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TO: Digvir Jayas
President and Vice Chancellor

DATE: August 25, 2025

FROM: Lynn Kennedy
Chair, Academic Quality Assurance Committee

RE: Master of Fine Arts Program 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 Program at its April 22, 2025, meeting.

The Self Study Committee for this review was comprised of: Devon Smither (Program Review Coordinator), Annie Martin, Dana Cooley, Doug MacArthur, and Julia Wasilewski.

The review produced 4 documents:

1. Self Study Report. Written by the Self Study Committee. Received May 16, 2024.
2. External Review Report. Written by Peter Morin (OCAD University) and PK Langshaw (Concordia University) based on a site visit December 5 to 6, 2025. Received February 11, 2025.
3. Program Response. Written by the Self Study Committee. Received March 20, 2025.
4. Dean's Response. Written by Heather Davis-Fisch, Dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts. Received April 8, 2025.

Self Study Report

The Self Study Report asked for External Reviewer feedback on several areas:

Growth and Sustainability of the MFA program

- The number of students admitted annually into the programs. Should numbers of admissions be increased? And, if so, what is necessary to support this expansion?
- The sustainability of programs given their current size, allocated funding, and number of full-time tenured and tenure-track faculty (and many recent retirements that have not been replaced).
- What changes would be needed to support part-time studies in the MFA program majors?
- A multidisciplinary MFA degree major (perhaps modelled somewhat on the proposed course-based MA – Multidisciplinary) to accommodate students pursuing studies that traverse traditional disciplinary boundaries or that are outside conventional creative areas?
- Are there potential benefits or economies of scale that could be expanded by greater use of the Western Deans' Agreement?
- Is existing faculty expertise and capacity suitable to graduate level studies in Indigenous creative practice and decolonization?

Student Experience

- What hurdles exist for international students in the MFA programs?
- What hurdles exist for domestic students?
- What hurdles exist for Indigenous students?
- What opportunities exist for graduate students pursuing a terminal degree to serve as the instructor of record for undergraduate courses as part of the training and professionalization offered in the MFA program?
- Do the facilities (including office and lounge/gathering spaces) meet the needs of graduate students in the program?
- Funding: Given indications of decreases to tuition awards and graduate assistantship funding, what other sources of funding can be found to help support the graduate program (ie: SSHRC CGS funding, external research funds from faculty)?
- Does the work undertaken for Graduate Assistantships benefit the professional goals of MFA students?
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: is the diversity of the student body reflected in the current faculty?
- Are students from equity-seeking groups receiving the resources they need to succeed and complete their programs?
- Faculty supervision and expertise: Do students have access to experts in their areas of study?

Governing Structure of the MFA program

- Should the MFA majors in Art, Drama, and New Media become separate and distinct degree programs (following the model used for the BFA degree programs), as opposed to the current structure which has majors within a single MFA degree program?
- How might the administration, governance, communication, and coordination be improved between the various stakeholders of the programs?
- How might marketing and recruiting efforts be improved to increase competitiveness and attractiveness of the MFA majors in Art, Drama, and New Media?
- What level of resources should be committed to the programs to ensure their long-term success and how might the administration improve resource use and compensation structures?
- Can funding and acceptance procedures be incentivized to make our offers more competitive with other institutions?

Faculty and Student Engagement and Opportunities

- What is the engagement and participation of faculty members in the programs?
- Is the program effectively delivered?
- Faculty workload: how to alleviate burnout, prevent teaching and service overload, and offer meaningful compensation?
- Faculty support for curricular development to update and improve quality and rigor of expertise offered at the graduate level.

The body of the report noted several strengths of the Master of Fine Arts:

- The MFA program has successfully graduated students who participate in professional positions, industry, and post-secondary teaching in their fields.
- The MFA program supports community development in the arts in Lethbridge and in Southern Alberta with many students staying in the region following graduation and contributing to a range of organizational and professional practices and activities.
- Most graduate students have access to individual studios / office spaces.
- Facilities and infrastructure are sound and support the programs.
- The programs are small, which allows students to receive individualized attention from supervisors, faculty, and staff.
- Students have the opportunity to exhibit and/or present their work in public forums including at Casa, Crossing Boundaries Graduate Symposium at UofL, Art Now, mainstage theatre season, and exhibitions at the Penny Building.

