

Program Review

Final Report

Fine Art Diploma



Submitted to
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Faculty of Arts, Science & Management

North Island College

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Preamble

As we continue working through the process of program review and renewal we are guided by the college's overarching, interwoven strategic plans, *BUILD 2026*, *Widening Our Doorways*, and *Working Together* – *the NIC Indigenization Plan*. The recommendations put forth (and the action items detailed in the accompanying Action Plan) align with commitments articulated in the guiding documents and are part of our continued effort to meet the needs of our diverse community of learners.

A. Executive Summary

The faculty members of the Fine Art Diploma program developed a self-study which was shared with the external review team. The three reviewers who formed the external review team met virtually with various people at North Island College for two days to explore and learn about the challenges and successes of the Fine Art Diploma program.

The reviewers provided ten recommendations related to commitment to learners, program structures, the learning community, practices, and collective impact. These included recommendations regarding curriculum development, program goals, student engagement, Indigenization, and internationalization.

The Fine Art Diploma program has written this final report summarizing their self-study recommendations, along with their response to recommendations from the external review team.

This report accompanies an Action Plan report which details action items to undertake the recommendations.

B. Background

In accordance with North Island College's Policy 3-11, the department undertook the program review process. This final report synthesizes recommendations and next steps from the department's self-study and the external review report.

The self-study was completed in January 2022 and submitted to the dean of Arts, Science & Management, Dr. Neil Cruickshank. Survey data from current students, alumni, and faculty were included to support the conclusions and recommendations shared in the self-study.

The external review visit was conducted in February 2022 via online meetings using the web conferencing platform, BlueJeans.

The external review team consisted of *Paul Walde*, Associate Professor, Visual Arts, University of Victoria, *Brad Muir*, Chair and Professor, Visual Arts, Camosun College, and *Dr. Dan Hinman-Smith*, Instructor, Humanities & Social Sciences North Island College.

The external review team, in fulfillment of its responsibilities, met with:

- Vice-President, Academic: Tony Bellavia
- Dean, Arts, Science and Management: Dr. Neil Cruickshank
- Department Chair: Elizabeth Russell
- · Registrar: Michelle Badger
- Associate Registrar: Darin Bellham
- Director, Institutional Research and Planning: Wes Skulmoski
- Executive Director, International Education: Mark Herringer
- Manager, International Enrolment and Recruitment: Junko Leclair
- Director, Indigenous Education: Kelly Shopland
- Director, Centre for Teaching and Learning Innovation: Dr. Liesel Knaack
- Faculty
- Students and Alumni

This final report is based on the program self-study, the external review report, and responses from program faculty.

C. Program Characteristics

The Department of Fine Art offers one credential, a two-year Fine Art diploma. The program offers a contemporary, professional, visual art education that fosters strong problem solving, critical thinking, research, and studio practice skills. Students develop critical and theoretical skills in a broad range of mediums encompassing traditional, interdisciplinary, and digital arts practice. The program curriculum integrates printmaking, video, painting, drawing, digital media, ceramics, photography, and sculpture.

This credential is offered predominantly as face-to-face delivery in-person at the Comox Valley campus. The program also includes courses that are delivered in two types of online delivery modes: digital scheduled, and digital asynchronous.

NIC's Fine Art diploma is a 60-credit program that integrates mandatory courses and a selected list of electives within the Fine Art (FIN) course offerings. The diploma requirements also include PHI 240 - Philosophy of Art and two English course requirements.

The diploma is designed for students wishing to gain a credential, or transfer to another institution to complete another diploma or degree program. NIC Fine Art program has transfer agreements with Emily Carr University of Art + Design, University of Victoria, Vancouver Island University, and Alberta University of the Arts.

The Fine Art Diploma program has a team of seven faculty members (NICFA), and three support staff (CUPE). The faculty team is composed of four regularized and three sessional instructors. There are two regularized faculty at 100%, one at 75%, and one at 50%. The sessional faculty positions consist of one instructor that is 50%, one instructor at 40% and one instructor at 25%. All faculty are experienced in both in-person and digital delivery formats. For the support staff team there is one full-time studio technician and two part-time digital technicians.

D. Summary of Strengths and Challenges

Given the changing learning environment, the Department of Fine Art has recently added delivery formats including: blended, and online digital delivery. These options address the increasingly complex needs of learners in our region and beyond.

