

# **PERIODIC PROGRAM REVIEW**

## **SCHOOL OF IMAGE ARTS**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The School of Image Arts, Faculty of Communication and Design, Ryerson University, is recognized in Canada and internationally as a leader in visual and media arts education. The School of Image Arts (IMA) offers Bachelor of Fine Arts degrees in three areas: Film, New Media and Photography. The Image Arts BFA includes theoretical and studio training in design, art history and cultural studies. The mandate of the School of Image Arts is to expand its reach as a national and international centre for study, production, research, exhibition and creative activity in visual and media arts, at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

In 2005, the School of Image Arts was the recipient of the most significant cultural contribution ever made to a Canadian university. The Black Star Historical Black & White Photography gift was accompanied by \$7 million, which was designated for the construction of a new Ryerson gallery and research centre within the School of Image of Arts. The gallery houses and displays the Black Star Collection, as well as collections in the School's Mira Godard Study Centre. The gallery was named the Ryerson Image Centre (or RIC), and has a multi-disciplinary function in support of research, guest curation and diverse gallery programming. It held its grand opening in September 2012.

The School's overarching goal is to deliver premium undergraduate programs for students in a variety of creative practices related to visual media. The School has a very strong reputation for promoting student-driven initiatives that offer experiential learning and enhanced engagement. The programs educate creative professionals in visual arts and media fields. The curriculum is designed to provide a balance of studio and theory courses that advance applied knowledge and research. The Image Arts curriculum is structured around a core of theoretical and experiential learning that fulfills important program learning outcomes shared by Film, Photography and New Media. Graduates of this program will be able to:

1. Perform creative responsibilities in their sectors of activity
2. Perform managerial responsibilities in their sectors of activity
3. Create and produce commercial, artistic, experimental projects in a professional manner
4. Integrate theoretical knowledge about their medium
5. Integrate specific artistic knowledge of the medium in their work
6. Synthesize concepts related to design, art history and cultural studies
7. Develop a professional approach to their work that incorporates critical thinking
8. Incorporate independent thinking and research skills in their professional practice and personal lives
9. Develop professional skills in Film, New Media or Photography
10. Develop advanced theoretical and production knowledge via a combination of electives and studio courses

The School of Image Arts has a 40-course program with 28 core required courses, 3 professional electives, 3 professionally related electives and 6 liberal studies electives. The core curriculum is based on a series of courses designed to build skill sets in three distinct areas of study: theory-history, visual studies and production. Courses are designed to teach creative and critical-thinking skills on a progressive scale of difficulty throughout four years of the program.

Applications to IMA's *Film Studies* program have been at a relatively constant level since the last program review due to its focus on cinema production and its established reputation. Today, Ryerson is one of 17 film programs offered by universities and colleges in Ontario, including 9 in Toronto alone. While visual arts programs elsewhere in Canada have shown a slight increase in enrollment, the fine-arts oriented *New Media Studies* has declined due to increased competition and the expanding definition and application of new media technologies. In Ontario alone, there are an additional 12 undergraduate university new media programs with a theoretical focus. Applications for *Photography Studies* increased slightly. As one of only two in the province, it has a long-standing reputation in the cultural sector. The Black Star Collection and the construction of the Ryerson Gallery and Research Centre have also added to the program's prestige.

The School's first-year enrollment increased from 161 students in F2002 to 209 students in F2010. Averaging over the last 5 years, 89.7 % of IMA students had a clear academic standing after one year. The graduation rate was 75.6%. Image Arts graduates are highly employable in a variety of fields. Most graduates enter the cultural sector and work in production, design, film, photography, graphics and editing jobs in traditional and digital media. Statistics show that 100% of Image Arts students are employed six months after graduation, they remain employed two years later and the demand for graduates continues to be very high. It is clear that the societal need for well-trained culture workers is strong within the cultural industries and new opportunities are rapidly emerging outside of traditional cultural sectors.

The priorities for the School going forward are based on six themes: *excellence in teaching, excellence in SRC activity, service to the community, relevance of the curriculum, success of the students in achieving academic and career goals, and ability of the program to meet its learning outcomes*. These themes were used to examine strengths and weaknesses of the program and to inform the developmental plan.

Strengths – IMA has been successful in developing student skills, providing useful learning resources and offering access to faculty members of quality. Faculty members' efforts to integrate theoretical and production knowledge have also added to IMA's success and the qualifications and inter-disciplinary research of faculty has created a rich visual-culture and media-arts knowledge base. Creative activities — visual projects, exhibitions, installations and social as well as physically mediated experiences — reinforce the program's learning outcomes. The new Ryerson Image Centre will foster a vibrant artistic and visual-media community. Curriculum plays a vital role in the ongoing demand for admission to the School of Image Arts. The highly structured curriculum, which includes history, theory and a set studio and production path, stands in contrast to other universities. All survey results suggest that the School's graduates readily find work in the industry and employers indicate that students possess a breadth of media knowledge and are technically proficient, with excellent verbal communicators. They are leaders and critical-thinkers capable of self-direction.