The following weaknesses and challenges were mentioned in the body of the report:

- Due to recent budget cuts at the university-level there has been a reduction in the number of technical support staff in Art and Drama which impacts the support available to MFA students in those areas.
- Due to recent budget cuts at the university-level there has been a reduction in the number of tenure track faculty as not all retirements have been replaced in the past few years. This has

meant fewer available supervisors for the MFA program. The loss of faculty positions to retirements means that MFA students have a narrow range of options for supervisors and committee members.

- There is no dedicated funding for recruitment and marketing of the MFA program, nor is there a strategic or coherent marketing and communication plan for the MFA program and its majors.
- The programs are not attracting enough qualified students to generate the high caliber of students that faculty would like to see, nor for an optimal learning environment for students at the graduate level. In all three program majors, faculty would like to see an increase in domestic and Indigenous applicants.
- Our limited intake capacity (6 students) means grad students don't have a big enough cohort. Further, a lack of financial support and lack of strategic marketing and recruitment mean that not all students admitted into the programs accept, leading to very small graduate cohorts.
- There is no policy about compensating faculty for graduate supervision.
- There is a lack of dedicated graduate studio space for New Media and Drama.
- There is a perception among a number of faculty members that graduate studies is not a high priority for the university administration due to a lack of funding and financial support for the programs in FFA.
- This impacts the desire for faculty to engage with the MFA program.
- The elimination of funding to support external examiners for the MFA programs has detrimental impacts on the academic rigour of the programs in FFA.
- Due to a lack of funding and support from the School of Graduate Studies (SGS) there is only one graduate course, FA5020: Information Literacy. More graduate courses are needed to run the MFA program.
- Many faculty indicated that the overall organizational structure and administration of the MFA program needs improvement. Concerns were raised about communication and recruitment to intake and process, to funding equity, and workload implications. While the institutional structure of the program is largely effective (students do register and complete the degree) there are ongoing concerns with process, the administrative obligations of faculty, and the lack of financial and curricular support for the program.
- Additional concerns include the quality of the student experience and the reality that several structures may limit the quality of incoming students (including limited funding, a lack of graduate-level courses, and faculty workload capacity).

Recommendations from the body of the report:

- Potential for developing a course-based MA program (with a Multidisciplinary major). Course-based MA programs have proven popular at other institutions and appeal to students given their short timeframe; in addition, they do not require supervisory duties from faculty. Developing this program would help create graduate level courses and a larger student cohort across this program and the MFA program.
- Potential to develop a Multidisciplinary major in the MFA which would facilitate, and support work often undertaken by our graduate students (particularly in New Media) through a formalized framework.
- There is potential to focus the marketing and communication regarding some of the programs more specifically on areas within the majors that are more feasible and sustainable or that may attract a more competitive applicant pool.
- Graduate Assistantships (teaching and non-teaching) can better connect to the professionalization

goals of the MFA program and better support the undergraduate curriculum in the Faculty of Fine Arts.

External Review Report

The External Review Report contained eleven (11) recommendations for improving the Master of Fine Arts:

