

**TO:** Mike Mahon  
President and Vice Chancellor

**DATE:** June 26, 2017

**FROM:** Alan Siaroff  
Chair, Academic Quality Assurance Committee

**RE:** Master of Fine Arts / Master of Music 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 Master of Fine Arts / Master of Music at its June 21, 2017 meeting.

The Self Study Committee for this review comprised Deric Olsen (Program Review Coordinator), Mary Kavanagh, Gail Hanrahan, Brian Black, and Leanne Elias.

The review produced four documents:<sup>1</sup>

1. *Master of Fine Arts / Master of Music Self-Study Report* (received January 26, 2017) – Self Study Report, developed by the MFA/MMus Self Study Committee.
2. *External Review of Master of Fine Arts/Master of Music 2017* (received March 16, 2017) – by John Kissick (University of Guelph), Glen Carruthers (Wilfred Laurier University), and Kathleen Irwin (University of Regina) based on their site visit of March 2-3, 2017.
3. *Master of Fine Arts/Master of Music, Quality Assurance Review 2017: Self-Study Committee Response to the External Review Report* (received May 1, 2017) – response of the Self Study Committee to the external review.
4. *Faculty of Fine Arts and School of Graduate Studies Deans' Response to the MFA/MMus Program External Review* (received May 30, 2017) – response to the review, written by Edward Jurkowski, Dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts.

As per the new academic quality assurance procedures, the Self Study Committee was given the opportunity to respond in writing to the Deans' Response. No such response was received from the Self Study Committee.

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<sup>1</sup> All documents are available upon request.

## ***Self Study***

Overall, the Self Study noted that the MFA and MMus programs have struggled to keep consistent support and are facing significant issues and concerns. The report summarized the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats for these programs:

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<b>Strengths:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Faculty members have excellent research and teaching profiles, and are committed to the success of the programs.</li><li>• Graduates have gone on to professional practice and post-secondary teaching.</li><li>• The programs support community development in the arts.</li><li>• Facilities and infrastructure are excellent.</li><li>• The programs have customized content and a flexible curriculum.</li><li>• Some MFA graduates have indicated that the program has prepared them for careers as professional artists, performers, practitioners, and academics.</li><li>• The programs are small, which allows individualized attention for students from supervisors, faculty, and staff.</li></ul>
<b>Weaknesses:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• There is a lack of clarity between the Faculty of Fine Arts and the School of Graduate Studies on the governance, coordination, and delivery of the programs. And there is hesitancy by both academic units to take complete responsibility and accountability for the programs, resulting in contradiction and confusion.</li><li>• There is no philosophical agreement between Fine Arts departments and disciplines, which leads to cumbersome negotiation about best practices.</li><li>• There is little coordination between Fine Arts, Graduate Studies, and Advancement on recruiting, marketing, and communications for the programs.</li><li>• There are not enough qualified students to develop an optimal learning environment.</li><li>• The programs are labour and resource intensive.</li><li>• Some faculty members hesitate to engage with the programs.</li><li>• There is a lack of equity regarding workload for faculty involved in the programs.</li><li>• Faculty perceive that graduate studies for Fine Arts are not a high priority for senior administration, as funding and financial support for graduate students in Fine Arts has been discontinued.</li><li>• Administration perceives that only select faculty are engaged with and support the programs.</li></ul>

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- Opportunities:**
- The U of L is committed to graduate programs.
  - The programs can leverage the U of L's commitment to liberal education.
  - The programs can be selective in admitting high quality students, who can make a positive impact and help boost the reputation of the programs.
  - Marketing can be focused on areas within the programs that are more feasible, sustainable, and attractive.
  - A part-time option could attract more students.
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- Threats:**
- To stay viable, the programs need an increase in space and resources, workload issues to be addressed, and a larger intake of high quality students.
  - Potential burnout of faculty involved in the programs is an issue.
  - A lack of coordinated administrative oversight and leadership can result in faculty neglect of policies, procedures, and responsibilities.
  - The School of Graduate Studies administration has a perception that faculty do not think that participation in the programs is part of their workload assignment and that supervision, serving on supervisory committees, and teaching graduate courses is overload and is not compensated.
  - Other post-secondary institutions in the province may expand into graduate studies in fine arts.
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The report included five recommendations for planning:

1. Improve governance, communication, and coordination between departments, the MFA/MMus Program Committee, the Faculty of Fine Arts administration, and the School of Graduate Studies administration.
2. Create a comprehensive marketing and recruitment strategy that is sensitive to disciplinary and program distinctions.
3. Examine faculty teaching and supervisory compensation to create equity within the university.
4. Examine the capacity for financial support for graduate students within the Faculty of Fine Arts.
5. Explore the viability of an Interdisciplinary MFA degree.

