

# Annual Assessment Report

Academic Year: 2015 - 2016

Department: The School of Art

Program(s):  
Master of Fine Art in Art

## What Was Done?

### Assessment Activities

#### Discipline-Specific Knowledge

Knowledge, skills, and abilities are assessed in the School of art by evaluations done in studio, and Thesis work. These evaluations are in the form of critiques of the student artist's final works of art; the assessment of the Thesis Exhibition; assessment of the Thesis and pre-Thesis paper/s and assessment of the student artist's knowledge of a wide variety of basic studio skills and educational theories related to artistic experiences (

#### Communication Skills

Communication skills are assessed by evaluating the student's ability to verbally express understanding of the art produced as well as the art produced by peers. This assessment takes place with one or more faculty in both individual and group formal critiques.

In the area of written communication, students are assessed with art history papers, journals in studio courses, and thesis statements.

Thesis course. Written communication skills develop an understanding of common art elements and vocabulary, place works of art in historical and stylistic context, and form and defend value judgments about art and design and art-related issues.

#### Problem-Solving Skills

Problem-solving skills are assessed by evaluating the student's competence in demonstrating the ability to communicate the origin and generation of ideas, and by evaluating the creative and technical skills appropriate to the particular studio such as color theory, painting, bronze casting, environmental art etc. Students must be able to break down the different levels of achievement in a composition, and discuss the thought process used to arrive at the final product. Evaluation is conducted by the studio instructor as well as student peers and outside reviewers.

Creative problem-solving is a basic skill for all art majors and is assessed at every level from first years through to senior year studio courses.

### Assessment Results

#### Discipline-Specific Knowledge

Students in the School of Art develop a high level of competencies in creating finished works of art. The quality of work in the MFA Thesis Exhibition demonstrates success and knowledge of art-making skills and abilities. Students win awards in exhibitions, are successful in seeking employment with their portfolios, and have a high rate of acceptance into the creative industries across the country.

Finished works of art demonstrate competence in technical skills, and understanding of processes and materials. Some of the areas of strength in this category are drawing, three-dimensional skills and abilities, and photographic concepts. Students demonstrate through their creative practices the ability to manage complexity, address change and engaged in diversity within cultural contexts.

### **Communication Skills**

The level of communication skills in the form of written research papers are generally good. MFA's have an especially high level of success in graduate Scholars Conference presentations. The School of Art MFA program prepare students to understand the theory of criticism both for individual understanding of one's own artwork, and to discuss the work of their peers. To this end The School of Art has made three significant changes to the MFA Program. First, while keeping common course numbering and portability of credits in mind, and in an effort to bring the curriculum fully into the 21st century we began breaking down the walls between disciplines

The guiding philosophy is: "Professional success in the visual arts requires knowledge of past and present accomplishments in the field, an ability to make interdisciplinary connections, and a strong sense of self-direction.

In the MFA Program, students will be encouraged to develop and enhance their technical skills, develop their critical judgment, refine their personal goals, and expand their understanding of history and culture. The seminar and new caucus course/s offer an in-depth range of critical and cultural topics in visual arts and practices.

Current curricular goals are: After successful completion of the first year MFA, students will have achieved a professional disposition, as demonstrated by:

1. An ability to develop and solve visual problems using various strategies for idea generation;
2. An ability to creatively translate ideas into visual terms using a range of art media and design processes;
3. A capacity to think critically, and write and speak clearly about the visual arts;
4. An understanding of the wide range of contemporary and historical visual culture and its role in society;
5. A work ethic that reflects integrity, teamwork, dedication to professional growth, social responsibility and the confidence to take risks."

### **Problem-Solving Skills**

Student competencies in the area of problem-solving skills are high in the area of technical skills for MFA, and high in the ability to analyze works of art and evaluate them critically. MFA students are generally confident in their decision of making skills as they relate to creative concepts.

As devised in consultation with Curriculum Committee, Student Consultation Committee for Graduate Education and the Director of the School; the most recent iteration of the MFA program has introduced caucus to the program and created distinctive approaches to engagement discovery & learning to the three years of the program.

### **What Data Were Collected**

Assessment is a key part of communicating the success of students and curriculum to all parties involved in the process. The Director of the School of Art regularly seek input from all School of Art faculty concerning the MFA curriculum. During the assessment reviews we ask reviewers to look for successful and less successful research and creative processes. We seek feedback from MFA students and ask them to recall what parts of the curriculum stick out in their memory as relevant. GTA's provide critical evaluation of the assignments they are teaching. Finally, we use the MFA Student Consultative Committee to listen to and act on needed improvements to the program or facilities.

Curricular assessment is concerned with all aspects of the program. First, to ensure our curriculum is designed to provide students with relevant and meaningful skillsets and knowledge appropriate to the classes and disciplines we offer. Second, the curriculum must be deliverable by/with the allocated resources, including time and space. Third, the delivery of the content must facilitate learning and discovery. Finally, each assignment is designed with specific learning outcomes, which, when aggregated meet the curricular goals and mission and vision of MSU and comply with NASAD accreditation guidelines.

### **What Was Learned**

Through the self-assessment process involving faculty, students, the Directors office and NASAD accreditation self-study the area of primary concern that became evident is the need for GTA stipends and credit waivers. Looking to the future we will continue to foster a curriculum with the ideal 'collision of the digital and physical', reflecting contemporary art. Other goals in the future include the continued improvement of the studio environment. This includes appropriate ventilation for a safe and healthy learning environment. It also includes the evolution of technological advancements in state of the art computer connectivity though wireless connections and the best implementation of resources to create active learning digital environments. The final goal will be to continue to improve career placement of MFA's locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. With half our MFA's staying in Montana and the other half leaving the state, we must always be mindful that our curriculum outcomes are in step with those in the creative and scholarly profession. This goal has far reaching implications at all levels of the MFA curriculum and requires a team effort by both the faculty and administration to successfully be achieved. While the majority of the aspects of communication on the scoring rubric scored above our threshold values, we identified in students' ability to research relevant contemporary art and design practices very good. Student competencies in the area of problem-solving skills are high in the area of technical skills for studio majors, and High in the ability to analyze works of art and evaluate them critically. MFA students are generally confident in their decision making skills as they relate to creative and cultural concepts. Some levels of improvement are needed in criticism and analytical synthesis of creative problem solving in the first year of studies which the new caucus course should address.

### **How We Responded**

Additional emphasis on research of historical and contemporary art and design practices; and organization of student time management will be integrated in our MFA program. To address this we have separated Graduate Seminar from graduate caucus.

Our assessment indicated that no changes are needed regarding learning outcome and assessment criteria.