Review of the B.A., B.S. in Arts Technology

Classification of Instructional Program (CIP) Code: 50.9999
Visual and Performing Arts, Other

Arts Technology at Illinois State University is a multidisciplinary unit housed in the College of Fine Arts. The unit administers the B.A., B.S. in Arts Technology program as well as the M.S. in Arts Technology program.

Arts Technology is not a department or school nor is it part of one. Administratively, Arts Technology is considered a unit functionally equivalent to the three schools in the college: the School of Art, the School of Music, and the School of Theatre and Dance. The unit is administered by the college dean through a designated program director or co-directors. Faculty members are hired to teach in the Arts Technology program and their locus of tenure is assigned to Art, Music, or Theatre and Dance depending on their field. Arts Technology faculty members have dual reporting lines: to the Arts Technology program director and to the school faculty status committee of their home school (for purposes of evaluation, promotion, and tenure). Faculty and staff of the Arts Technology unit serve as a committee-of-the-whole in matters of curriculum, admissions, and student reviews.

Arts Technology integrates study across the arts with the study of digital technologies. The B.A., B.S. in Arts Technology program prepares students with a broad range of knowledge and skills in multimedia design, including digital video and sound, computer graphics and theater design, digital and MIDI music (Musical Instrument Digital Interface), and Web design. Fall enrollment in the program averaged 56 students between 2010 and 2014. Enrollment declined during this period before rebounding to near record enrollment of 63 in fall 2014.

Although other universities in the state offer content similar to the B.A., B.S. in Arts Technology, the program at Illinois State is the only stand-alone undergraduate arts technology degree program in the state. Arts technology content at other institutions is provided through sequences, concentrations, specializations, or options. Other similarly-titled plans of study are typically narrowly aligned with either an art or music program. Unique to the Arts Technology program at Illinois State is its interdisciplinary curriculum merging technology across all of the fine arts.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
PROGRAM REVIEW SELF-STUDY REPORT

Self-study process. The program review self-study report for the B.A., B.S. in Arts Technology program is the result of ongoing discussions among arts technology faculty and staff members over the past several years. Meetings about this self-study began in fall 2014, and tasks were assigned writers at that time. The actual writing of the document was distributed among the program director, assistant director, and three faculty members. Much of the writing was done in summer 2015. Each writer was assigned a section to research and write. Drafts were shared so all writers could track progress toward completing each section and could add content if desired. Progress meetings to discuss the document were held during the summer and into the fall 2015.

Program curriculum. The faculty and facilities support courses in the B.A., B.S. in Arts Technology program at three levels: sophomore, junior, and senior level. When taken as a whole, these courses provide a breadth of experiences in interactive and digital art including Web design and development, coding and programming, sound design, and digital music. Arts technology students pursue one of three curricular emphases (art, music, or theatre and dance) and take foundation and intermediate courses from the curriculum of the respective school. Students take arts technology-specific courses simultaneously with the courses in their curricular emphasis.

Program or academic unit faculty. The Arts Technology unit has five full-time tenure track faculty members assigned to deliver the curriculum. Each faculty member has his or her locus of tenure in one of the three schools in the college (School of Art, School of Music, or School of Theatre and Dance). Peers in their respective "home" schools evaluate faculty members annually with input from the Arts Technology unit director. Tenure track faculty in the unit must have a terminal degree, preferably in a field closely related to a fine arts discipline or another field that offers study in digital media or technology. Applicants with strong arts or digital media practice-based or theory-based scholarship are considered candidates for faculty positions. Arts Technology seeks faculty with wide-

ranging professional interests and welcomes those faculty who blur disciplinary boundaries in the arts and technology. All tenure track faculty members in the program hold either a M.F.A. or a Ph.D.

Program goals and quality indices. Goals of the B.A., B.S. in Arts Technology program are to revise and broaden the curricular scope to better reflect course content, trends in the workforce, and incoming student knowledge and skill levels; recruit and retain high-achieving students who embrace the broad-based multidisciplinary nature of the program; increase scholarship funds and tuition waivers available to recruit and retain the most talented undergraduate students; increase the number of student public exhibitions and performances; and improve and expand facilities classrooms and laboratories to provide flexible and functional learning spaces that support the program mission and goals. In particular, the program seeks spaces that foster technical innovation, collaboration, and creativity. Quality indices include the quality of student applications, student retention, and graduate school and job placement rates.

Student learning outcomes assessment plan and process. The B.A., B.S. in Arts Technology program measures four primary learning goals: technical competence, aesthetic decision-making, creative problem solving, and verbal articulation of work and experiences. Assessment tools include project critiques and evaluations for every project in every course, observations made during students' intermediate portfolio reviews, student self-assessments, feedback from internship placements, and feedback regarding alumni successes and program satisfaction.