- We recommend developing a collective archive/history of this program. In this archive, you hold/highlight all the graduates, graduate works, and all the teaching faculty, technicians, and community events.
- We recommend Administration/administrative re-design. We also suggest that this administrative re-design, or administrative easement, creates a change to pull back on 'meeting culture' and returns research/creation time to the faculty who are super important in this program.
- We recommend the creation of one program coordinator who supports all current, and incoming graduate students.
- We recommend building stronger resources to support international students/learners. This includes supporting current faculty to include multiple language resources in their classrooms.
- We recommend developing revenue and skill sharing around multiple graduate programs in the university.
- We recommend moving the student gallery from the downtown location back to the University.
- We recommend that technicians be involved in the intake process for incoming graduate students.
- We recommend highlighting current research by current, and past teaching faculty. We recommend supporting current teaching faculty to develop research proposals.
- We strongly recommend that the current administration of the School of Graduate Studies provide appropriate leadership training for everyone who is involved in this program, but especially the Deans and Associate Deans, going forward.
- The website for UofL's graduate programs in Fine Arts presents challenges for both searches and promotion.
- A recommendation is to have a strategic plan of who are you contacting in terms of leaders of that community and how would you provide a decolonized environment or that programs support the ways of creating from an indigenous perspective/practice.

The following, taken from the report, discuss the challenges noted:

- Faculty and a student mentioned that graduate students meet once a week with their supervisor or even twice a week throughout their program was a normative practice. This is untenable for professors over the long term. (burnout, the inability to supervise more than one student at a time). Faculty mentioned that some faculty are not willing to take on graduate supervision due to the extended workload and because there is no clear-cut advantage in doing so, compensation or remission from taking on these supervisory roles.

- The faculty interviews suggested a culture of difference, or isolation emphasized more between some faculty and technicians. The relationship between faculty and staff is fundamental. Faculty needs their technical staff to be fully present willing and energized to workshop with the students. Though the faculty may have that knowledge but is not tenable over the long term to manage. The technicians should be encouraged to learn new techniques, materials and tools which will benefit the program.
- One of the main concerns of the students was the lack of community and student-to-student sharing of ideas and techniques. They spoke about the isolation of not meeting a diverse body of faculty or meeting each other, especially at critical stages of their studies. Graduate students need to have a family/community no matter how small.

The following, taken from the report, discuss the opportunities noted:

- This university is situated on Blackfoot territory. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission offers several 'Calls to Action' specific for Universities in Canada. This means making generous, and real space, for inclusion of Indigenous knowledges in all aspects of the program(s). Blackfoot language is represented in some of the signage throughout the university. This inclusion needs to be extended into this graduate program especially because many students enrolled are international students. Polylinguistic speakers will learn better in environments that include multiple spoken and visual languages. Also, the inclusion of local Indigenous languages will help the international students to start to become aware of their relationship to the place. The inclusion of the Blackfoot language in the classroom and throughout the program will also be a strong indicator for potential future Indigenous students and colleagues that this is a safer space.
- The University of Lethbridge could formulate a strategy of why students would be welcome and should apply to this graduate program. It is a smaller university in a community that seems quite beautiful and quite enticing as a quiet community where it is not within a large city, which may be very appealing to some students including local national, and international.

Program Response

In their Program Response, the Self Study Committee addressed the recommendations from the External Review Report:

1. We recommend developing a collective archive/history of this program. In this archive, you hold/highlight all the graduates, graduate works, and all the teaching faculty, technicians, and community events.

The University of Lethbridge struggles to record and capture its history and archive, a problem that was exacerbated with the dissolution of the University Archivist position in 2020—a position that had previously existed for 24 years. Creating an archive for the MFA program, including past graduate students and their thesis work would be very challenging given the reduction in administrative positions as a result of budget constraints over the past five years. The Faculty of Fine Arts (FFA) is working to create a webpage as part of the FFA site for our graduate students so that they each have a profile and space to present their research. New Media does showcase the work of graduate students on their student showcase website but creating one central place to highlight our graduate students and their research is important. This is in line with other graduate programs and is also a way for prospective students to see the research being done by current and past students and offers a way to recruit new talent. This webpage can be built to archive students and their work after graduation.

