

July 17, 2019

PROFESSOR AMY ADLER, Chair
Department of Visual Arts

SUBJECT: Undergraduate Program Review for Visual Arts

Dear Professor Adler,

The Undergraduate Council (UGC) discussed the Visual Arts 2019 Undergraduate Program Review. The Council supports the findings and recommendations of the review subcommittee and appreciates the thoughtful and proactive response from the Department. The Council's comments centered on the following:

Articulation of courses

Although the Department said that recent attempts to look at articulation of community college courses to existing Visual Arts courses was unsuccessful, the Council agreed with the Department's proposed idea of focusing on a few specific courses or areas first. UGC opined that an area that seemed like a logical place to look for courses that could articulate might be some of the lower division requirements in the Interdisciplinary Computing and the Arts Major.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) courses

The Council found the lack of DEI courses in the Department surprising, due to the diverse faculty body and general breadth of faculty expertise relevant to the DEI mission. We encourage the Department to submit course proposals for DEI consideration.

Student Advising

While the Council is sympathetic to the large numbers of students and the small number of advising staff in the Department, we encourage the Department to further engage with students in different ways outside of one-on-one advising. The Council is particularly concerned that transfer students receive more focused attention than they currently receive. One potential way to create that dialogue and interaction would be to have dedicated group advising sessions for incoming transfer students. Since the transfer student population is typically smaller, group sessions could be beneficial in creating community within the transfer student population while establishing that relationship between the advising staff and students.

Streamlining curriculum

The Council understands that there are limitations to what the Department can do, in regards to curriculum revisions, due to a very diverse curriculum that serves many audiences. Within these limitations, UGC optimistically looks forward to receiving curricular proposals from Visual Arts that that might streamline requirements after the Department's curricular retreats scheduled for Fall 2019.

The Council will conduct its follow-up review of the Department in Spring Quarter 2020. At that time, our goal is to learn about the Department's progress in implementing the recommendations of the program review subcommittee and the Undergraduate Council. The Council extends its thanks to the Department for their engagement in this process and we look forward to the continued discussion.

Sincerely,

Anthony Burr, Chair
Undergraduate Council

Attachment

(1) Undergraduate Program Review Report and Response for Visual Arts

cc: M. Corr
C. Della Coletta
R. Horwitz
J. Moore
R. Rodriguez
M. Sidney
J. Teranes

A. Current Operation of the Program

The committee met to review the Visual Arts undergraduate program on April 4th and 5th, 2019. We met with department chair Amy Adler [name of the associate chair?], a wide cross-section of faculty, core administrative staff, two lecturers and four students in the program.

The program currently has 570 majors who are enrolled in five separate degrees: 92 in Studio Art (VA28), 30 in Art History and Criticism (VA26), 246 in Media (VA27), 135 in ICAM (Interdisciplinary Computing and the Arts Major VA29) and 67 in Speculative Design (VA30). This represents significant growth since the previous program review. We would point in particular to strong growth in the Media (driven by a significant upswing of interest in photography), ICAM and the newly created Speculative Design programs. It was not clear to us if the recent growth in these areas was a short term feature or the beginning of a longer trend. If the latter, the department will be under considerable pressure to match the growth of enrollments with appropriate facilities and associated staffing, as discussed in greater detail below.

We also note the observation, expressed throughout the meetings, that alongside growth in digital and virtual media, student demand for material engagement with hands-on art-making is on the rise across all populations. We are impressed at the department's continued commitment to teaching art-making to the widest variety of students, from non majors taking general education requirements, through to upper division studio art majors.

Our interviews gave us the impression that the department is running very well for the most part. The Chair presented a thoughtful and nuanced analysis of the challenges facing the department in its delivery of the undergraduate teaching mission, and faculty seemed supportive of her vision and displayed at least the appearance of a real esprit de corps. The large number of faculty who attended the review speaks to the strength of their engagement with the undergraduate program. We note here the chair's observation that there is a strong cohort of rising junior professors who are strongly committed to undergraduate teaching, and who stand poised to carry the department's mission into the future.

