevents the flexible, streamlined curriculum that would better serve students' needs (Student Survey, 2021; Admin Staff, 2022). The high number of required courses that must be taught annually renders it difficult to offer the full degree program efficiently because of diminished faculty numbers, higher demand for classes by both majors and elective students, and administrative and resources issues. The combination of these factors has resulted in a degree program that involves delayed time to completion, many course/credit substitutions, increased administrative workload, and general frustration from students, faculty, and staff. The curriculum expectations of the degree need to be revisited and rethought in order to respond to current needs of the students and the current realities of the university environment in order to offer a sustainable and growth-oriented program.

The current structure of the BFA VIST requires students to complete a minimum of 69 to a maximum of 81 units of ART courses, out of a total 120 units for the degree. These requirements are significantly greater than other humanities-based degrees within the Faculty of Arts at the University of Calgary that require students to take 42-60 major units, out of a total 120 units for the degree. However, this elevated requirement correlates with other BFA degree programs offered provincially and nationally (Environmental Scans, 2022). As such, these degree requirements should not be reduced because students would lose the in-depth and exploratory nature of the studio art degree, and the program would become incongruent with broader BFA expectations. In other words, the department should consider reducing required courses as part of the degree, while maintaining the number of ART-specific units for the major.

While the general degree expectations of the BFA VIST at UCalgary align with other BFA-specific programs elsewhere, the specificity and rigidity of the specific courses required of the 69-81 units are causing issues in multiple areas that prevents flexible course options, streamlined progression through the degree, and resource issues. As it is currently designed, the BFA VIST curriculum is resource-intensive and inflexible. The department has too few faculty to field the courses necessary for students to complete the degree in the expected four-year period. To deliver the curriculum in its current form, faculty teaching assignments would need to be directed first and foremost to covering requirements. This, in turn, diminishes options to offer new courses that respond to immediate opportunities or to offer unrequired electives. The curriculum is inflexible for students as well, in a variety of ways. Courses are not currently offered with the frequency required for timely degree completion, and students are locked into a curriculum that restricts their ability to make individual choices that serve their specific interests and needs (Student Survey, 2021; Curriculum Mapping, 2022). This issue causes concern not just with our own BFA majors, but also with students from other units who depend on our courses as part of their degree, such as those from the Faculty of Education (Werklund, 2022). The department's faculty needs to balance what it considers essential coursework with

students' freedom to follow where their interests lead them, and the real capacity of the department to deliver the program it promises.

With this context in mind, however, there are some areas that could be improved to enable more efficient, flexible, and streamlined programming for the BFA VIST. All BFA requirements should be reviewed, with an eye to focus, efficiency, and department resources. As part of this, the unit should consider any ART courses that run as non-studio-based, content courses can be evaluated, particularly in light of dwindling teaching resources and the opportunity to utilize Art History, Museum and Heritage Studies, and Art Education courses as support to the BFA.

Students consistently identify issues with getting their required courses in a timely, efficient manner (NSSE, 2017; Student Survey, 2021). Some strategies that might alleviate these issues include scheduling and teaching allocations should occur on a 2-3 year planning cycle, and involving administrative and technical staff in the planning and scheduling of course offerings so that the curriculum approach is more holistic. Additionally, the prerequisite structure of the curriculum should be evaluated to ensure course structures and offerings propel students through the degree levels efficiently and clearly. Students also identify a lack of consistency, particularly at 200-level courses, of which most are required for the degree (Student Survey, 2021). Faculty feedback echoes this issue (Curriculum Mapping, 2022). To help streamline and make consistent curriculum expectations, all faculty need to be responsible for delivering the core components of the curriculum; need a reduction in and cycling of elective ART courses.

Streamlining the curriculum addresses several issues raised in student, faculty, and staff feedback. It allows us to offer students the freedom to choose a good path through the studio art curriculum. It allows us to timetable the courses students need so that they can complete their degrees in a timely fashion. It allows continuing term faculty to deliver more of our core, required courses, ensuring continuity and consistency in instructional approaches. And it can open up the possibility that faculty may have the opportunity to offer some topical courses that take advantage of areas of special skill, knowledge and interest.

Action Items	Recommendation #9	University calendar should reflect current course offerings
	Recommendation #13	Reduction of specific ART courses required as part of the BFA degree
	Recommendation #15	Role of non-studio ART classes should be clarified
	Recommendation #19	Consistent standard of learning expectations for all courses at the same level
	Recommendation #20	Consistent prerequisites and flow across ART courses within the different teaching streams
	Recommendation #25	Directed Study courses need to be limited in their offering
	Recommendation #28	Sessional faculty should be enhancing, not buttressing, the required degree programming
	Recommendation #29	All continuing faculty should be responsible for foundation-level courses
	Recommendation #30	All continuing faculty should be responsible for teaching required courses within the degree program

4. How do faculty address Indigenous ways of knowing and being in their teaching? How does our department address anti-racist, decolonizing, and inclusive practices in our curriculum?

