



UCF Academic Program Review 2015-16 Consultant Graduate Program Review

Program: **Emerging Media, M.F.A.**

Reviewer(s) Name(s):

Report Author(s): **Kimberly Burleigh, Ian Bogost, Jed Dannenbaum and Carmon Colangelo**

Instructions: Please offer your assessment of each item below, considering when appropriate, your knowledge of other public research institutions. While a few items solicit an open-ended response, most ask you to rate a particular characteristic of the program under review as exemplary, appropriate, or needing improvement. At the end of each section, please elaborate on any items in that section identified as exemplary or needing improvement. Additional comments are optional. You may offer recommendations for improvement on the topics covered in each section at the end of the respective section and/or you may provide all recommendations for program improvement in item 8.3 at the end of this document.

Section 1 Program Goals and Planned Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)

Please evaluate the following:

- 1.1 Program goals and objectives, including those related to planned student learning outcomes (In addition to the program self-study, you may wish to consult the *Student Learning Outcomes Assessment* library in the UCF APR Web site.)

Please select only one option from the list below:

Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

Please elaborate if you identified item 1.1 as exemplary or needing improvement. Other comments are optional.

The Emerging Media MFA consists of tracks in Digital Media, Entrepreneurial Digital Cinema, and Studio Art and the Computer* (The Studio Art track is undergoing a name change to help clarify its objectives to potential students. This will be implemented in 2016-2017).

The goal of preparing students for careers as art and design practitioners, scholars, and educators in arts-affiliated fields is appropriate, yet the program needs significant improvement to meet these stated objectives. While the concept of the Emerging Media tracks was an ambitious one and intended to allow for a meaningful integration of studio art, digital media and film, there does not seem to be a strong interdisciplinary connection within the program, nor is there a sufficient disciplinary focus—with appropriate studio time—to meet the professional standards of the MFA degree in individual disciplines.

To earn the MFA, a student must exhibit the highest level of accomplishment through the generation of a body of work. The current curriculum and sequence of courses is not aligned with this goal. More time is needed for students to make and conceptualize their own work and to explore various media materials, and craft skills in order to achieve a high level of mastery.

Professional competency is often met through the concentration of a specific discipline such as painting, sculpture, photography, printmaking, digital media and cinematic media . In programs that focus on interdisciplinary study, it is even more essential that the curriculum allow for in-depth exploration directed, through careful faculty engagement and planning, for individual creative investigation, arts practice and research. Differently put, an interdisciplinary MFA must not sacrifice depth of accomplishment for breadth of discipline.

An MFA program such as this should also include study of cultural heritage through critical study seminars and art history courses that explore how theory is used in studio practice to inform, synthesize and develop a thesis exhibition and body of work. The proposed curriculum we were presented with (drafted in November 2015) for the Emerging Media MFA in Studio Art is more closely aligned with these goals, but it should also be shaped carefully to assure that significant studio time is protected in the program. A clear and formal process for an “Admission to Candidacy” review at the end of the first year or third semester would assure satisfactory student preparedness to advance to a graduate thesis and to work towards an MFA degree exhibition. The degree exhibition must be required to earn the degree. The written thesis should augment the exhibition and final body of work.

Additionally, while students in the MFA Studio (other than those in Film) have adequate personal studios, a dedicated cross-disciplinary digital labs, and a print center, the overall access to facilities downtown is inadequate in terms of providing proper studio equipment and tools for producing creative work. Few improvements, if any, have been made to the art studio since the last review, and the same problems were noted then, including the continuing lack of access to basic services, equipment and tools for processes other than painting, drawing and digital output. Furthermore, the studios’ physical distance from the main campus, and the resulting disconnection from the creative environment of SVAD as a whole, continues to mean less contact time than is desirable with the faculty, fewer opportunities for informal interactions with undergraduates on the main campus, and difficult access to more advanced studios for studio production in equipment intensive areas such as sculpture, ceramics and printmaking.