Strengths

Various positive factors come together forming a strong framework to support student success in the program. At the core are dedicated and experienced instructors, technicians and support staff paired with excellent shared studio spaces, technology, labs, and shops. This combination allows for the delivery of a rigorous curriculum on par with 1st and 2nd year university foundation level programs. Our program is best suited to a combination of variable class sizes and delivery modes that support students' collaborative learning environment with access to instructors, and exposure to practicing artists. Program instructors and support staff have professional practices in the art and cultural sectors as visual artists, curators, program directors, designers, gallery technicians, and creative collaborators.

NIC's strong reputation for providing a high quality, interdisciplinary arts education is built on its well-rounded program offering that integrates 2D, 3D, media arts, design, art history, cultural theory, research, and place-based experiential learning. The curriculum fosters learning in a digital age, through the integration of digital platforms that correspond with industry standards. This approach allows the program to customize and hybridize delivery to best match course content and to provide flexible student-centered learning.

Many fine art and digital alumni continue to support and advocate for the program, some having received valuable opportunities to exhibit and showcase their work on campus and within the community.

As students advance in the program, they can self-direct their learning to better prepare for further education and to enhance learning pathways in specialized fields of study.

General Challenges

The Fine Art diploma program must remain responsive to the changes in cultural ideologies, learning and industry-centered technologies and pedagogical practices, both in terms of student interest, community and institutional needs. Overall, current students, alumni, and employers appear to be satisfied with the program. However, the self-study placed emphasis on program revision and renewal through an examination of the core vision, identity, and curriculum updates through remapping and interconnecting all course curriculums. Areas of priority include Indigenous reconciliation, building relationships and partnerships with communities, place-based projects, experiential and practical learning opportunities, and addressing faculty and student workload. Tied to a program remapping, the self-study identified the need to examine the relevance and value of art history + visual culture, digital foundations, professional practices, and integrating capstone projects.

Challenges that Fall Beyond the Scope of Program Review

Feedback from the external review team advised the appointment of at least one Indigenous faculty member, ideally to a full-time position as soon as possible. The Fine Art faculty see this as an integral step to diversify the program and offer guidance towards meaningful reconciliation. However, it should be noted that this will require support from NIC upper administration and North Island College Faculty Association on how to navigate funding and seniority protocols. Faculty have noted that studio classrooms need to be equipped with appropriate technology to effectively deliver the program and meet the needs of students, faculty, and technicians.

E. Self-Study Recommendations

The self-study includes recommendations based on the review of the program, feedback from students, faculty, and various stakeholders, as indicated above. These recommendations recognize the need for the program to review curriculum design, learning outcomes, course delivery, and design and consider how the program can capitalize on current strengths and address identified challenges.

The following recommendations come from self-study.

Commitment to Learners

Focus: This area focuses on the program's commitment to student learning by reflecting on the underlying values and philosophy of the program. This includes the alignment of program commitments with the needs and expectations of students, the institution and the broader discipline, industry, or profession.

- 1. **Rename program and establish our own identity:** "Fine Art" is weighted in patriarchal hierarchy and sounds dated. "Visual Arts" would be more suitable and would more accurately reflect the integration of visual and media arts. Identify the vision of the program.
- 2. **Student Workload:** A review of all courses is needed to comprehend what a full-time student workload really looks like, and to ensure enough time is provided for learning with less content repetition. The focus needs to shift from quantity of work to quality.
- 3. **Student Retention:** Assess student retention from first year to second year, and program graduation rates. Examine, analyze, and implement short-term and long-term strategies for how we can support student success.
- 4. **Faculty Workload:** The task of programming extracurricular exhibitions for students, workshops, and community talks should be nested into the curriculum for a dynamic and effective use of teaching and learning resources for the program, faculty, and students.

Program Structures

Focus: This area focuses on the roots and design of the program, as well as how and why the program has evolved over time highlighting key milestones, developments, and accomplishments as it relates to the student learning experience. This includes the evolution itself, as well as the mechanisms in place for identifying and responding to emerging needs and changing realities.