There were 16 questions posed for the External Reviewers:

1. What is your opinion on the number of students admitted annually into the programs?
2. What is your opinion on the sustainability of the programs?
3. Should we consider admitting more students into the programs?
4. What is your opinion on the majors that the programs can effectively deliver?
5. What is your opinion on part-time studies in the programs?

6. What is your opinion on an interdisciplinary MFA program?
7. Should the MFA majors in Art, Drama, and New Media become distinct programs?
8. How can the administration, governance, communication, and coordination be improved between program stakeholders?
9. How can marketing and recruiting be improved to increase competitiveness and attractiveness of the programs?
10. What level of resources should be committed to the programs to ensure their long-term success, and how can the administration improve resource use and compensation structures?
11. Should the administration and governance of the MFA and MMus programs be separated so they are more effectively managed?
12. Should the MMus program consider other culminating activities, rather than just a thesis?
13. Should we consider a Digital Audio Arts major (with a research-oriented curriculum with technology-driven modules) within the existing MMus degree, or would this be better delivered through an MA program, a terminal degree program like an MFA, or an entirely different or new degree program?
14. Should we consider offering a doctoral program in Music?
15. What is your opinion on engagement and participation of faculty members in the programs and the faculty effectiveness in delivering the programs?
16. What do you think of opportunities for graduate students to serve as the instructor of record for undergraduate courses as a component of their funded support in addition to their graduate assistantships?

## ***External Review***

The External Review Report discussed the issues and challenges faced by the MFA and MMus programs:

- The MFA degrees in Art, Drama, and New Media, are unified in name and credit load only. Each area conceptualizes the nature of the MFA degree very differently.
- There is a perception in the Faculty of Fine Arts that resolving the challenges of academic units is impossible due to overly complex regulations, a lack of understanding of research in the fine arts disciplines, and a lack of support in senior administration.
- There is a sense in the Faculty that graduate students are a burden, which is demonstrably inaccurate.
- In some areas concern was expressed that staff member needs and opinions too often drive curriculum decisions.
- Faculty members, students, and program administrators are frustrated with the information flow and clarity of guidelines and supervisory processes for graduate students.
- The Associate Dean of Fine Arts is largely extraneous to daily activity related to the graduate programs, which does not serve graduate processes.
- The relationship of the School of Graduate Studies to the Faculty of Fine Arts is not well understood. The division of responsibilities between these two academic units is unclear.
- The cataloguing of courses is often done late or in an ad hoc manner.

- There is a lack of a cohort of peers for graduate students.
- Core graduate courses are offered irregularly.
- Almost all graduate courses are cross-listed with undergraduate courses to meet the university-regulated ten student threshold. This impacts the experience of the graduate students in those courses.
- Where there are not enough students, faculty are expected to teach the course as overload, which is creating resentment amongst faculty members.
- The programs have had difficulty in attracting a large pool of qualified applicants.
- There is frustration with heavy teaching loads at the undergraduate level, which is impacting the delivery of the graduate programs.
- The graduate Digital Audio Arts program does not fill well into the MMus program.

The report noted several program strengths:

- Students express satisfaction with the programs and with the quality of their supervision.
- Faculty members were highly engaged with the review process and care highly about the quality of Fine Arts programming.
- The Faculty of Fine Arts has outstanding facilities and all areas are supported by staff members who are skilled, knowledgeable, and enthusiastic.

The report included the following recommendations:

<b>General:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Implement a solution that acknowledges and addresses workload.</li> <li>2. Clarify the roles of the School of Graduate Studies, Faculty of Fine Arts, Associate Deans, Program Committee, unit graduate representatives, and department heads.</li> <li>3. Place the organization and chairing of the Program Committee under the purview of the Associate Dean of Fine Arts.</li> <li>4. Ensure everyone involved in the programs clearly understand the composition of the programs, the routes to defence, the nature of the thesis, the weight of the graduating project, the need for an external examiner, and so on. All relevant forms must be on the School of Graduate Studies website, with links to the Fine Arts website.</li> <li>5. Each area should create a comprehensive student handbook that includes a clear description of when and how to catalogue graduate courses. This handbook must be updated regularly.</li> <li>6. Ensure the ways in which departments can streamline their areas are made clear.</li> <li>7. Seriously consider expanding the cohorts in both programs.</li> <li>8. Annually offer one or two core graduate courses.</li> <li>9. Allocate a graduate assistantship to a student who can create content on social media and direct this content to art communities and schools.</li> </ol>
<b>Studio Art:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10. Expand the graduate cohort, to address concerns about dialogue and support.</li> <li>11. Consider expanding opportunities for exchange with other arts organizations.</li> <li>12. Consider marketing potential research opportunities connected to fabrication.</li> </ol>
<b>Drama:</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>13. Explore alternatives to proscenium stage productions, including site-specific projects or alternative space installations.</li> </ol>