The program most damaged by this disconnection is the MFA in Film which had been thriving and attracting students with its emphasis on microbudget feature filmmaking until it was merged with Art and Digital Media and reconstituted as a poorly thought-out MFA degree in Entrepreneurial Digital Cinema which (despite its name) changed its emphasis from commercial features to much shorter experimental films. The move downtown, at first a source of excitement and hope, was quickly followed by confusion and disappointment, as promised facilities were dropped from the plan and the piecemeal move itself became a source of further isolation and fragmentation for the Film program, which already felt misunderstood, unrepresented and disregarded within SVAD. The ill-defined, inadequately funded and poorly marketed MFA has been a source of frustration and further alienation for both the students who enrolled (often without understanding the curriculum) and the faculty who have tried to address their concerns.

Recommendations, if any, in the area of program goals and planned student learning outcomes:

Adopt the new MFA in Visual Art curriculum as proposed with attention to all the issues stated above. See CAA MFA Standards and Guidelines: <http://www.collegeart.org/guidelines/mfa>

Proposals for two new tracks in the Emerging Media MFA appear to be in development, one in Character Animation and one in Meaningful Play. Both proposals are promising and worthy of pursuit given the proper resources and attention.

The Character Animation MFA has strong potential; the current BFA students are producing good work and

there is demand for the MFA. The facilities may need to be improved or supplemented to support such a program, in which case a careful evaluation of projections and required space, equipment, staff, and so forth should be conducted.

The Meaningful Play MFA offers partial salve for the flagging Digital Media MA (see separate report). It has the benefit of avoiding competition with the FEIA masters degree, which is far more oriented to the traditional commercial industry. It appears that substantial interest for this degree exists among current students, suggesting that it might even be sustainable in the short term just from continuing BA students. The concept of this degree is truly in the spirit of the arts, and it has the potential to become a nationally distinctive program if pursued correctly.

Consider moving the MFA programs back to the main campus to be closer to their home department with open access to the studios, tools and equipment until the School can properly invest in the MFA current tracks and programs to be together in proper facilities and in a manner that signals interdisciplinary synergy rather than additional physical and creative dispersion. A move back to the main campus would require adequate studio space in the same buildings or in close proximity to the main buildings for each graduate to have access to specialized equipment in existing buildings. Either way investments will be critical to continuing the program, growing a successful program and sustaining a future program.

Regardless of the outcome of the above choice as to whether to move all the MFA programs back to the main campus until new facilities are ready for the School as a whole, the Film MFA should be returned and placed under the aegis of the Film program. The Film administration and faculty should study and propose a clear interdisciplinary focus and suitable curriculum for the degree, and then work with the School administration to recruit students who will thrive within the graduate program.

Section 2 Program Coordination and Administration

Please evaluate the following:

2.1 Program administrative and management structures to effectively run program (e.g., effectiveness of program coordination, process for monitoring students' progress to degree, program handbooks, process for selecting preceptors/thesis advisors/research mentors/clinical supervisors)

Please select only one option from the list below:

Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

2.2 Student access to resources to enhance student success (e.g., advising, faculty members, appropriate technology)

Please select only one option from the list below:

Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

Please elaborate if you identified any items in this section (2.1-2.2) as exemplary or needing improvement. Other comments are optional.

The MFA program lacks full time leadership or a clear administrative structure so even basic issues linger and undermine the integrity of the MFA program. Much more coordination is needed in the current structure and this will continue to be the case regardless of curriculum changes or any relocation. The current coordinator lacks any real authority over the program and is also the full time gallery director; she does not have an MFA and is non-tenured. While the current coordinator is very well liked and respected by the students and is making

strong contributions, including sharing visitors who are part of the current gallery program, it is critical that the faculty member who coordinates the program and who becomes the Graduate Chair holds a terminal MFA degree or PhD in one of the areas, has demonstrable interest in and experience with interdisciplinary work, and is a tenured faculty member.

Recommendations, if any, in the area of program coordination and administration:

We strongly recommend that the School appoint and properly compensate a highly qualified artist, filmmaker or digital media faculty member to serve as a Graduate Chair to lead the program; this should be someone who holds an MFA in one of these areas and who has a strong vision for interdisciplinary education and understanding of all three tracks. The Graduate Chair should be in a term position of 3-5 years and one who has the confidence of the faculty and who is appointed by the Director of SVAD. The Chair should have the authority to act on all matters germane to the graduate program including curriculum, budget and facility matters; while working in close consultation with the faculty and director.

