Review of the M.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 program administers the M.S. in Arts Technology program as well as the B.A., B.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.

The M.S. in Arts Technology program emphasizes theory, design, and practice in the application of computer technology to traditional art, music, and theatre disciplines with an emphasis on interactive media, sound design, digital music, and computer coding for arts applications. The program provides critical training and experiences that prepare graduates for careers in digital and interactive media production including front-end Web development; video production; sound design for live performance, broadcast, and multimedia; digital music composition and production; and emerging arts disciplines for which basic knowledge of coding is required. Graduates work for employers of all types including small businesses, government agencies, and corporations; some graduates are self-employed entrepreneurs. Fall census day enrollment in the program averaged 14 students from 2010 to 2014.

Although other universities in the state offer content similar to the M.S. in Arts Technology, the program at Illinois State is the only stand-alone master's level arts technology degree in the state. Arts technology content at other institutions is nested within other degree programs.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
PROGRAM REVIEW SELF-STUDY REPORT

Self-study process. The program review self-study report for the M.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.

Program curriculum. The M.S. in Arts Technology is a 39 credit-hour program that includes courses open to both undergraduate and graduate students and courses open only to graduate students. Arts Technology students pursue one of two curricular emphases: art and theatre or music. All students, regardless of emphasis, are required to take seminar courses in digital art theory, which teach students to apply critical thinking skills to content related to digital media and art making. Even though both emphases offer a breadth of experiences in interactive and digital art, including Web design and development, coding and programming, sound design, and digital music, some students pursue a narrow area of interest such as Web design or sound design and production. Students may customize their plan of study to meet personal and professional goals through guided independent study with individual faculty members. In addition, all students enroll in a portfolio development course every semester, complete an internship or professional practice experience, and work on a directed project as part of the program requirements.

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" school 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 from 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 M.S. in Arts Technology program are to revise the curriculum to increase the number of credit hours earned through courses open only to graduate students and to add at least one tenure track faculty member so this goal can be achieved without reducing undergraduate and graduate enrollment, to require a graduate committee for each student rather than allow students to work with only one faculty member in completing the capstone project, to increase research opportunities for graduate students, and to increase scholarship funds and graduate assistantships. Other goals include expanding public dissemination of student learning through venues such as exhibitions, online products, and conference presentations; improving and expanding facilities, including classrooms and laboratories, to provide flexible and functional learning spaces that support the program mission; and creating graduate student workspaces that facilitate collaboration and experimentation and promote self-directed projects. Quality indices include the quality of student applications, student retention, and job placement rates.

Student learning outcomes assessment plan and process. The M.S. in Arts Technology program measures three primary learning goals: a deep understanding of at least one technical medium taught within the program, critical thinking by the student about his or her work and about the work of others, and application of critical analysis to problems. Assessment tools include project critiques and evaluations for every project in every course, observations made in the graduate portfolio review course, feedback from internship placements, and feedback regarding alumni successes and program satisfaction.

Specialized accreditation. The program was reaccredited in 2015 by the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD) 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. The last program review, in 2007-2008, resulted in two recommendations by the Academic Planning Committee. The committee recommended that the program develop a four-year strategy that considers the sustainability of the graduate program and identifies a plan for obtaining adequate resources for the program. Although program resources are less than adequate at the time of this review, the college has established a separate budget line for the program and has increased space allocated to the program in the planned new College of Fine Arts complex. The committee also recommended that the program articulate its mission and goals and study the need for and feasibility of developing a M.F.A. in Arts Technology program. Arts Technology faculty has since clarified the mission and goals of the program and the student population it seeks to serve. Faculty has decided not to pursue establishing a M.F.A. in Arts Technology program, because sufficient resources to support such a program are not available at this time.

Changes in the academic discipline, field, societal need, and program demand. Since the last program review, the field has experienced growth in arts technology coverage by universities across the country. Much of this arts technology content is nested within arts and media programs rather than delivered through stand-alone arts technology degree programs. Growth in arts technology content in postsecondary programs has been fueled by the growing demand across society for digital content and a need for artists who understand how to develop that content and by employers seeking 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, social networks), professionals able to synthesize creative, conceptual work with the technology to deliver it are in high demand.