- 5. Review program structure and course progression to:
 - Align with institutional plans and directions.
 - Engage in significant and thoughtful program redesign that includes both faculty and alumni feedback, and that focuses on interdisciplinary student learning, scheduling, and workload.
 - Inventory program courses and mapping exercises related to program learning outcomes.
 - Maintain and renew relevance within the local community and the Canadian visual art culture.

- 6. **Establish a flexible curriculum to intersect with the cultural sector that can be responsive to opportunities in the community.** Infuse the program with connections, learning and sharing opportunities to create pathways and build long-lasting relationships with artists, funders, and galleries.
- 7. **Professional Practice:** Integrating content that teaches students how to install an exhibit, how to write an artist statement, and how to write gallery proposals etc. into a capstone project class would benefit the program.
- 8. **Digital Foundations**: A foundational digital studio class is required to adequately prepare students with relevant online skills that go beyond the basics of what they currently learn (Photoshop/Illustrator Indesign, WordPress).
- 9. **Contemporize the Art History and Visual Culture courses:** Currently, the program offers survey courses: FIN 100 Paleolithic to Early Medieval, FIN 101 Early Medieval to Romanticism, FIN 250 Modern Art (invention of camera to beginning of Postmodernism 1970s). More contemporary art needs to be integrated into the art history curriculum.

Learning Community

Focus: This area focuses on the program as a learning community. This includes interactions and relationships between and among faculty and students within the program, as well as engagement with broader communities (e.g., institutional, regional, discipline, industry, or profession specific relationships).

- 10. **Indigenization plan:** Indigenization of course material is needed, as is further thought around how to expand and grow in this area. Having a cultural advisor (local Indigenous artist), hiring Indigenous instructors, and arranging field trips to Indigenous artistic spaces, studios, cultural centers, ceremonies, and events would be a step forward.
 - Make space for diversity in the curriculum by utilizing place-based learning, guest speakers, and dialogue with other post-secondary institutions.
 - Intersect the curriculum with the cultural sector by bridging with communities, integrating real world experiences, and incorporating place-based learning. For example, start by working with cultural advisors to take a program learning outcomes inventory.
 - Explore storytelling (i.e., K'ómoks Band Long House gathering, local speaker)
- 11. Collaborate and connect with the local communities, school districts, cultural sectors, and industries by building relationships that create space for dialogue and creative exchange and experience.
 - **Student Job Placements:** Explore how we can integrate local job placement opportunities with industry professionals within the curriculum.

12. Build community within the program building a sense of belonging for students, faculty and staff:

- Partner with NIC's advising team to conduct student workshops that focus on navigating courses in the program, setting students on the pathway to program completion.
- Create a fine art internal advisor system that assigns students to a faculty member upon program entry to support course selection, number of courses, and funding/community opportunities.
- Blend 1st year students with 2nd year students to support peer learning across the program.
 Organize student events outside of class time, particularly in early fall to foster connection and build community.
- Continue to run the winter term art event exhibition.
- Cultivate community among faculty to improve skill sharing and course awareness

13. Build community with regional high schools:

- Cultivate and maintain relationships with the regional school district. Developing an annual touch base and working to align the high school experience with the Fine Art Diploma programming.
- For example, aligning the ways students learn, the platforms used, and student evaluation methods ("ungrading").
- Bring schools to campus for connections events and tours (i.e., Art Experience Day)
- Offer educational and informational fine art program sessions for parents and students
- Organize peer mentorship with high school teachers for PD as a way of sharing information about the program and nurturing relationships.

14. Build community within the cultural sector and industry:

- Connect, either through off site visits or virtual collaborations, with visiting artists who are in the community.
- Curate talks and activate conversations that bring people together and build meaningful
 connections to the course curriculum. Continue to build onsite and offsite collaborative
 residencies that provide student exposure to professional practice and hands-on learning (i.e.,
 CVAG incubator).

Practices

Focus: This area focuses on teaching and learning practices, including assessment and evaluation methods and the alignment of these approaches to supportive practices. This includes the methods or approaches members of the department engage in to fulfill the stated commitments while engaging in reflective practice.

- 15. **Offer a fluid and dynamic educational experience** that reflects the vital landscape of art making and cultural practices of today. Integrate creative inquiry to support students in developing personal growth, research and taking on challenges.
- 16. **Highlight and expand the development of specific and transferable skill sets**, like conceptual research, professional presentation strategies, and experimental process-orientated studio approaches.