Specialized accreditation. The program was reaccredited by the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD) in 2015 under the academic category "Disciplines in Combination." The next accreditation site review is scheduled for 2024, with a decision regarding reaccreditation expected in 2025.

Responses to recommendations resulting from the previous program review. During the last program review in 2007-2008, the Academic Planning Committee made four recommendations regarding the B.A., B.S. in Arts Technology program. The committee recommended that the program develop a strategic plan that prioritizes program needs and clearly articulates a mutually agreed upon organizational structure. A strategic plan has been developed and was included with the current program review self-study report. The committee also recommended that the program develop a resource plan that provides for adequate support of the program. A budget line for the program was established in 2009. This change makes it possible for the college and University to identify specific and permanent funds for the Arts Technology unit and provides a baseline for comparing the program with others and for measuring growth. The committee recommended that the program work with University Assessment Services to complete and implement a student learning outcomes assessment plan. Such a plan has been completed and is being implemented. The plan has evolved into one that is comprehensive and effective. In addition, the committee recommended that the program work with the Office of Enrollment Management and Academic Services to identify an optimum program enrollment. In 2012 the program decided that its optimum enrollment should be approximately 55 undergraduate students. Actual enrollment is now much higher. The college has compensated for this increase by adding one tenure track and one non-tenure track faculty member to the program and by authorizing faculty and staff overloads for teaching.

Changes in the academic discipline, field, societal need, and program demand. Since the last program review the number of arts technology education programs across the country has increased. Many of these programs are concentrations nested within arts and media programs, but all provide broad-ranging education in the digital arts. This growth has been fueled by the growing demand for digital content and a need for artists who understand how to develop that content. Employers are seeking arts technology professionals who understand creative processes and have training in aesthetic decision-making. Because so much of contemporary life is experienced through digital media (websites, online video, and social networks), professionals able to synthesize creative, conceptual work with technology to deliver it are in high demand. Demand among employers for specialists in creative media also continues to increase. The Arts Technology program has expanded its internship program in response to this increased demand, and program graduates are finding work in the field at an approximately 90 percent rate. Likewise, demand for entrance to the B.A., B.S. in Arts Technology program at Illinois State has increased dramatically since the last program review. In just the past two years, the program has added 22 students, a 48 percent increase.

Major findings of the program review self-study. The B.A., B.S. in Arts Technology program at Illinois State is one of the fastest growing academic programs at the University and is the fastest growing program in the College of Fine Arts. Students in the program receive training in technical and creative fields with high employment demand and with high levels of entrepreneurial activity. There is a high interest in game design and animation among prospective students. The administrative structure of the Arts Technology unit presents significant barriers to enrollment growth, faculty and student scholarship, and faculty assessment. The program is unable to sustain its recent growth without a significant increase in its permanent budget. Many of the courses that have been added to cover enrollment growth are funded through temporary funds. The unit lacks adequate classrooms/laboratory spaces, and students in the program lack sufficient opportunities to publicly exhibit their work to increase their professional exposure.

Initiatives and plans for the next program review cycle. During the next program review cycle, faculty and staff of the B.A., B.S. in Arts Technology program plan to seek departmental status to sustain program growth and to address administrative shortcomings, seek centralized administrative facilities and increase and improve classroom and laboratory space, redesign the curriculum to address the need for tracks and to reduce reliance on selected topics courses, and increase public exposure of the program through civic engagement, outreach, and collaborative efforts.

PROGRAM REVIEW OUTCOME AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE ACADEMIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

The Academic Planning Committee, as a result of this review process, finds the B.A., B.S. in Arts Technology to be in Good Standing.

The Academic Planning Committee thanks the program for a concise, critical, and forward-looking self-study report that evidences involvement of faculty, staff, and external stakeholders. Particularly noteworthy is the analysis of comparator and aspirational programs and use of that analysis to identify initiatives consistent with the strong program goals already adopted by faculty.

The committee recognizes faculty for offering the only undergraduate arts technology degree program in Illinois. The committee congratulates the program for achieving and maintaining accreditation with the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD), with the most recent reaccreditation granted by NASAD in 2015 for a 10-year period. Accreditation is a major indicator of program quality, as is the high demand for program graduates, evidenced by a 90 percent job placement rate over the last four years.

The committee commends the program for recruiting a diverse group of students, many of whom are engaged in the community and most of whom graduate from the program within four years. Approximately 29 percent of students in fall 2014 self-identified with racial/ethnic groups traditionally underrepresented at Illinois State, compared to approximately 21 percent across all undergraduate programs at the University. Students and faculty are involved in numerous community initiatives, including video production for the Town of Normal and arts technology training for area youth. The percentage of graduates completing the program in four years is consistently and significantly higher than university-wide averages. In fiscal 2014, for example, 83 percent of program graduates who started at the University as first-time-in-college students completed their degree within four years, compared to 64 percent across all undergraduate programs at the University.