The department and its BFA program are fully committed to the ideals of Indigenization, decolonization, anti-racism, and inclusivity in all levels of the unit. This commitment must extend beyond curricular interventions, to ensure pedagogy, content, practices, and administrative strategies align. There is much enthusiasm and effort by most faculty to ensure the BFA curriculum incorporates teachings and understandings of Indigenization, decolonization, anti-racism, and inclusivity (Curriculum Mapping, 2022). However, further training supports and workshops is needed to strengthen and make more precise the how, where, what, and why of these commitments and actions.

As part of this process, the department needs clearer understanding of the meanings and implications of these terms, in order to ethically, responsibly, and fully integrate these approaches as actions within the curriculum. Significantly, clear parameters on these terms and actions are essential to ensuring equity in work distribution, so that certain colleagues—particularly women, gender non-conforming, Indigenous, Black, racialized diasporic, queer, and disabled colleagues—are not carrying an unduly heavy workload.

An agreed upon and clear understanding of the contexts of Indigenization and decolonization is central to creating, maintaining, and evolving the curriculum. Following UCalgary's Indigenous Strategy *ii'taa'poh'to'p* (2017), the department recognizes its own historical and ongoing implications in colonial systems and its responsibility to account for, repair, reconcile, and redefine its role. Indigenization and decolonization are two integral, interconnected, yet differentiated aspects of this larger, ongoing process. Indigenization refers to promoting and supporting Indigenous knowledge systems, and centralizing Indigenous ways of knowing and being; as outlined in the Indigenous Strategy, transformation and renewal need to involve Indigenous ways of being, knowing, doing, and connecting (*ii'taa'poh'to'p*, 2017).

The capacity to undertake this work effectively and respectfully involves centralizing the knowledge and expertise of Indigenous faculty, as well as those with established and recognized connections and relationships to Indigenous communities. The department currently has two full-time Indigenous professors that provide teaching of Indigenous ways of knowing and being in the classroom environment. Their teaching in the program offers significant and particular insights related to Indigenous histories, methods, and knowledges, and their contributions need to be centralized in all discussions on Indigenization within this unit.

However, the need for contributions from Indigenous faculty members in this area should be balanced with work equity—which includes accounting for visible and invisible labour—to ensure they are not overburdened with fixing, addressing, and restructuring ongoing

colonialism in the department. A key way to ensure equity in these processes is for a significant focus on decolonization by all members of the department. Decolonization emphasizes the need to critique, dismantle, and move beyond structures of colonialization, and is the responsibility of everyone. For all faculty, educating themselves on Indigenous histories, and integrating Indigenous content and artists in all their classes operate as meaningful gestures of decolonization and reconciliation. So too, decolonization helps support the work of Indigenization, and should be seen as foundational and reciprocal with Indigenization. These actions function to improve curriculum structures steeped in colonialism, as well as to assert solidarity and support for Indigenous colleagues tasked with the work of Indigenization.

Indigenization and decolonization should work in partnership, but need to be recognized as distinct from each other in their mobilization, purpose, and structures. This recognition and understanding of the work and intent of each strategy are important not only for to clarify intent and purpose, but also to give credit to the additional labour, responsibility, and potential strains that are placed in the workloads of Indigenous faculty members in their dual expectations of Indigenizing and decolonizing. While again, the department and faculty-at-large demonstrate a commitment to work and curriculum that challenges the status quo of colonial histories, further workshops and supports—particularly from external experts—are essential to ensure these efforts are moving in the best, and most ethical and efficient direction.

Additionally, issues of anti-racist and inclusive practices need to be informed by the specific frameworks that define and differentiate their intent with the university. As mentioned, further workshops to define and elaborate on the curriculum, teaching, and pedagogies related to anti-racism and inclusive practices would strengthen and refine the department’s current commitment to these issues. As stated consistently in faculty feedback on teaching modules (Curriculum Mapping, 2022), anti-racist and inclusive approaches to knowledge should be central to what is taught and how it is taught within the BFA Visual Studies program. Certainly, clearer and more explicit definitions and implementation suggestions would help all faculty to play a role and contribute to these larger goals, as well as ensure women, gender non-conforming, racialized, queer, and disabled colleagues are not unduly tasked with the responsibility and workload of mobilizing these efforts. Again, there are supports and efforts currently being made in the department along these lines (Curriculum Mapping, 2022); further guidance and training would help to focus and clarify how these efforts can be best served to the larger goals of the unit.