Each program requires close coordination between faculty in each discipline to develop the curriculum and implement the program. Graduate students should be assigned at least two faculty mentors/advisors for each semester with one serving as their major professor. An MFA program is not simply a series of disparate courses; it is a focused period of creative activity and research, contributing to a conceptualized body of work demonstrating a high level of execution, focus and innovation.

The responsibilities of the Graduate Chair must be clearly defined and should include developing the curriculum in collaboration with the faculty, implementing the review process, assigning the faculty mentors/advisors and managing the graduate program budget and resources in coordination with the director of the School. If graduate programs are to relocate closer to their home base on the main campus until the new facilities are completed or significantly upgraded, close coordination with undergraduate Chairs would also be critical to the success and use of shared resources, studios, classrooms and equipment.

Section 3 Program Demand and Productivity

Please evaluate the following:

3.1 Program's ability to meet student demand for the major

Please select only one option from the list below:

Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

3.2 Enrollment levels relative to faculty size and composition

Please select only one option from the list below:

Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

3.3 Program's ability and responsiveness to meet the needs of other disciplines (e.g., program offerings that support other programs)

Please select only one option from the list below:

Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

3.4 Program's ability and responsiveness to meet local, regional, and national needs

Please select only one option from the list below:

Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

3.5 Student retention

Please select only one option from the list below:
 Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

3.6 Student time-to-degree in the program

Please select only one option from the list below:
 Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

Please elaborate if you identified any items in this section (3.1- 3.6) as exemplary or needing improvement. Other comments are optional.

There has been a decline in the demand for the program with the number of applicants dropping every year from 2008/9 (19 applicants) to 2013/14 (4 applicants). Moreover, it is largely attracting in-state students and undergraduates from UCF. Too many of the students in the MFA program come from the BA or BFA program at UCF.

Students expressed a great deal of unhappiness regarding the curriculum, the lack of maintenance of facilities and overall lack of attention and management of the program. They articulated a very high degree of frustration about classes that are mostly assignment-driven and not relevant to the development of their creative work and area of research. Students feel discouraged by the lack of leadership and amount of busy work assigned without much consideration of the goals and objectives of the MFA degree. There appears to be a lack of intensity and consistency in critiques, advising and mentorship. There is also a dire need for visiting artists and critics to bring new and diverse ideas to the program. Visitors and external reviewers are part of most MFA art and design programs and contribute to building the reputation of the program and help with both recruitment and retention.

Students are physically disconnected and expected to provide their own transportation to get to the main campus to TA for classes or take electives. This makes the program less attractive and difficult to navigate. Some students expressed serious safety concerns about having to drive in heavy traffic to meet for classes. This takes up considerable amounts of time and adds to the financial burden of the students in having to provide their own transportation between locations.

Recommendations, if any, in the area of program demand and productivity:

Improvements to curriculum and facilities along with strong program leadership with greater focus on building a stronger identity and reputation would lead to increased application numbers from diverse candidates in the region. The School is to be commended for successfully increasing the number of graduate teaching assistantships and scholarships and they should continue to do so as well as use these deliberately to help attract highly qualified applicants.

We recommend that SVAD consider eliminating the GRE as an application requirement. Applications to the MFA at most NASAD accredited programs, including the University of Cincinnati and Washington University in St. Louis for instance, do not require the GRE; eliminating this requirement may open the door to more applicants.

The university should be providing reliable, safe and affordable transportation as long as students are expected to be on both campuses. Moving the MFA programs back to the main campus would alleviate this issue until the proper facilities for all MFA students and transportation can be provided downtown.

Section 4 Program Quality

Please evaluate the following:

4.1 Criteria for program admission (if applicable)

Please select only one option from the list below:

Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

4.2 Quality and rigor of student learning outcome targets (Refer to student learning outcomes assessment plans located in the *Student Learning Outcomes Assessment* library of the APR Web site.)