Three staff met with us: the MSO, and the two undergraduate advisors. The primary stresses reported by the staff were the advising struggle of dealing with students who transfer into majors within the department late in their college careers, and the feeling that the department is understaffed, especially with respect to the management of technical and production facilities. The meeting with staff and the documents provided with the self-study gave us a clear picture of the well-thought-out and well-structured undergraduate advising program. Student feedback provided with the report materials, and in interview with the committee, was more mixed, with a stated lack of personal attention to students by advisors being the common denominator, especially in connection with transfer students. We understand that it's impossible for only two staff people to maintain personal relationships with 250 students. An opportunity exists for advising staff to take time to develop new strategies around timing and modes of address that could help address the bigger issues of how and when contact is made with students, and review the effectiveness of emails and worksheets in helping students proceed efficiently but also enthusiastically through the major. A valuable collateral benefit of this could be increased morale and awareness within the cohort.

The department's facilities situation is complex: most undergraduate teaching happens in Mandeville, but important courses in some areas are taught in the VAF (where most of the graduate program lives), and in a small number of rooms in SME. Additionally, some large lecture courses are offered in general campus facilities, as is usual. In the previous review, the somewhat dilapidated condition of the Mandeville facilities was a major point of concern. We are pleased to report that significant renovation has occurred in the meantime, and the spaces seem in good working order now. We particularly commend the work being done by the two facilities staff to maintain not just the instructional spaces but also dedicated workshop spaces (wood shop, film editing space, etc). While these staff are doing a terrific job, there are only two of them covering all of the facilities for graduate and undergraduate programs in the VAF and in Mandeville. They are assisted by some graduate student workers, but the situation seems completely unsustainable. The curriculum requires that students have access to specialized facilities and that these facilities should be adequately maintained. Despite valiant efforts, it's hard to see that this is currently the case. We heard repeatedly of a need for technical support staff in photography (where there has been a significant spike in undergraduate enrollment), and in instructional technology support, where again facilities

staff are providing some of the work. The photography staffing need is essential - currently UCSD's facilities don't stack up against local community college labs - and the lack of adequate IT support is perplexing, given that the department's programs have consistently been on the cutting edge of developments in art and technology. The department has recently hired a significant and highly rewarded photographer to take over a faculty position. Retention of this artist could be challenging for the department if one of the most basic work conditions of teaching photography is overlooked. Continued growth and success of the programs depends on the administration finding a way to provide more staff support. We also note that there are certainly health, safety and liability concerns here as well.

B. Strengths and Weaknesses of the Curriculum

The department offers a genuinely diverse and wide-ranging variety of courses, taught by an experienced and distinguished community of professors and lecturers. In all areas of the curriculum, truly novel ideas and unusual implementations give the programs a distinctive stamp; we acknowledge this fact as a rare accomplishment. It is worth noting that the department has a celebrated history in innovative practice and innovative curricular design dating back to its founding, and we are happy to say that this history continues to develop.

The breadth and ambition of the curriculum are, inevitably enough, also challenges for the department. New programs and new courses seem to have been added in layers to existing curriculum, and faculty and students both reported feeling that there are redundancies and overlaps that are not necessarily very well coordinated. We amplify a suggestion from our meeting with the Chair that a holistic examination of the curriculum would offer the opportunity to address, reconsider, and potentially streamline course offerings. Importantly, identifying existing overlaps could offer the opportunity to emphasize inter-disciplinary teaching in ways that would strengthen connections between students in different strands of the department's offerings (a desire which featured in student feedback).

