

## SENATE COMMITTEE ON UNIVERSITY PLANNING

### Academic Unit Review – Summary

**Department:** Fine Arts

<b>Site Visit</b>	March 15-16, 2011
<b>Date of Report</b>	April 21, 2011
<b>Informal Response to Planning</b>	June 22, 2011
<b>Formal Response to Planning</b>	October 27, 2011
<b>Implementation Update</b>	Expected Winter 2013
<b>Midterm Review</b>	Expected Fall 2016

#### Summary of Departmental Self-Study

The Department of Fine Arts has a long and proud history at Mount Allison. The teaching of Art began here at the Ladies' College in 1854; the Owens Art Gallery – the oldest university art gallery in Canada – has been on campus since 1895; and Mount Allison University awarded the first Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in Canada in 1941. Many of the Department's graduates are renowned Canadian artists, and its faculty members have been and are heavily involved in exhibitions, scholarship, and artist residencies elsewhere, and have received considerable recognition as productive artists and art professionals.

The Department of Fine Arts and its programs have a strong reputation in the Canadian art community. The Department currently offers a B.F.A. program, with B.A. students having the opportunity to major or minor in either studio Fine Arts or Art History. Emphasis is placed on facilitating the development of creative, technical, and critical ability in drawing, painting, photography, printmaking, sculpture, open media, and various combinations of these different media, along with study in Art History. The Department provides a wide array of additional opportunities, including collaborative activity involving the Struts Gallery and access to new media equipment and technical assistance via the Faucet Media Arts Centre, both in Sackville; a number of student-run galleries and other spaces for the display of art work by faculty, graduates, and students; internships; field trips, including a biennial one to New York City; and special projects, on campus, in nearby communities, and elsewhere in the region.

The full-time faculty complement in Fine Arts currently stands at seven. In addition, there is an Adjunct Professor associated with the Department and an artist-in-residence (shared with l'université de Moncton), along with a departmental secretary, a full-time printmaking technician/lecturer, a part-time photography technician/lecturer, a part-time sculpture technician, a part-time (shared) visual

resources technician, and a number of other student technicians. A large and varied number of visiting artists have significantly broadened the scope of the program as well through the years. There have been between 70 and 78 B.F.A. students at Mount Allison during each of the past five years. The total number of students enrolled in Fine Arts programs or courses has ranged from 112 to 136 over that same period, and the number of graduates with a B.F.A., a Major or Minor in Fine Arts, and a Major or Minor in Art History from 24 to 30 in the most recent four years.

The program is delivered in three different buildings, the Gairdner Fine Arts Building, Hart Hall, and the Fawcett Building. Each of them suffers from a number of inadequacies, but they – and particularly the Gairdner Fine Arts Building – have served the Department well as it has delivered its program to its students over the past many years. The Department is anticipating the construction of a new building that will serve within a few years to consolidate its operations; provide a dedicated seminar room and various improved uses of space; enable movement into new curricular areas, in particular permitting the housing of new, digital video and sound equipment; minimize crowding; and maximize safety.

The Department indicated some apprehension vis-à-vis the rather modest increase of net space and the implications of that for its studio program, and expressed concerns related to the absence of full and final detail concerning the building plans. The Department also identified the need to establish full-time hours for both the sculpture and photography technicians as a significant challenge. As well, they indicated a desire to re-establish the Honours in Art History that had once existed in their program. Finally, they suggested that new recruitment strategies, including the establishment of additional scholarships, would be needed to maintain the incoming first year classes at the 20 to 24 level experienced in recent years.

The detailed appendices provided in the Department's self-study included a most illuminating collection of considerably detailed comments from Fine Arts graduates from the past few decades.