The committee commends the program for its collaboration with Milner Library to provide teaching and research resources that support the curriculum, particularly resources in non-traditional formats. Among them are digital equipment available for borrowing, a studio in the library for recording, and multiple digital screens for presentations and data visualization. Also commendable is collaboration between Arts Technology and library faculty to provide information fluency instruction to students in the introductory Arts Technology course.

Arts Technology faculty has made significant efforts to develop a student learning outcomes assessment plan that sets forth student learning outcomes, incorporates use of multiple assessment tools such as portfolios and self-assessment surveys, and involves feedback from multiple stakeholders. The committee asks the program to continue to refine its assessment plan by mapping learning outcomes to specific courses and projects and by describing

measures used for overall course and program assessment and how they are applied. The committee asks the Arts Technology program to submit a revised assessment plan to the Office of the Provost by April 15, 2017.

Recommendations

The Academic Planning Committee makes the following recommendations to be addressed within the next regularly scheduled review cycle. In the next program review self-study, tentatively due October 1, 2023, the committee asks the program to describe actions taken and results achieved for each recommendation.

- The committee commends Arts Technology faculty members for their ongoing attention to the curriculum and for periodically modifying it based on assessment findings, student demand, and changes in the discipline. The committee concurs with faculty that curriculum review and development should continue to be a high priority in coming years, including a determination whether the track system currently in place should be retained. The committee recommends that faculty also explore interdisciplinary collaborations with programs outside the College of Fine Arts; consider introducing gaming design and animation courses and courses in music production, recording, and engineering; seek ways to incorporate more civic engagement opportunities and public exhibitions of student work throughout the curriculum; and collaborate with Milner Library faculty in exploring information literacy instruction beyond the introductory Arts Technology course. The committee agrees that verbal articulation of work and experiences is an appropriate learning goal in the discipline but also suggests attention to writing skills. While the committee acknowledges increased emphasis in the discipline on applied learning in recent years, the committee urges faculty to engage in conversations regarding the appropriate balance in the curriculum between theory and application necessary to promote and maintain program rigor.

- The committee supports Arts Technology faculty in its consideration of offering an arts technology course in the General Education program. Such a course could help equalize technical knowledge and skills of students, increase the campus profile of the Arts Technology program, and foster connections between Arts Technology and other programs and units at the University.

- The committee congratulates the program on the rebound in enrollment to fall 2010 levels. Enrollment now exceeds student counts forecast (40 students) when the program was proposed in 2000. However, one concern of the committee is the decline in student credentials from fall 2013 to fall 2014, as reflected in average ACT composite scores and mean external transfer grade point average. While potentially an anomaly, this decline merits monitoring and, if appropriate, actions to reverse it. One potential approach for doing so might be to increase the number of scholarships and tuition waivers available to high-achieving students.

- The program has done a commendable job recruiting students from traditionally underrepresented racial/ethnic groups. The committee urges continuation of those efforts as well as implementation of strategies to increase the percentage of students who are female.

- The self-study report articulates concerns regarding the current system of evaluating Arts Technology faculty. According to the report, faculty members are evaluated by the school faculty status committee in their home school with input from the Arts Technology program director. This arrangement, according to the report, could result in faculty members being evaluated by colleagues who might not be familiar with scholarship of the discipline. The committee recommends that the Arts Technology program collaborate with the college faculty status committee and the three school faculty status committees in the college to develop guidelines for evaluation of Arts Technology faculty by their home schools such that concerns raised in the self-study report are minimized and mitigated.

- There currently are no persons on the Arts Technology faculty from traditionally underrepresented racial/ethnic groups. While seeking visiting artists who are non-white and/or non-Western is a laudable strategy for increasing racial/ethnic diversity among instructors in the program, the committee recommends that Arts Technology faculty work with their home schools to recruit for racial/ethnic diversity when tenure-line faculty positions are filled.

- The self-study report describes numerous deficiencies in facilities and equipment currently available to the Arts Technology program. The report appropriately notes that improvements to facilities and equipment will be realized through renovation of College of Fine Arts facilities. However, given the status of state funding for higher education it may be several years before the renovation project begins and several years thereafter before a renovated facility is ready for occupancy. In the meantime, the committee recommends that the program work with the school and college to explore use of facilities and equipment external to the University.

- The annual arts technology survey has been effective in obtaining information about the careers and educational pursuits of program graduates. The committee recommends that the program incorporate this and additional initiatives in a formal plan for tracking alumni to document their successes including their creative achievements, periodically solicit feedback from them regarding the program, and identify additional prospects for internship placements and visiting artist invitations.

- Beyond the work requested by the committee to revise the student learning outcomes assessment plan for the program, the committee urges the program to continue to utilize data collected through student learning outcomes assessments over the next eight years to make program improvements and to document how that has been done.