Most of the department's lower division art-making courses effectively target and enroll students across a range of constituencies: from prospective majors through to students filling a

general education requirement who have never engaged with art before. It was no surprise, then, that students and faculty reported considerable difficulties responding to such disparate skill levels, especially for teaching assistants who seem to have to pick up some of the slack. Unfortunately no teaching assistants attended our meeting. Of special concern to us was that VIS 80, a recently instituted class for all majors, was proposed in the self-study as a course that might be grown through actively recruiting general education enrollments. This seems counter-productive: the course as it exists was a strong favorite of students who felt it helped anchor their experience in the program. Diluting that experience with non-majors would seem to be recreating the difficulties that exist with the lower division courses.

Faculty and students also pointed to what they referred to as "bottlenecks" in the existing curriculum, and these were confirmed by the advising staff. There are key courses offered only once a year (generally in Fall Quarter) that, by serving as prerequisites, "unlock" the bulk of the upper division degree requirements. In some cases these are high number lower division courses (what the department refers to as "intermediate" courses in its self-study), while in other cases they are introductory upper division offerings. We understand the need for a common basis before students move on to more specialized areas of the curriculum, but, given the number of students in the major, perhaps there is a way to schedule these key courses more than once a year, subject to faculty availability, naturally.

Faculty and students both bemoaned the absence of a University Art Gallery. We are aware that this is a longstanding and highly charged matter that is largely outside of our purview. However, we would like to underscore that the existence of an active and vibrant on-campus gallery could serve a strong pedagogical function, especially on the undergraduate level. In any and every other peer university or art college, an art gallery functions as a space for students across the campus to encounter art and as a space for art majors to show their own work on occasion. Art galleries can also provide useful professional experience to students: they can work as interns, curatorial assistants, researchers, docents and so on. We join our voices with the many others in hopes that the campus will find a good outcome in this matter.

We asked the faculty groups in particular about how they are dealing with articulating learning outcomes, as required in the upcoming WASC accreditation process. While some faculty cited the Teaching and Learning Commons as having tools to offer, it also seems that faculty are not

uniformly engaged in thinking through the issues. We agree strongly with the sentiment, expressed by some faculty, that the existing WASC categories don't necessarily do a good job reflecting what is important in arts education. We stress that it is therefore all-the-more important for faculty to reflect upon and to articulate their own vision of what it is that they want and value in this process; and we encourage them to use resources from the Teaching and Learning Commons in undertaking this project.

C. Strengths and Weaknesses in the Context of University Policies

While this is already covered in Section A, we'd like to reiterate that to deliver its undergraduate curriculum adequately the department absolutely needs more staffing and facilities support.

Time to degree is a primary policy concern on campus at the moment, as everyone knows. The department's time to degree statistics are not great: completion times for both freshman enrollees and transfers are currently higher than campus and division averages. Furthermore, the numbers for freshman admits are trending in the wrong direction (up from 12.8 quarters in 2016/17 to 13.8 quarters for 2017/18). One explanation offered in the self-study and by staff was that the averages are impacted by what they understand to be an unusually large number of students who declare their major late, or come to a Vis Arts degree after failing out of another major. Anecdotally this explanation makes a certain amount of sense, and the same trajectory is not unusual in peer departments, but, absent data to support it, we would encourage the department to explore a wider range of causes and how they might be addressed. We'd note that putting so much emphasis on this explanation also fails to account for the also higher than campus average time to degree of transfer students.

Based on student feedback provided to us in review materials and in person, transfer students report what they feel to be certain specific problems. They were particularly concerned with the issues of "bottleneck" courses at places in the curriculum as described above, and were also concerned about having to take lower division courses once they came to UCSD. In many cases they felt these lower division courses replicated material that they had already covered at

community college. We understand that this is a complex situation, but we encourage the department to review existing articulations with community colleges and look for ways to streamline the experience for transfer students in ways that do not shortchange the integrity of the curriculum. Of the four students who spoke to us, three were transfers, and none reported any specific advising attention from faculty or staff beyond an email in the first quarter. There's an opportunity here for closer engagement that might help build morale: students reported feeling somewhat isolated within the bubble of their own degree area, and expressed hope for greater cross-discipline engagement.