Please select only one option from the list below:

Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

4.3 Evidence of student learning consistent with stated program goals (including planned student learning outcomes) and discipline standards

Please select only one option from the list below:

Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

4.4 Student licensure pass rates (if applicable)

Please select only one option from the list below:

Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

4.5 Placement rates for graduates relative to disciplinary trends at other public research universities

Please select only one option from the list below:

Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

Student Perceptions of Program Quality

Based upon your interactions with students in the program, please indicate how you believe students in the program view the program in the following areas:

4.6 Students' perception of the overall administration of the program

Please select only one option from the list below:

Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

4.7 Students' perception of advising and mentoring

Please select only one option from the list below:

Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

4.8 Students' perception of program quality and rigor

Please select only one option from the list below:

Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

4.9 Students' perceptions of the academic and collegial atmosphere of the program

Please select only one option from the list below:

Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

Please elaborate if you identified any items in this section (4.1- 4.8) as exemplary or needing improvement. Other comments are optional.

The current curriculum for the MFA studio art is not appropriate as noted above. It should require far less specific coursework and allow for more individual studio work. The students are aware of this and were quite outspoken about it.

Recommendations, if any, in the area of program quality:

The faculty and administration have been working to respond to these issues by developing a new curriculum see: MFA proposal Draft, November 2015. We were told these plans were delayed until after our visit and we recommend they be reviewed, adjusted and implemented ASAP. See above 3.6.

In the Film program, the faculty and the students expressed concerns about the lack of meaningful diversity in the faculty, and (as reported by students) in the limited scope of the content of the degree programs and the frequent (if presumably inadvertent) narrowness of the content the professors are presenting — for example, students spoke of courses where all the film clips, quotes, and discussions of important filmmakers, etc., were exclusively about white, male, American, Hollywood-oriented directors. The Film faculty has lost FTE lines and is suffering from production classes that are too large and lecture classes that are unwieldy given the lack of teaching assistant support. We recommend that when hiring new faculty, diversity should be a priority. As noted above, we also recommend relocating the Film MFA back to the main campus until a time when a creative community and appropriate resources can be provided downtown.

Section 5 Student Characteristics and Quality

Please evaluate the following:

5.1 Program's ability to attract high quality students

Please select only one option from the list below:

Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

5.2 Incoming students' credentials

Please select only one option from the list below:

Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

5.3 Student diversity

Please select only one option from the list below:

Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

5.4 Quality of student accomplishments compared to similar programs at other public research universities (e.g., theses, dissertations, creative works, papers presented; awards won; quality of subsequent graduate and professional programs entered; employment) (Refer to student works located in the *Student Works* library of the APR Web site as well as any additional student works you may have reviewed during your site visit.)

Please select only one option from the list below:

Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

5.5 Program relationship with alumni

Please select only one option from the list below:

Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

Please elaborate if you identified any items in this section (5.1-5.5) as exemplary or needing improvement. Other comments are optional.

The student work would benefit from all of the comments made above.

Recommendations, if any, in the area of student characteristics and quality:

The ability of the program to attract students could be improved once the studio facility and curricular issues are addressed as noted earlier. Once this is addressed investments in recruitment materials advertising the program along with announcements about graduate assistantships would also attract a stronger applicant pool. A more consistent visiting artist program is needed to augment the program. It would also help establish connections to other institutions and advance recruitment. The program should expect to have at least 3-4 visitors per semester and continue to leverage the gallery program and sharing with special programs such as Flying Horse Press and FIEA. Private sponsorships might be sought or there may be central resources or student activity fees to share the cost for visitors.

Section 6 Curriculum, Course Offerings, and Student Engagement Opportunities

Please evaluate the following:

6.1 Current curriculum's alignment with program goals

Please select only one option from the list below:

Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

6.2 Design of core courses' to provide students a solid foundation in the discipline

Please select only one option from the list below:

Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

6.3 Availability and timeliness of required courses

Please select only one option from the list below:

Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

6.4 Adequacy of student professional development opportunities (e.g., research, clinical experience, student teaching)

Please select only one option from the list below:

Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

6.5 Balance between coursework and research, practica, independent study, etc., (e.g., too many or too few courses)

Please select only one option from the list below:
 Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

6.6 Overall quality and rigor of current curriculum

Please select only one option from the list below:
 Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

6.7 Incorporation of appropriate pedagogical and/or technological innovations into the curriculum

Please select only one option from the list below:
 Exemplary Appropriate Needs Improvement Don't Know Not Applicable

Please elaborate if you identified any items in this section (6.1-6.7) as exemplary or needing improvement. Other comments are optional.