17. **Digital Learning:** Blended learning modalities are challenging as instructors are not properly equipped to simultaneously accommodate students in the classroom and online. We will work with NIC to attain better resources for digital learning.

Additional Recommendation:

18. **Program Advisory Committee (PAC):** The faculty will develop a Program Advisory Committee to offer guidance from the cultural sector, industry and community to offer feedback on the program.

Collective Impact

Focus: This area focuses on the accomplishments and contributions of faculty and students from the program. This includes learning experiences, opportunities and outcomes related to the program. This also includes mechanisms in place to help faculty and students reflect upon and recognize accomplishments.

19. **Enhance and Maintain Visibility and Acknowledge:** The fine art faculty are committed to maintaining and developing opportunities to present and celebrate the accomplishments of our students, staff, and faculty.

F. Summary of Key Findings from the External Reviewers

The external review team commended faculty for their commitment to learners, dedication to community outreach, and demonstrated engagement in ongoing professional and reflective practice.

Key findings of the external review team include recommendations relating to reimagining the Fine Art Diploma program identity, structure, and curriculum, provide opportunities for building relationships with cultural communities, Indigenous reconciliation, educational partners and community connection, and to work collaboratively with administration to deliver curriculum and support student success.

The reviewers highlighted the importance of the relationship between the diploma-completing students and all other students in Fine Arts. Students within the program express a high level of satisfaction with it, while on average only 25% of students taking Fine Arts courses are in the Fine Arts Diploma program (43/172) and on average 49% of registrations are from students in other programs (211/433). They also noted the retention for the second year is actually quite high at 70%.

The self-study recognizes that existing program structures are profoundly shaped by its foundational origins some decades ago and its earlier relationship with Emily Carr University of Art and Design. Recommendations placed emphasis on focused collaboration amongst faculty and department members to critically analyze legacies in relation to progress and growth of the department is a crucial aspect of the review process.

G. Program Response to External Reviewers' Recommendations

Commitment to Learners

Focus: This area focuses on the program's commitment to student learning by reflecting on the underlying values and philosophy of the program. This includes the alignment of program commitments with the needs and expectations of students, the institution, and the broader discipline, industry, or profession.

Recommendation 1

To more clearly define your identity as a program and a department looking forward. Department members are encouraged to step back from the program and see it from the outside. (#1 on External)

This connects to the following NIC Strategies:

- Build 2026 2.1 TEACHING AND LEARNING, 5.5 PROGRAM RESPONSE AND RENEWAL, 6.1 BRAND AND IDENTITY
- Widening Our Doorways 2026 Strategy #4 Program Response and Renewal and POINT #2. Enhancing Student Learning Experiences.

Response: The Fine Art program members agree with this recommendation. We need to solidify who we are and what we want to become. This will provide guidance for how we develop program/curriculum restructuring.

Recommendation 2

To consider how to include some activities heretofore considered extracurricular into the formal curriculum in an effort to lessen workloads for teachers and learners alike. (#4 on External)

This connects to the following NIC Strategies:

- Build 2026 5.2 COMMUNITY-CONNECTED LEARNING and 5.3 SELF-DIRECTED AND CUSTOMIZED LEARNING and 9.2 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT and 5.5 PROGRAM RESPONSE AND RENEWAL and 4.2 Learning Services
- Widening Our Doorways 2026 Strategy #2. Enhancing Student Learning Experiences

Response: The Fine Art program members agree with this recommendation to embed extracurricular activities that are integral to the core learning of our students into the formal curriculum.

Program Structures

Focus: This area focuses on the roots and design of the program, as well as how, and why, the program has evolved over time highlighting key milestones, developments, and accomplishments as it relates to the student learning experience. This includes the evolution itself, as well as the mechanisms in place for identifying and responding to emerging needs and changing realities.

Recommendation 3

Consider what systemic changes are needed to the program structure and to the curriculum. We recommend that you consider the incorporation of a first-year certificate and micro-credentials or similar small but coherent packages of courses should at least be considered as well. The two-year diploma could remain an important part of the program without necessarily being its only fulcrum and centerpiece. (#3 on External)

This connects to the following NIC Strategies:

- **Build 2026** 4.3 PATHWAYS TO LEARNING and 5.3 SELF-DIRECTED AND CUSTOMIZED LEARNING and and 4.1 PROGRAM ENTRY and 7.4 ENROLMENT PLANNING
- Widening Our Doorways 2026 Strategy POINT #2. Enhancing Student Learning Experiences and Point #4.
 Program Response & Renewal

Response: The Fine Art program members agree with this recommendation to explore this potential for our learners to have various phased credentials that can ladder into one another. To develop this concept will require research and dialogue regarding resources and retention to see if it properly fits our growth. We seek to maintain the diploma as the centerpiece, the flagship of a cohort learning model.

