

***Program Evaluation
University of Victoria, Art History and Visual Studies (AHVS)
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Executive Summary:

The assessors thank the faculty and students of AHVS and the Executive team of the University of Victoria for their frankness, openness and generous facilitation of this process of review. It is clear that this is a strong program, with dedicated faculty and staff and a cohort of excellent students, and that the work of the program is highly valued and regarded as essential to the University's mandate.

The committee was highly impressed by the quality, dedication and pro-active attitudes that pervade AHVS. The full-time and part-time teaching faculty, and the entire professional staff, place the interests and needs of students at the top of their priority lists, and act effectively and energetically to ensure that students receive the best possible education experience. Undergraduate and graduate students alike testified to the quality of their time in AHVS, and the career successes of graduates, as well as the ability of former students to obtain major funding for continued study at prestigious institutions in Canada and abroad, offered ample evidence of the effectiveness of the AHVS as an institution.

AHVS is the second-largest Art History program in Western Canada, and the only one on Vancouver Island. It offers BA Major, Honours and Minor degrees in Art History and a Minor in Museum Studies, and contributes expertise to a Diploma program in Cultural Resource Management (CRM) and to a Professional Specialization Certificate in Collections Management, both of which are offered through the University's Division of Continuing Studies. At a time when registration in Art History Major and Honours programs is in decline across North America, AHVS is tackling this trend by embracing a leading degree of inclusiveness that comprises not only Western historical and contemporary art, but also offerings in South and South-East Asian historical and contemporary art, Islamic art, North American (especially Northwest Coast) Indigenous art, film studies, popular culture, and cultural theory. Students graduating with Major and Honours degrees thus have the opportunity to engage with the demographically diverse local, national and international communities in which they live. The faculty members provide a high level of instruction by ensuring that their teaching is informed by their research projects, by having an ongoing curriculum review process, and by incorporating current themes, theories and developments into their programs. The recent

institution of a limited-enrolment first-year seminar course is excellent. So is the creation of the Art Collections Classroom, in which students are able to work directly with artworks, although the catalyst for this—the moving of the Maltwood Art Museum and Gallery to an off-campus site—did not benefit the department, and throws into some doubt the University's readiness to support degree work in Museum Studies

AHVS is located within the Faculty of Fine Arts, where a vibrant, dynamic, creative culture contributes to an excellent learning environment. The students who met with the Academic Program Review Committee (APRC) were unanimous in their enthusiasm. There is, however, room for improvement in the provision of more experiential learning for the students: expanded internships and other placement opportunities, field trips, study abroad, and more information about career possibilities.

Faculty members are well established in their fields, have good scholarly reputations, and for the most part have maintained active publishing and conference profiles. They would, though, benefit from the drawing up of a Strategic Research Plan, which would highlight their accomplishments and articulate AHVS's research goals, all with the result of further enhancing to the rest of UVic the research profile of the department as a whole.

AHVS is well positioned to deliver on most of the program-specific goals enumerated in its very strong five-year strategic plan (included in the department's self-assessment report for the APRC). However, in serious respects the department is hampered by its inability to replace all retiring faculty members. Three recently retired faculty (in architecture and in Canadian art; in Chinese art; and in Islamic art in India) have not been replaced, and more retirements will happen in the next five to ten years. The program is not in immediate danger. But the ongoing loss of expertise and critical mass will have a negative effect on AHVS's ability not only to grow, but to sustain the established strengths that differentiate it from competitor programs at other universities. There does not, though, seem to be consensus within the department about how subject areas should be prioritized for future hires. The need to make replacement hires, and to do so on the basis of a clearly articulated vision for hiring over the long term, are the greatest needs facing the department. For example, the proposal (stated in AHVS's five-year strategic plan) to expand the Film Studies Minor into a Major program will require a hire in this area. But it is not clear how this is being envisioned in relation to other current and future hiring needs.

AHVS has been active in building strategic interdisciplinary relationships with departments and programs not only in the Faculty of Fine Arts, but elsewhere at UVic. More work can yet be done in this regard, with a view to ensuring that AHVS students derive maximum academic benefit from the University as a whole. Similarly, AHVS's DIDO image database is an invaluable tool, and the department is to be congratulated on having built it into such an effective support for teaching and

research. It seems a pity, though, that DIDO is unavailable to teachers and researchers outside of the Faculty of Fine Arts. The APRC recognizes that there are copyright issues that have a negative impact in this area, but its members felt that more initiative needs to be invested in finding ways around the problem. (Other universities have faced the same challenge.) Especially given the need for AHVS to continue its practice of building strong relationships outside of the Faculty of Fine Arts, the need to make DIDO more broadly available to faculty and students across the entire University becomes ever clearer. On a larger institutional-practice level, the APRC was disturbed to learn that UVic does not always have effective mechanisms for ensuring that different Faculties cooperate in the establishment of new programs, and that AHVS is currently facing a situation in which another Faculty appears to be moving ahead with plans to create a Major program in Film Studies without working with, or deferring to, AHVS (which has strong teaching and research strength in this area). Such activities introduce a completely unnecessary and counter-productive competitiveness between academic units: something the University can ill afford at a time of tightening resources.

In the final analysis, though, the APRC was greatly impressed with AHVS, and wishes this report to support the department's vision for its ongoing development as it responds to the fast-changing nature of the disciplines of Art History and of Visual Studies nationally and internationally.