	14. Allow up to two productions per year to be designed or directed by those graduate students who are interested in working on the mainstage.
	15. Count productions as a class, for both faculty and students.
<b>Digital Audio Arts:</b>	<p>16. Give Digital Audio Arts the same status within the Faculty of Fine Arts as Visual Art, Music, Drama, and New Media. Or, subsume Digital Audio Arts into New Media.</p> <p>17. Have the graduate Digital Audio Arts program culminate in an MFA (Digital Audio Arts) or Master of Audio Arts.</p> <p>18. Give the graduate Digital Audio Arts program a separate Calendar entry, independent of the MMus entry.</p> <p>19. Actively pursue interdisciplinary studies, in the context of a new MFA in Interdisciplinary Studies or a revamped Digital Audio Arts graduate program.</p> <p>20. Ensure the degree requirements of the Digital Audio Arts graduate program comprise 42 credits.</p> <p>21. Revise and streamline the Digital Audio Arts curriculum to allow for maximum flexibility.</p>
<b>MMus:</b>	<p>22. Undertake curricular reform that incorporates into the MMus elements of the other Fine Arts programs, notably New Media.</p> <p>23. Use one or two key features of the revamped MMus to market the program.</p>
<b>Digital Audio Arts and Music:</b>	<p>24. Revise and streamline the Digital Audio Arts and Music graduate programs to allow for maximum flexibility.</p> <p>25. Consider using interdisciplinarity as one of the differentiating features of these programs.</p> <p>26. Following curricular revisions and concerted marketing efforts, admit three or four students annually into the Digital Audio Arts program and the MMus program.</p> <p>27. Complete further strategic planning using an external facilitator.</p>
<b>New Media:</b>	<p>28. Refine the identity of New Media, in terms of the program itself and its relationship with the other MFA programs.</p> <p>29. Actively recruit students from beyond the local catchment area.</p> <p>30. Focus publicity and marketing materials on the interdisciplinary nature of New Media studies.</p>

## Program Response

The Self-Study Committee felt that, overall, the External Review Report was an accurate assessment of the M.F.A. and M.Mus. programs. In their response, the Committee did wish to identify, expand, and contextualize some aspects of the External Review Report.

The Program Response noted that the External Review Report implied that the MFA majors in Art, Drama, and New Media should be separate and distinct graduate degree programs. The response went on to address the recommendations from the External Review Report:

1. <i>Implement a solution that acknowledges and addresses workload.</i>	Agreed. This is high priority. Action should adjust undergraduate teaching to accommodate teaching and supervision at the graduate level.
2. <i>Clarify the roles of the School of Graduate Studies, Faculty of Fine Arts, Associate Deans, Program Committee, unit graduate representatives, and department heads.</i>	Agreed. Fine Arts needs a clearer organization for the graduate programs. Administrative responsibilities for the programs should be allocated in a way that makes them more effective and efficient.
3. <i>Place the organization and chairing of the Program Committee under the purview of the Associate Dean of Fine Arts.</i>	Agreed. This is a high priority. In conjunction with this recommendation, the composition of the MFA/MMus Program Committee should be reviewed to ensure that departmental representation on is consistent with practice in other Fine Arts administrative processes.
4. <i>Ensure everyone involved in the programs clearly understand the composition of the programs, the routes to defence, the nature of the thesis, the weight of the graduating project, the need for an external examiner, and so on. All relevant forms must be on the School of Graduate Studies website, with links to the Fine Arts website.</i>	Agreed.
5. <i>Each area should create a comprehensive student handbook that includes a clear description of when and how to catalogue graduate courses. This handbook must be updated regularly.</i>	Creating a student handbook would not adequately address the issues behind this recommendation. The real concern is orienting the supervisors, faculty, and students to already existing documents like the MFA and MMus policies and procedures manuals, and proactively determining students' coursework to be completed.
6. <i>Ensure the ways in which departments can streamline their areas are made clear.</i>	Agreed.
7. <i>Seriously consider expanding the cohorts in both programs.</i>	Agreed. However, this recommendation conflicts with recommendation 1 on heavy workload. Taking on more graduate students would impact faculty members' capacity to contribute to the department, faculty, and university in other ways.
8. <i>Annually offer one or two core graduate courses.</i>	Agreed. This is high priority. The faculty should consider committing to offering graduate seminar courses below the university level of ten students per class.