Recommendation 4

To evaluate what courses should be added, deleted, or drastically modified. (#5 on External)

This connects to the following NIC Strategies:

- **Build 2026** and 1.3 Employee engagement and collaboration; 2.1 teaching and learning; 3.1 student well being; 5.5 program response and renewal; and 7.1 Reconciliation
- Widening Our Doorways 2026 Strategy POINT #2. Enhancing Student Learning Experiences and Point #4.
 Program Response & Renewal

Response: The Fine Art program members agree with this recommendation to explore how our current courses are serving and aligning with our program identity, and assess where revisions are necessary. This allows us to assess where we can contemporize, Indigenize, localize, and internationalize course content.

Learning Community

Focus: This area focuses on the program as a learning community. This includes interactions and relationships between and among faculty and students within the program, as well as engagement with broader communities (e.g., institutional, regional, discipline, industry, or profession specific relationships).

Recommendation 5

Establish better lines of communication between the department and the administration. This should ideally include not just one-on-one monthly meetings between the chair and the dean, but the clarification of the lines of authority defining the responsibilities of the dean, the associate dean, and the assistant to the dean. A consultative and collaborative model should be honoured, and there should be mutual understanding as to the processes for pedagogical decision-making. (#2 on External)

This connects to the following NIC Strategies:

- **Build 2026** 1.1 Healthy and Productive Workplaces; 1.2 People Development; 1.3 Employee Engagement and Collaboration; 7.2 Diversity, Equity and Inclusion; 7.3 Transparency and Accountability
- Widening Our Doorways 2026 Strategy Point #1, Safe and Healthy Place-Making

Response: The Fine Art program members agree with this recommendation establishing clear modes of effective communication with the dean's office is an integral process for departments to make strides in effective change and development at the program level and provide responsive programming to best serve our learners.

Recommendation 6

To recognize that the program, while it rests upon a solid foundation, is nonetheless quite rooted in the past. The curriculum needs to be "modernized," but perhaps even more fundamentally the program needs to be modified so that previously underrepresented individuals can see a place for themselves within it. (#6 on External)

This connects to the following NIC Strategies:

- Build 2026 7.1 Reconciliation; 7.2 Diversity, equity, and inclusion; 5.1 Indigenous Education; 5.2
 Community Connected Learning; 5.4 Global Learning
- Widening Our Doorways 2026 Strategy POINT #2. Enhancing Student Learning Experiences and Point #4.
 Program Response & Renewal, POINT #5. Indigenous Led Learning and Reconciliation, POINT #6
 International Education Renewal

Response: The Fine Art program members agree with this recommendation; it is an integral trajectory of how to diversify our identity and curriculum to develop an inclusive program. This will take teamwork with college resources to offer guidance in how to develop these values in a respectful manner.

Recommendation 7

We strongly recommend the appointment of at least one Indigenous faculty member, ideally to a full-time position as soon as possible. (#7 on External)

This connects to the following NIC Strategies:

- **Build 2026** 7.1 Reconciliation; 7.2 Diversity, equity, and inclusion; 5.1 Indigenous Education; 5.2 Community Connected Learning
- Widening Our Doorways 2026 Strategy. POINT #2. Enhancing Student Learning Experiences, Point #4.
 Program Response & Renewal, POINT #5 Indigenous Led Learning and Reconciliation.
- Working Together: NIC Indigenization Plan 2021-26: aligns with goals in sections: Institutional
 Commitment; Teaching and Learning; Understanding and Reciprocity; Indigenous Employee Recruitment

Response: The Fine Art program members agree with this recommendation as an integral step towards reconciliation. This will require support from NIC upper administration and North Island College Faculty Association on how to navigate personnel funding and NICFA seniority protocols. As an institution we need to arrive at a holistic approach to honour place-responsive learning and offer support to current and new faculty.