<p>2. We recommend Administration/ administrative re-design. We also suggest that this administrative re-design, or administrative easement, creates a change to pull back on 'meeting culture' and returns research/creation time to the faculty who are super important in this program.</p>	<p>The School of Graduate Studies (SGS) at UofL is currently working toward a proposed restructuring to decentralize more administration of graduate studies. The impacts of this restructuring will largely impact the Faculty of Arts and Science although there will be some impact felt in Fine Arts. This restructuring presents an opportunity for FFA to review its current administrative structure and support for graduate studies. To begin with, in consultation with the Graduate Programs in Fine Arts Committee representatives from each department, an audit of current administrative tasks and responsibilities should be conducted to identify which tasks could be centralized to reduce the administrative burden on faculty.</p>
<p>3. We recommend the creation of one program coordinator who supports all current, and incoming graduate students.</p>	<p>Currently the FFA Student Program Services, Administrative Assistant does some of the work of supporting graduate studies but the administration of graduate studies was added to this position over time and is in addition to this position's support of undergraduate program services. The Associate Dean is also responsible for a great deal of the administration of graduate studies including work that would be better suited for a Program Coordinator like the organization of our annual graduate research symposium entitled Crossing Boundaries, events for students, coordinating award funding, and answering faculty queries. We agree that the FFA needs a dedicated central position to support graduate studies including overseeing admissions and enrollment, tracking academic progress, coordinating faculty mentorship, advising students, organizing events and workshops, tracking GA and ULGRA assignments, and liaising with other administrative offices. While this review was for the MFA as a discreet graduate program, we do have students in the MA and MMus and it is important to underscore that our recommendation here applies to supporting all of our graduate programs. The FFA Student Program Services Office is committed to extending the same level of support to graduate students that it has traditionally provided to undergraduate students.</p>
<p>4. We recommend building stronger resources to support international students/learners. This includes supporting current faculty to include multiple language resources in their classrooms.</p>	<p>We agree that supporting international graduate students in their own languages may be ideal for fostering deeper intellectual engagement, equitable participation, and academic success, however given current resource levels we do not feel that this is possible. Further we recognize that international applicants are making a conscious decision to attend an English-language instruction institution which requires significant prior preparation before admission. We are committed to supporting their efforts in English after admission as well.</p>
<p>5. We recommend developing revenue and skill sharing around multiple graduate programs in the university.</p>	<p>In the externals' report more broadly, as with the last AQA review of the MFA/MMus in 2017, the lack of graduate-level courses was identified as a problem. The proposed course-based MA – Fine Arts Multidisciplinary program which is on track to be submitted to the Alberta government in summer 2025 includes the creation of six masters-level courses. The program has an anticipated intake of 8-10 students in the first year and an average of around 12 students annually. The anticipated start date for the course-based MA program is September 2027. MFA students can take the six courses offered as part of this program which will increase enrollments and build a cohort of students. In addition, the dean's office is exploring the creation of a shared studio course for MFA and MMus students to address the specific needs of students in the studio-based programs.</p>
<p>6. We recommend moving the student gallery from the downtown location back to the University.</p>	<p>We agree that it would benefit students, faculty, and the university-community to have a student-run art gallery on campus. This would provide valuable work-integrated-learning opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students who would manage this gallery space. In addition, this would increase the audience size for graduate student thesis exhibitions. Having an on-campus student-run art gallery would also put the UofL on par with institutions like AUArts, Emily Carr, OCAD, NSCAD, and other universities with well-regarded art, new media, and design programs.</p>