9. <i>Allocate a graduate assistantship to a student who can create content on social media and direct this content to art communities and schools.</i>	Agreed. Implementing this recommendation depends on the particular graduate students enrolled at the time.
10. <i>Expand the graduate cohort, to address concerns about dialogue and support.</i>	Agreed. An intake of three to four students per year in the Studio Art program should be considered. Also, the impacts on workload must be considered.
11. <i>Consider expanding opportunities for exchange with other arts organizations.</i>	Agreed.
12. <i>Consider marketing potential research opportunities connected to fabrication.</i>	Agreed.
13. <i>Explore alternatives to proscenium stage productions, including site-specific projects or alternative space installations.</i>	The Self Study Committee does not agree with the assessment motivating this recommendation. Main Stage shows are in either the University Theatre of the David Spinks Theatre, where configurations are flexible. MFA Drama students are already encouraged to undertake whatever projects align with their interests and are not required to work on the large proscenium stage.
14. <i>Allow up to two productions per year to be designed or directed by those graduate students who are interested in working on the mainstage.</i>	The Self Study Committee does not agree with the assessment motivating this recommendation. MFA students are encouraged to participate in the Main Stage season, including as designer or director.
15. <i>Count productions as a class, for both faculty and students.</i>	Agreed.
16. <i>Give Digital Audio Arts the same status within the Faculty of Fine Arts as Visual Art, Music, Drama, and New Media. Or, subsume Digital Audio Arts into New Media.</i>	The Self Study Committee agrees with establishing a graduate program that serves Digital Audio Arts. Subsuming Digital Audio Arts into New Media is not feasible and is not supported.
17. <i>Have the graduate Digital Audio Arts program culminate in an MFA (Digital Audio Arts) or Master of Audio Arts.</i>	Agreed. The Digital Audio Arts faculty members will have to carefully consider this recommendation.
18. <i>Give the graduate Digital Audio Arts program a separate Calendar entry, independent of the MMus entry.</i>	Agreed, assuming recommendations 16 and 17 are also implemented.
19. <i>Actively pursue interdisciplinary studies, in the context of a new MFA in Interdisciplinary Studies or a revamped Digital Audio Arts graduate program.</i>	Agreed.
20. <i>Ensure the degree requirements of the Digital Audio Arts graduate program comprise 42 credits.</i>	Agreed, subject to the related recommendations being implemented concurrently.
21. <i>Revise and streamline the Digital Audio Arts curriculum to allow for maximum flexibility.</i>	Agreed, subject to the related recommendations being implemented concurrently.



22. <i>Undertake curricular reform that incorporates into the MMus elements of the other Fine Arts programs, notably New Media.</i>	The Self Study Committee agrees with the implication of this recommendation that interdisciplinary collaborations would contribute to creating an identity for the MMus program. Collaborations could be established with other programs in: Fine Arts; Arts and Science (like Physics or Computer Science); Health Sciences; and Management.
23. <i>Use one or two key features of the revamped MMus to market the program.</i>	Agreed. One of the unique elements is the reputation of the studio professors.
24. <i>Revise and streamline the Digital Audio Arts and Music graduate programs to allow for maximum flexibility.</i>	Agreed. A thesis should still be an option, but not a requirement.
25. <i>Consider using interdisciplinarity one of the differentiating features of these programs.</i>	Agreed.
26. <i>Following curricular revisions and concerted marketing efforts, admit three or four students annually into the Digital Audio Arts program and the MMus program.</i>	Agreed. This would require adequate staffing and financial resources to offer new graduate courses.
27. <i>Complete further strategic planning using an external facilitator.</i>	Agreed.
28. <i>Refine the identity of New Media, in terms of the program itself and its relationship with the other MFA programs.</i>	Agreed. The committee is open to exploring the relationship between New Media and the other MFA programs. An interdisciplinary MFA program may be an option to deliver graduate studies involving New Media.
29. <i>Actively recruit students from beyond the local catchment area.</i>	Agreed.
30. <i>Focus publicity and marketing materials on the interdisciplinary nature of New Media studies.</i>	Agreed, subject to implementation of recommendation 28.