We were a little surprised by the turnout for our meetings. Faculty attendance was excellent, but very few undergraduate students showed up, only two lecturers (both of whom seemed somewhat disengaged from the department), and, most surprisingly, no teaching assistants at all. This last is concerning, as we heard expressions of concern about teaching assistants being over-extended from faculty and from the students. The department's self-study is vague on matters surrounding teaching assistants, so it was hard for us to make sense of what is happening. We don't have any information on what percentage students are hired at, what they're expected to do, and when they are hired for courses [you mean as Instructors of Record?]. It seems essential for department faculty and administration to work together to address these concerns, as they not only impact the delivery of the undergraduate curriculum, but surely affect morale amongst graduate students.

The department currently enrolls a significant number of non-majors in lower division classes, many of them centered on art-making. However, as stated above, many of these courses also serve as requirements for majors, and thus create instructional spaces with mixed aims. If the department more consciously designed courses targeted specifically at general education students it might be a win/win situation: needs of those students would be more clearly met, and majors would not be frustrated that their experience was being "diluted" via the presence of large numbers of less engaged, less adept students. Some curricular rethinking/retooling here might allow the department to more efficiently address both its major curriculum and the general education mission. A corollary boon might be the development of high-enrollment courses specifically suited to non-majors.

Within the consideration of courses that fulfill general education requirements, we note that the department currently offers very few DEI courses, far fewer than most other departments in the division. Given faculty interests and expertise, this seemed surprising; we would encourage the department to think actively about offering more of these courses. Faculty reported frustration that courses proposed to fulfill the DEI requirement had been rejected by the committee that vets them. We appreciate this frustration, but urge said faculty to resubmit their proposals after consultation with the committee. This process has been successful for other departments.

While it is true that the department could ideally be offering more large enrollment general education classes, it is also true that they do not have control over any instructional spaces that accommodate enrollments above (); any larger courses then need to be scheduled in general campus facilities, and these do not necessarily mesh with the needs of the class. Further, there are specific logistical requirements for instructional spaces in almost all of the courses offered by the department. Even in the case of something like art history, which might conform most explicitly to a standard lecture format, a room is needed with high quality projection capacity and control over lighting. Currently many art history classes are being taught in SME 149, and faculty underscored the urgent need for continued access to and control over this classroom in order to be able to successfully deliver these classes.

Also on the topic of facilities, faculty and students in Speculative Design spoke of the need for space for hands-on, process-based instruction within the program, especially a space where students could work on large scale projects collaboratively over a longer period of time. Studio art majors have access to honors studio or large painting and sculpture studios in Mandeville, but the newer and larger cohorts of Speculative Design and ICAM students seem to be split between spaces in SME and VAF, without necessarily having access to any space for long enough period to develop work continuously.

D. Recommendations

- The department needs more staff to adequately deliver its undergraduate program, specifically facilities staff. The need is chronic in photography and technology in particular. We are aware that this is not something the department really has the budgetary resources to address, but it is essential that some campus entity that does have the resources provide for this.
- Review the potential bottleneck effects of key course requirements
- Provide more curricular opportunities that reinforce or create community-building opportunities across disciplinary areas.
- The preceding item could be achieved in part through an evaluation of potential redundancies and overlaps in the curriculum.
- Review existing articulations with community colleges with a view to improving the experience of transfer students.
- Rethink the balance of majors and non-majors within key required courses for the major
- Look into creating large enrollment courses specifically designed for non-majors, instead of enrolling non-majors in core required courses.
- Add some courses that fulfill the DEI requirement. This could be a win/win in increasing the diversity of the department's curriculum and, by designing courses thematically, could offer another place to enfold multiple areas within the program.
- Any new incarnation of the University Art Gallery should serve at least in part as a curricular resource for the undergraduate program.