See above recommendations for curriculum changes, a need for more engagement with visiting artists and critics; proper balance of studio time and coursework.

Recommendations, if any, in the area of curriculum, course offerings, and student engagement opportunities:

Since many MFA students come to graduate school with the idea that they may teach in higher education, and given the undergraduate enrollments and financial structure at UCF, it is good to see an increase in teaching opportunities and financial support for MFA students. By increasing both teaching and financial support even more, the program should be able to attract a more competitive pool of applicants. GTAs and TAs are an affordable way to respond to some of the large undergraduate class sizes, however a teaching practicum course and/or working directly with a faculty mentor as a GA at minimum is critical prior to teaching in either their second or third year.

Section 7 Comparative Advantage

7.1 If applicable, please identify features that distinguish the program from similar programs at other institutions (e.g., curriculum, faculty member expertise, student engagement opportunities)

The program's competitive advantage lies the overall low cost of the degree, the diversity of the faculty and overall student body at UCF, the ambition of the University to grow the scale and quality of graduate education, and the location and climate in Florida. If properly supported, the promise for a unique interdisciplinary focus in the merging of studio art and new technologies could provide for special niche status. However, in the absence of a stronger and more deliberate effort to provide the staffing, leadership, facilities and equipment, the review team feels that leveraging the current strength of the home programs and moving the facilities onto the main campus until investments are made downtown would benefit the program. We understand the complexity of these options, as either direction requires investments. Also, suspending the program could threaten the ability to rebuild it into a successful program.

7.2 Does the program fit a disciplinary niche? If so, please elaborate.

7.3 Please discuss the program's potential for achieving discipline (re-)accreditation or (re-)certification, if available.

The program is not positioned to be NASAD accredited and needs to address the curriculum, facility and administrative issues as well as the heavy faculty workloads that are not conducive to attracting top faculty and chronic undergraduate enrollment issues; faculty ratios and class sizes. Class sizes are fine at the graduate level but NASAD would not accredit the institution until it attends to these issues. The consultants recommend waiting until these issues are addressed before seeking accreditation.

Section 8 Analysis and Recommendations

8.1 Please identify up to five areas of greatest program strength.

1. Engaged and diverse student body with a strong sense of community
2. A dedicated and productive faculty and staff across a wide spectrum of specializations
3. Unique MFA degree tracks that could be developed and leveraged if truly integrated and supported
4. Access to the resources of a large University that has identified graduate growth as a top priority
5. The art, digital art, gaming and entertainment culture in Orlando

8.2 Please identify up to five areas of greatest concern for the program (e.g., program weaknesses, barriers, threats, unique vulnerabilities).

11. Curriculum that fully supports the MFA degree requirements and focus
2. Lack of strong graduate leadership, management and advocacy
3. Lack of access to specialized studio equipment, tools and facilities
4. Operational budget for general operations and visiting artists
5. Distance from main campus without adequate transportation

8.3 Please reflect on program centrality, cost, comparative advantage, demand, and quality. Keeping these factors in mind, please offer your recommendations for program improvement considering each of the following, as appropriate:

- improvements necessary for successful continuation of program operation (if applicable)
- improvements that are not resource intensive, but that are likely to enhance program quality
- improvements that, if resources permit, could help take the program to the next level of prominence

As noted in the last review, in order for the MFA program to truly achieve distinction and realize an interdisciplinary

vision significant investments in leadership, proper facilities and equipment, staff support and studio space would be needed as well as establishing innovative ways of connecting the graduate and undergraduate program in order to help overcome the physical distance between them. As noted back then, investing in more teaching assistantships and a visiting artist program and lecture series could help bridge some of this gap. While the three Emerging Media tracks have been created since that time, the curriculum has not been shaped to either meet the depth of content in each program nor has it been shaped to leverage the collaborative interdisciplinary potential of the whole. As recommended at that time leadership is needed in this area to be more decisive and strategic in all aspects of the planning and development of the program.

Section 9 Executive Summary

In one to two pages, please provide your overall impression of the program, emphasizing key aspects of the review. As appropriate, contextualize your assessment in relation to best practices in the discipline of study, graduate education, the broader higher education landscape, and/or industry trends within the field.