Action Items	Recommendation #2	Greater supports for Indigenization
	Recommendation #3	Informed engagement with decolonization in all classes
	Recommendation #4	Informed engagement with anti-racist and inclusive practices in all classes
	Recommendation #5	Clearer guidelines for what “engagement” involves
	Recommendation #6	New faculty to fill gaps in medium and content offered by the department

5. How do we produce foundational knowledge in creative-practice that enables skill-building and conceptual thought as the basis of the studio arts program?

The 200-level courses within the BFA Visual Studies are intended to provide students with a clear basis in technical skills and conceptual thought to allow further development of these areas at more senior levels. As they currently exist, there are multiple issues that prevent these foundational classes from effectively, consistently, and efficiently meeting those needs. Students highlight the need for more academic rigor at the foundational level to better prepare them for course expectations in upper-level courses (NSSE, 2017). Additionally, students note the discrepancies from instructor to instructor when multiple sections of the same class are taught (Student Survey, 2021), which yields frustration and confusion.

This lack of consistency and potential confusion as to wider expectations of 200-level classes is echoed in the curriculum mapping completed by faculty. Between sections of the same course as well as between different 200-level courses, course expectations, their relationship to program expectations, assignments, and pedagogical methods vary greatly. For instance, some faculty identify their 200-level classes as very introductory, while others highlight multiple areas of advanced knowledge (Curriculum Mapping, 2022). These discrepancies are causes for concern, and need to be addressed in future action plans to streamline and strengthen the curriculum. The curriculum and the faculty members who undertake it need to have clear parameters for course expectations, and need to find the consistent balance between technical skillset building and content across 200-level classes, and certainly among different sections of the same course. The department should consider how best to ensure consistency from section-to-section, course-to-course, and year-to-year instruction, so that students are clear on the parameters and expectations of 200-level courses, and faculty teaching upper-year classes can feel confident that students have the required basis of knowledge to successfully undertake senior courses.

Students also highlight the constant difficulties in finding space in 200-level classes, which slows or stymies their progression into more advanced courses that required certain 200-level courses as prerequisites (Student Survey, 2021). Certainly, some of these issues relate to work allocation and scheduling, which are outside the purview of this Curriculum Review; however, any plans moving forward need to account for a wholistic perspective to the degree, and think through how 200-level courses can best serve the needs of students, scholastically and administratively.

A crucial area of 200-level classes that needs to be addressed moving forward is the balance between technical skill-building and conceptual thought. Faculty feedback outlines the inconsistencies from course to course, and section to section (Curriculum Mapping, 2022), which highlights potential difficulties for students as they progress to upper-level courses. The department needs clearer parameters of what type of knowledge and to what degree students should have upon completion of their 200-level requirements. Issues related to technical

capability, in particular, need to be further articulated and realized. Compared to other similar programs, students are often under-capable technically (Environmental Scans, 2022). This lack has implications for the amount of time and labour required of technical staff to support students in their projects in upper-year classes, because students' technical abilities are underprepared for the type of work they aim to undertake (Technical Staff, 2022). Technical staff within the department have steadily increasing work expectations over the past two years and the current roles in the unit are not those of teaching technicians. Without stronger training in technical capacities for students at the 200-level, art technicians are asked to provide too much consultation and teaching for the upper-year levels because students don't have technical skillsets to undertake their conceptual designs of projects. This arrangement puts stress on students to seek out additional support, strain on the workloads of technical staff, and confusion for faculty who can't be sure of what type of training students are entering into their classes with.

Moving forward, the department needs to more fully think through the role, implementation, and management of 200-level foundation courses within the BFA Visual Studies program. There needs to be consistency between sections, courses, and terms, and the department should consider explicit course outcomes that ensure this consistency. Certainly, this consistency would be best served by continuing faculty, rather than sessional instructors, taking on the bulk of teaching. Additionally, better communication and collaboration between teaching faculty and technical staff at all levels, but particularly in the area of 200-level classes, would help relieve some of the pressures and confusions of foundational level expectations. And while better planning related to scheduling and allocating 200-level classes is outside the parameters of the Curriculum Review, this planning needs to be highlighted here as a key factor in ensuring clarity and consistency of foundational learning in the unit moving forward.

Action Items	Recommendation #8	Clarity on the role of 200- and 300-level courses in relation to major vs. elective enrolments
	Recommendation #16	Consistency of requirements across all sections of 200-level courses
	Recommendation #17	Consistency of requirements across all 200-level foundational courses
	Recommendation #18	Increased technical learning and requirements at the 200-level