## Deans' Response

The Deans' Response first addressed the general themes from the MFA/MMus review:

<i>Graduate teaching: workload, student cohorts, funding</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Workload associated with graduate student teaching is a priority. But workload goes beyond graduate supervision. Graduate student teaching also involves work on the supervisory committee and/or thesis committee. Addressing workload related to graduate students must be done in the context of all the Faculties; it cannot be done in isolation of other units. The process to equitably acknowledge workload will vary depending on graduate student enrolments.</li><li>• Teaching effectiveness and teaching resources are just as important as workload. How can teaching effectiveness at the graduate level be measured? Regarding resources, the Faculty of Fine Arts is stretched to its maximum in terms of space, which puts strain on growth. Any decisions on growth must consider strategic goals and balance all aspects of departments, curricula, staffing, and resources at both undergraduate and graduate levels.</li><li>• The proposed growth in the programs of two to four students per year would increase capacity from 16 to 40 students. This would have positive impacts for Fine Arts. It would allow for a reasonable minimum cohort and would enable the regular offering of graduate seminar courses. However, this proposed growth is not realistic given the current fiscal environment; it would require unfunded students. There should be a comprehensive study of a model of growth using unfunded students and a plan for its implementation that includes an assessment of outcomes at the three-year and five-year points.</li></ul>
<i>The MFA as standalone degrees</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The proposal to separate the MFA into three distinct degree programs – MFA (Art); MFA (Drama); MFA (New Media) – should be explored and evaluated. This evaluation must consider the risks, which include rejection of the new program proposals by the Ministry due to program duplication in Alberta, and loss of flexibility to adjust intakes in the three areas when applications to one is low.</li></ul>
<i>MFA Multidisciplinary and MFA Digital Audio Arts</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The proposal to develop an MFA (Multidisciplinary) degree should be explored. Students wishing to explore graduate study in Digital Audio Arts can do so in this program.</li></ul>
<i>Administrative structure of graduate studies within the Faculty of Fine Arts</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Deans support the model where the Associate Dean is the Chair of the MFA/MMus Program Committee, and there is a representative from each department on this committee.</li></ul>
<i>Core seminar courses</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Deans support core seminar courses. However, this requires a consistent large cohort of students. In the short term, departments should ensure they consistently offer required senior-level undergraduate seminar classes. Graduate students can enrol in these classes.</li></ul>
<i>Curricular changes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The departmental curriculum committees should discuss the various recommended curricular changes and take them to the Fine Arts Curriculum Committee. This should not be done until a decision is made on if the MFA stays as one program or as three standalone degrees.</li></ul>

<i>Building upon curricular strengths</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Deans support the departments identifying the key features of their offerings and using these elements to market the programs.</li> </ul>
<i>Graduate assistantship for social media content</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It will be difficult to ensure consistency, plus faculty oversight of the content is a concern given faculty workload. Any such graduate assistantship would have to conform with the Fine Arts strategic communications plan, which is under development.</li> </ul>

The response included a proposed timeline for actions to address the review outcomes:

<i>Year One</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a short, medium, and long term plan for student cohorts. Determine the role of unfunded students.</li> <li>Complete a comprehensive curriculum review. Determine if program offerings stay as one MFA with majors or separate degree programs.</li> <li>For each department identify two to three areas of distinctiveness to use in marketing and recruitment.</li> <li>Study the role of a potential MFA (Multidisciplinary) degree.</li> <li>Review the appropriate pathway for graduate studies in Digital Audio Arts.</li> <li>Develop a short, medium, and long term plan for workload compensation.</li> <li>Develop a Faculty-level strategic recruitment and retention plan for graduate studies in Fine Arts. Ensure this plan is incorporated into the University's graduate enrolment plan.</li> <li>In consultation with the School of Graduate Studies, complete administrative restructuring of graduate studies within the Faculty of Fine Arts.</li> </ul>
<i>Year Three</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure the medium and long-range plan for student cohorts is accurate.</li> <li>Complete a review to ensure the administrative structure for graduate studies in Fine Arts is appropriate and effective.</li> <li>Implement outcomes of the comprehensive curriculum review.</li> <li>Confirm the feasibility of the MFA (Multidisciplinary) degree.</li> <li>Confirm the program design of Digital Audio Arts graduate studies: standalone degree, part of the MFA (Multidisciplinary), or both.</li> <li>Ensure the resources required for growth in graduate student numbers are linked with the space planning of Destination project Phase II.</li> <li>Study the efficacy of the Fine Arts recruitment and retention plans.</li> </ul>
<i>Year Five</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review the student cohorts from the past few years. Begin developing a new short, medium, and long term plan for student cohorts.</li> <li>Review each department's enrolment patterns to determine the effectiveness of the chosen areas of curricular focus.</li> <li>Study workload to determine equitability and sustainability.</li> </ul>

The Academic Quality Assurance Committee is satisfied that the MFA/MMus 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:

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Alan Siaroff

Chair, Academic Quality Assurance Committee

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