Weaknesses – The main concerns related to the academic/learning experience were focused on the quality of classrooms, the quality of instruction and the lack of variety of course offerings within majors. Also noted was a lack of university support, including funding, release time and research assistance, for SRC activities. There were few opportunities for student participation in research, few cross-option research endeavours, inadequate space to accommodate research needs and insufficient communication of research activities between faculty and students. Other program weaknesses identified were: links to other disciplines in the university; failure to communicate relevant and responsible roles that filmmakers can play in society; shortage of partnerships within the university and

community; clarity of goals and direction for the community at large; low student interest in community-based projects; and low student participation in commercial and fine arts competitions. Entrepreneurial and workforce skills need to be more strategically incorporated into the curriculum along with more emphasis on writing, research, business and critical-thinking skills and career preparation.

The Peer Review Team indicated that the links between the School of Image Arts and the Ryerson Image Centre will enhance the student's education and degree accreditation through the association and experience they acquire within a world-class centre of excellence, research and pedagogy. This relationship will assist the faculty to develop their own research and professional profiles, generate additional revenue for the University, and this process will continue to revitalize the pedagogical environment. In addition the renewed profile of the School of Image Arts will attract the highest caliber of students from Canada and abroad. The creation and growth of the graduate programs has already enhanced the academic presence of the School and has had a positive impact on the delivery of the undergraduate curriculum. The recent architectural renovations and implementation of upgraded production facilities has provided a physical presence to these innovations. The PRT also noted that while the three undergraduate streams maintain a degree of autonomy, there is room for more collaboration across the options. They also expressed a concern about the balance between digital and analogue technology.

The Dean of FCAD recommended that IMA investigate future opportunities and benefits of analogue filmmaking and photography; that diversity imbalances should be considered with respect to the faculty, student population and the curriculum; that IMA explore a new relationship between practice and theory; that IMA explore common (academic) courses in visual studies in the first two years of the respective programs; and that the School investigate opportunities for philanthropic donations and for on-line delivery opportunities.

Developmental Plan – Over the next five years, IMA has planned the following initiatives:

1. The Image Arts Enhancement Project – Planning includes a fundraising program; striving for the Gallery to acquire a “category A designation” under the Department of Canadian Heritage and development of programming congruent with educational goals by Gallery staff and faculty.
2. Undergraduate Curriculum – Film and Photography undergraduate curricula needs examination to ensure currency. The New Media program has begun a transition to RTA: School of Media to be completed by Fall 2016. Issues of special need are new minors, structure of core program courses and updating of University electives. The School should also develop courses for the Faculty of Arts and the new School of Creative Industries.
3. Graduate Programs - The School of Image Arts is the home of two graduate programs: MA, Photographic Preservation and Collections Management and MFA, Documentary Media. The faculty also actively contributes to the York/Ryerson Communication and Culture program and wants to develop this relationship further. The next step is to develop additional graduate programs, most immediately a section of Film Preservation within the Photographic Preservation MA. Each of these degrees will provide advanced study to undergraduate programs currently within the School of Image Arts.
4. Continuing Education - To ensure optimal service and relevancy to Continuing Education, the School needs to re-examine all courses and infrastructure.
5. Facilities – The programs need additional space. Some facilities require upgrades and studios are an immediate priority for New Media production.

6. Faculty – The faculty complement must continue to grow to optimally serve undergraduate and proposed graduate programs.
7. Inter-faculty partnerships – Development of relationships, cross-appointments, complement position models and partnership arrangements within Ryerson need to be considered.
8. SRC –While IMA enjoys the highest applicant to recipient ratio for SSHRC and Canada Council grants within FCAD, scholarly, research and creative activities need to be further developed and supported within the School, with partners in FCAD, throughout the University and with the larger academic community. IMA needs to continue all activities related to conferences, symposia, lectures and guest artist residencies.

The status of analogue production – The IMA Advisory Committee has recommended keeping analogue technologies as a pedagogical tool for as long as possible. This is in accordance with other leading media programs. Of course, the end of analogue might be determined for Image Arts by external forces, but even then analogue would remain as a medium to study and preserve in undergraduate history courses and in the Photographic Preservation and Collections Management (PPCM) graduate program. In light of the new field of Film Preservation approved for PPCM, and in accordance with the Dean's suggestion, the School of Image Arts has plans to mount a weekend symposium " Film: The Medium and its Future" scheduled for late spring/early summer 2014. This symposium will bring together industry practitioners and media artists to discuss the place of film within image-based media practice.