7. We recommend that technicians be involved in the intake process for incoming graduate students.	We agree that it could be beneficial for technicians to offer their thoughts and feedback in the student admission process for the MFA program and will consult with faculty and technical staff to find the best way to address this. We have concerns, however, that having technicians serve on graduate committees would not align with SGS's membership terms as technical staff are AUPE members and we also have concerns about the additional labour that this would demand of staff.
8. We recommend highlighting current research by current, and past teaching faculty. We recommend supporting current teaching faculty to develop research proposals.	The FFA always ensures that major funding and awards received by faculty are announced internally and externally through our own Communications Manager as well as central communications and public relations at UofL. FFA has been working closely with the Office of Research and Innovation Services over the past two years to ensure strong support for faculty funding and awards. We are also incentivizing faculty to seek out external grants and funding by considering grant applications and/or the holding of grants as one (of many) criterion in the assignment Graduate Assistantships.
9. We strongly recommend that the current administration of the School of Graduate Studies provide appropriate leadership training for everyone who is involved in this program, but especially the Deans and Associate Deans, going forward.	We agree that more training and leadership are always a good idea for faculty, staff, and administrators and would be happy to see more support for things like travel to the Canadian Association of Graduate Studies and/or the Canadian Association of Graduate Studies Leadership Summit which would help to support this training. In addition, SGS has been running workshops for faculty supervising graduate students and FFA continues to encourage faculty to attend.
10. The website for UofL's graduate programs in Fine Arts presents challenges for both searches and promotion.	We agree that an update of the faculty directory so that it is user-friendly and clear for prospective graduate students seeking supervisors would be helpful. In addition, we very much agree that updating all graduate program websites is sorely needed. Hosting our graduate program websites on the FFA website (instead of Future Graduate Students where they are hosted now) would make this easier; currently it is too difficult for us to change these pages ourselves.
11. A recommendation is to have a strategic plan of who are you contacting in terms of leaders of that community and how would you provide a decolonized environment or that programs support the ways of creating from an indigenous perspective/practice.	We recommend that the FFA work with the SFGS and Ikaisskini to ensure Indigenous graduate student support and mentorship. Furthermore, FFA would like to work closely with the FFA Iniskim Advisory Circle and SGS to explore committee structures that would allow for active participation and input from Blackfoot and other Indigenous community members.

Dean's Response

The Dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts responded to the recommendations from the External Review Report:

1. We recommend developing a collective archive/history of this program. In this archive, you hold/highlight all the graduates, graduate works, and all the teaching faculty, technicians, and community events.	The committee's choice to develop a website profiling current and recently graduated graduate students is a very good response to the recommendation, as it will not only document past students' work but will also support recruitment.
2. We recommend Administration/ administrative re-design. We also suggest that this administrative re-design, or administrative easement, creates a change to pull back on 'meeting culture'	The program would benefit from having the roles and responsibilities of the Admin Support, Assistant Dean, and Associate Dean clarified and reorganized, as needed. In order to address inefficiencies, reduce administrative burdens for faculty (especially advisors and committee members), and make processes simpler and more transparent for students, I encourage the Graduate

and returns research/creation time to the faculty who are super important in this program.	Programs in Fine Arts Committee and the Associate Dean to identify tasks that need to be undertaken by advisors/faculty and tasks that might be centralized and overseen by the Admin Support staff member (e.g. tracking progress, organizing events such as Crossing Boundaries, etc.).
	It is essential to note that any reorganization of responsibilities needs to occur by redistributing resources, not through any additional positions etc.
3. We recommend the creation of one program coordinator who supports all current, and incoming graduate students.	Refer to the response to recommendation 2.
4. We recommend building stronger resources to support international students/learners. This includes supporting current faculty to include multiple language resources in their classrooms.	I agree with the committee's response.
5. We recommend developing revenue and skill sharing around multiple graduate programs in the university.	The courses developed for the course-based MA are designed to include practice and praxis-oriented components that will serve MFA students well. These courses will address ongoing issues in the MFA and allow the faculty to increase the number of graduate student enrolments overall.
6. We recommend moving the student gallery from the downtown location back to the University.	I agree with the committee's response. Any action on this should be considered in the context of other FFA spaces in UCA and in relation to conversations about Destination II planning.
7. We recommend that technicians be involved in the intake process for incoming graduate students.	I agree with the committee's response. While technicians are valuable members of the team supporting graduate students, their role needs to remain advisory. It would be inappropriate for technicians to be included in admission decisions, although faculty could certainly consult with technicians if relevant to a specific student's proposal's feasibility.
8. We recommend highlighting current research by current, and past teaching faculty. We recommend supporting current teaching faculty to develop research proposals.	I agree with the committee's response.
9. We strongly recommend that the current administration of the School of Graduate Studies provide appropriate leadership training for everyone who is involved in this program, but especially the Deans and Associate Deans, going forward.	The Associate Dean has been actively involved in professional development related to graduate studies since their term began. The Dean of SGS has indicated that with a network or more shared model of graduate studies support, they are hopeful we can find a way to champion more leadership and supervisory training. At the Faculty level, as we review graduate program coordination, we will also look at how training, expectations, and resources for advisors and advisory committee members can be more uniform across the faculty.
10. The website for UofL's graduate programs in Fine Arts presents challenges for both searches and promotion.	I agree with the committee's response. In particular, the current hosting of graduate programs on the future student's website means that it is difficult to update information and that it is difficult to coordinate recruitment and communications across undergraduate and graduate programs in the Fine Arts. The Dean of SGS shares these concerns and has contextualized them as part of larger ongoing discussions; they indicate that they would support and value any type of coordinated response we could make to address the ongoing concerns about the Future Students (graduate) page.
11. A recommendation is to have a strategic plan of who are you contacting in terms of leaders of that community and how would you provide a decolonized environment or that programs support the ways of	The Dean of SGS indicates that they would like for engagement with the Blackfoot community to be a priority in its (strategic) plan. In the FFA, we are exploring how to create better ways of collaborating with, and recognizing the labour of, Indigenous Elders and cultural experts as members of graduate students' committees and as advisors on curriculum at the undergraduate