### **Summary of External Reviewers' Report**

By and large, the External Review Committee concurred with the views expressed in the Department's self-study as to its strengths, its concerns, and the challenges its members anticipated. They confirmed the high, indeed legendary, reputation of the Department and its programs among Fine Arts educators; suggested that the current complement of faculty was particularly collegial, energetic, resourceful, and renewal-oriented; and reported a unanimity in student views that the faculty members were collegial, co-operative, caring, knowledgeable, and interdisciplinary in orientation. The reviewers also reported that faculty, technicians, and students expressed some anxiety about the future and concern over what appeared to them to be the university administration's somewhat fitful support of their efforts and

initiatives. They also underlined the potential benefits of adding teaching power in the area of Art History.

The reviewers considered at some length the deficiencies of current spaces available and used in creative ways in Fine Arts, and apprehension that the planned new building might prove an inadequate solution. They counseled that account needs to be taken of non-studio spaces currently being used, particularly in the hallways; that student complaints about crowded and otherwise inadequate working space need to be heeded; and that attention should be paid in particular to the studio technicians, with their deep understanding of what is required to remedy the situation. The reviewers also reported a general *malaise* within the Department concerning communications gaps and deficiencies and seemingly peremptory administrative actions. Finally, they questioned the merits of housing Fine Arts and Drama Studies in the same building, as well as the assumption of some shared and cross-purposed space associated with that decision.

The reviewers' diagnosis of the challenges facing Fine Arts also included reference to the importance of dedicated Art History lecture-room facilities; the perception that various internal funding bodies require more transparent processes and should provide more generous and equitable funding; and the general need for better compensation for research, creative activity, teaching, and administrative service.

The reviewers provided many specific recommendations for the short, medium, and long term. The short-term ones dealing only with faculty matters included making the sculpture and photography technician positions full-time; increasing funding for faculty; reducing their teaching responsibilities and/or establishing payment for overload teaching; providing better compensation for the Department Head; and guaranteeing Fine Arts faculty or staff representation on the Research and Creative Activity Committee. There were also a number of short-term recommendations as to programming within the Department, some involving funding enhancement, some referring to shifts in curricular emphasis, and some pertaining to creating a more effective approach to student advising. There were also many specific suggestions concerning the planning and development of the new building, consistent with the arguments alluded to above. In the medium and long term, they again recommended many changes, of which we shall identify only a sub-set. They argued for additional teaching power in the area of Art History as well as the creation of a new position in new media/digital media; an emphasis on interdisciplinarity in future hiring; greater consolidation of and compensation for community education and outreach; re-establishment of an Honours in Art History; development of a museum studies and/or an arts conservation program in collaboration with the Owens Art Gallery; maintaining a foothold in the Gairdner Fine Arts Building as the Department "sees fit", if additional square footage were not included in the new building; and improving both digital art resources and computer resources and software, as well as training in the use of same.

## **Summary of Departmental Response**

The response from the Department of Fine Arts indicates fundamental agreement with the major arguments presented in the External Review Committee's Report. However, the Department chose to focus in its response to the review and the subsequent suggestions made by the University Planning Committee and the Provost on several specific, essential, urgent, and in their judgment attainable objectives. They were as follows.

- Have the sculpture technician and photo technician positions made full-time, like the printmaking one already is in Fine Arts, and "consistent with other technician positions on campus".
- Improve the communications and decision-making processes associated with the planning for the new "Fine Arts Building".
- Drop what the Fine Arts Department views as the unworkable and potentially disastrous idea of having Fine Arts share either a wood or metal shop with the Drama Studies program in the new Fine and Performing Arts Centre (the working name that has been used for several years now, to connote the intention to have the building house both Fine Arts and Drama Studies).
- Seek to retain some space in the present primary location of Fine Arts (the Gairdner Fine Arts Building), unless additional square footage were provided to Fine Arts beyond that currently allocated within the planned Fine and Performing Arts Centre, particularly to accommodate better the needs for studio space for fourth-year students and for faculty members.
- Add a position, possibly involving cross-appointment, in the area of Arts History, and seek to re-establish an Honours program in Art History.

These and other arguments were made most forcefully, and in the case of the middle three at a level of considerable detail, in the meeting at which the Department's final response was presented to the University Planning Committee by Thaddeus Holownia, the Head of Fine Arts, and Erik Edson, the Chair of its internal Review Committee.