As a faculty we need to focus on what changes we can implement in the program as short-term goals and ongoing. Our values align with the statement from Build 2026, 5.1: to work collaboratively with Indigenous communities to develop and deliver unique programming that incorporates Indigenous knowledge, language, and culture. We need to start with relationship building as consultative practice.

Recommendation 8

Plan how the building of student housing might support Fine Arts and whether that addition to the college might be associated with new initiatives within the program. (#8 on External)

This connects to the following NIC Strategies:

- Build 2026: 2.4 Campuses and Centers 3.1 Student Wellbeing; 3.2 Student Support and Persistence; 7.4
 Enrolment Planning
- Widening Our Doorways 2026 Strategy, POINT #2. Enhancing Student Learning Experiences, Point #4. Program Response & Renewal
- Care2 Plan: Student Mental Health and Well-Being at NIC

Response: The Fine Art program members agree with this recommendation. Student housing will add vitality to student and campus life as whole. The faculty team will engage in dialogue to brainstorm initiatives. Student housing has the potential to provide a healthy ecosystem for student support and culture.

Recommendation 9

There needs to be more communication between the department and the administration regarding various

scheduling issues, including critical decisions about how, why, and when it is decided that any given section is or is not viable. Streamline scheduling and delivery methods that do not inconvenience students or place additional workload demands upon faculty, but rather open up access and workload flexibility. (#9 on External)

This connects to the following NIC Strategies:

- **Build 2026:** 1.1 Healthy and Productive Workplaces; 1.3 Employee Engagement and Collaboration; 2.1 teaching and learning; 3.1 Student Well-being; 7.3 Transparency and Accountability
- Widening Our Doorways 2026 Strategy: POINT #2. Enhancing Student Learning Experiences, Point #4.
 Program Response & Renewal

Response: The Fine Art program members agree with this recommendation and are committed to engage in collaborative dialogue and decision-making with administration regarding course scheduling and delivery modes. This is an essential factor that leads to student success and retention; the faculty are the frontline workers in the institution and can offer an informed perspective.

Practices

Focus: This area focuses on teaching and learning practices, including assessment and evaluation methods and the alignment of these approaches to supportive practices. This includes the methods or approaches members of the department engage in to fulfill the stated commitments while engaging in reflective practice.

Recommendation 10

To re-establish vital links with area high schools. (#10 on External)

This connects to the following NIC Strategies:

- **Build 2026** 5.5 Program Response and Renewal, 9.1 Serving the people of the region, 9.2 Community Engagement
- Widening Our Doorways 2026 Strategy: POINT #2. Enhancing Student Learning Experiences; Point #4.
 Program Response & Renewal

Response: The Fine Art program members agree with this recommendation but recognize the importance of extending our outreach incentive to integrate learners of all ages: elementary, middle school, high school, and mature students. Our outreach needs to expand beyond the region and include all of central and north Vancouver Island and Powell River (Sunshine Coast) and the province as a whole. We also seek to strengthen ties within North Island College developing interdepartmental relations. We need to strengthen our outreach relationship with NIC's Office of Global Engagement and Indigenous Education.

Response: The external reviewers had minimal recommendations for this section. The Fine Art Faculty are committed to maintaining and developing a reflective practice for intercultural learning and sharing.

Collective Impact

Focus: This area focuses on the accomplishments and contributions of faculty and students from the program. This includes learning experiences, opportunities, and outcomes related to the program. This also includes mechanisms in place to help faculty and students reflect upon and recognize accomplishments.

Response: The external reviewers had no recommendations for this section. The Fine Art faculty are committed to maintaining and developing opportunities to present and celebrate the accomplishments of our students, staff and faculty.

H. Summary

The impact of self-study on faculty has been extensive. For many years faculty have been working hard to improve courses, student experiences, and the quality of the credentials that we offer, albeit in isolation for the most part.

As a result of the self-study process, the faculty of the NIC Department of Fine Art have begun to think as a collective; determined to rethink, revalue, and recreate our credentials.

The 10 recommendations from the external reviewers not only support those presented in the self-study but challenge the faculty to celebrate not only the success of our students but the faculty and the work they do to enrich the lives of those students.

The accompanying Action Plan document outlines the actions and next steps the Department of Fine Art will take.