creating from an indigenous perspective/practice.

and graduate levels. I would also note that from the external reviewers' report, it seems that many aspects of how the FFA has begun to address Indigenization at the curriculum and programming level, as well as significant research projects taking place in FFA, were not communicated to the external reviewers.

Consulting the External Reviewer Recommendations, the Program Response, and Dean Heather Davis-Fisch, the Academic Quality Assurance Committee made the following five (5) recommendations for action which the Program must report on in 1 and 3 years:

1. The Faculty of Fine Arts Dean's Office in consultation with the Master of Fine Arts program and other stakeholders will develop a web page that:
 - a. Includes an up-to-date Faculty Directory.
 - b. Profiles current MFA students (and where possible past MFA graduates).
 - c. Offers clear information about the MFA program requirements for current students.
 - d. Acts as a marketing and recruitment tool for future MFA students.
2. The Faculty of Fine Arts will form an ad hoc committee to address elements of concern around the Master of Fine Arts and other graduate programs, including but not limited to:
 - a. Clarifying and streamlining of administrative structures, and the roles of the GPFAC, Program Coordinators, and Associate and Assistant Deans in these programs. This work will align with the current institutional level work to create consistency and efficiency with respect to SGS/Faculty administrative structure and governance.
 - b. Consulting with SGS on issues of workload and appropriate recognition of advisors and committees, to better understand and explore practices across institutions of our size.
 - c. Improving communication and consultation with technicians involved in the graduate program.
3. The Faculty of Fine Arts will continue work on the course-based Master of Arts application to the Ministry of Advanced Education, considering how it can support MFA programs with courses and cohort-building that enhances the graduate experience.
4. The Master of Fine Arts program should actively participate in space planning for Destination II to ensure the needs of both their faculty and students are understood. The possibility of space for a student gallery should be part of this discussion.
5. The Master of Fine Arts program will work with the FFA Iniskim Advisory Circle to continue to deepen and strengthen relations with the Indigenous community, including:
 - a. Developing meaningful engagement for community members involved in graduate programming.
 - b. How to incorporate Indigenous knowledge into the graduate curriculum.

The Academic Quality Assurance Committee is satisfied that the Master of Fine Arts 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,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "L Kennedy", with a horizontal line underneath.

Dr. Lynn Kennedy
Chair, Academic Quality Assurance Committee
Associate Professor, Department of History and Religion

cc Michelle Helstein, PhD.
Provost & Vice-President (Academic)