## **Planning Committee and Provost Response**

It was added in discussion during the meeting with the University Planning Committee that other matters raised by the Department, by the external reviewers, and even by members of the University Planning Committee might well be dealt with later, but could and indeed should not be considered without first addressing the critical needs noted above, since everything else in the Department's view depended on resolving the issues identified therein. It was acknowledged by the Fine Arts representatives during that meeting that some improvement in technician hours had been experienced in recent years, that efforts had been made in recent months to improve communications around the planning of the new building, and

that in some ways the new building as it was conceptualized would indeed be an improvement over the *status quo*.

The Provost suggested that, as a result of the very attempt to improve communication, differences of opinion and perspective on some of the matters under discussion had become all the more apparent, seemingly increasing anxiety for all concerned. This situation continued for some time after the meeting between the University Planning Committee and representatives from Fine Arts. However, in recent days there has been improvement in the situation, with there having emerged considerable clarification of options and rationales and an emergent consensus on changes in the plans. Given the nature of those changes, we see no reason for Fine Arts to maintain a foothold in the Gairdner Building once the Department has moved into the new facility, although we acknowledge that the Department continues to believe this to be desirable.

It was suggested during the early “informal response” meeting between the Department Head and the University Planning Committee that the current plans for the new building do not allow for the hoped-for expansion of the program, and indeed imply a need to reduce the number of students admitted into the program. In that latter connection, we would observe that 30, 26, 26, 26, and 23 students were accepted into the first year of the Fine Arts program from 2006 to 2010; these numbers include majors and minors in studio courses along with full-time BFA numbers of 21-24 in each year’s class. The prospect of the new building and its improved facilities and resources, and expansion of the curriculum in the desired directions, might engender greater interest and warrant a slight expansion of the incoming cohort. We recognize also that the Department of Fine Arts admits non-Fine Arts students into certain of their art history and even their studio courses, so the first-year enrolment enumerated above under-estimates the space needs of the program even if the *status quo* were to be maintained. Precisely for that reason, the plans for the new building are premised on a Fine Arts student complement of 20-24, and on providing for those students, the faculty, and the technicians the best possible use of the space and equipment available, within the budget provided.

We hope that, as communication progresses, mutually satisfactory ways continue to be found around the remaining difficulties and that, once the building is completed and the programs have moved into it, some of the synergistic possibilities envisioned several years ago will eventuate, including for example collaborative projects involving both Fine Arts and Drama Studies.

On the matter of adding a position in Art History and restoring an Honours program in Art History, the Department has indicated a preference for a new colleague entirely within the Department, but would certainly welcome a colleague shared with another academic unit if that were as much as were feasible. In discussion with the Provost and University Planning Committee, the Department has acknowledged that there are existing courses and/or potential teaching resources that would be

helpful in that regard in a number of other programs at Mount Allison, such as Canadian Studies, Classics, English, French, German, and History.

We recommend that the senior administration, with the advice of the University Planning Committee and Senate, find ways to expand and use more effectively the resources provided to the Department, starting with a commitment to shifting the sculpture and photography technician positions to full-time ones and to setting in motion discussions in appropriate bodies of how best to restore an Honours program in Art History. We also urge the administration to ensure that the momentum recently experienced in discussion of functional needs and design issues relating to the new building be maintained, and trust that any remaining issues will be resolved in the very near future, if honest and clear discussion occurs and good will is maintained. Critical roles will necessarily be played by the Dean of Arts, the Provost and Vice-President, Academic and Research, and the Vice-President, Administration in ensuring that all such discussions occur at various levels and in facilitating communication between and among those levels.

Some of the many other recommendations made by the reviewers and not addressed directly by the Department in its response seem to us to reflect slight misunderstandings of the situation, to be based on inadequate evidence, or to be unrealistic in the extreme. Others certainly warrant further consideration, and we anticipate that they will be addressed, either while the major issues that the Department has seized on are tackled or afterwards. This will require close communication between the Department Head and the Dean of Arts.