Major findings of the program review self-study. The M.S. in Arts Technology program is one of the largest master's degree programs at Illinois State in terms of its share of total enrollment of its administering unit. Within the Arts Technology unit at Illinois State (both undergraduate and graduate degree programs), enrollment in the M.S. in Arts Technology program is approximately 20 percent of the total Arts Technology unit enrollment. The share of enrollment in the College of Fine Arts and across all programs at the University attributed to graduate programs is approximately 11 percent. Students in the program receive training in technical and creative fields with high employment demand and with high levels of entrepreneurial activity. One aspect of the program identified by faculty for improvement is the number and variety of opportunities students have to publicly exhibit their work to increase their professional exposure. Enrollment in the M.S. in Arts Technology program has been stable since 2010. Despite robust demand for arts technology graduates, the program is unable to substantially increase enrollment without a significant increase in its permanent budget. Additional funds would be needed to fund more graduate assistantships and to offer more courses open only to graduate students. The administrative structure of the unit also presents significant barriers to enrollment growth as well as faculty and student scholarship.

Initiatives and plans for the next program review cycle. During the next program review cycle, faculty and staff of the M.S. in Arts Technology program plan to develop mechanisms to recruit a larger and stronger pool of student applicants, promote a culture in which the professional dissemination of student scholarship is a normative activity, and increase faculty and graduate student participation in national and international professional conferences. With respect to the curriculum, faculty plans to provide for a meaningful capstone project that requires students to demonstrate mastery of program learning objectives, require that graduate committees rather than individual faculty members supervise capstone projects, and re-categorize completion of the internship or professional practice as an elective experience rather than a program requirement. If the Arts Technology unit does not achieve department status with its own faculty evaluation committee, Arts Technology faculty should work with the three schools in the college to create guidelines for use by faculty evaluation committees in those schools when evaluating arts technology scholarship.

PROGRAM REVIEW OUTCOME AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE ACADEMIC PLANNING COMMITTEE

The Academic Planning Committee, as a result of this review process, finds the M.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.

The committee recognizes faculty for offering the only master's-level arts technology degree program in Illinois. Quality of the program is evidenced by its accreditation by the National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD), which reaccredited the program in 2015 for a 10-year period. Other quality indicators include consistently positive feedback from program alumni and internship supervisors and rigorous performance reviews throughout the program including evaluation of each student's capstone work by all program faculty members.

The committee commends faculty for expanding student recruitment efforts, including increased financial support for students enrolling in the program. These efforts have contributed to an increase in the number of program applicants, including international students, and the stabilization of enrollment in the target range adopted by the program (12-15 students).

The committee recognizes 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 two graduate-level courses.

In its self-study report, program faculty has identified four programs with qualities to which it aspires. While the report describes similarities and differences between the aspirational programs and the program at Illinois State, the report does not describe specific actions Arts Technology faculty might take to achieve or exceed levels of quality at

the aspirational institutions. The committee asks program faculty to engage in further discussions to complete the aspirational analysis and to report its findings in a follow-up report submitted to the Office of the Provost by September 30, 2016.

The committee concurs with program faculty members' concerns regarding design of the curriculum and urges faculty to initiate comprehensive review of the curriculum if it has not done so already. The committee recommends that faculty explore, among other issues, finalizing and formalizing a capstone requirement, assigning each student a graduate committee to guide the student through the capstone experience, and increasing the number of graduate level courses to ensure rigor appropriate to the master's level. The committee also encourages faculty to explore adding content in areas of high demand such as gaming and animation, to consider adding foci on history, critique, and research methodologies, to investigate ways to promote a culture of presenting creative works at and beyond the University, and, collaborating with Milner Library faculty and faculty in other units, to explore adding instruction in data mining and evaluation. Findings from the analysis of aspirational programs might inform the curriculum review. The committee asks Arts Technology faculty to summarize results of its evaluation, including specific curricular changes faculty has proposed or intends to propose, in a report to the Office of the Provost. The committee asks the Arts Technology program to submit its report by January 27, 2017.

As the curriculum is modified, the plan used to assess student learning should be revised to reflect those modifications. As does the current plan, the revised assessment plan should articulate learning outcomes, incorporate multiple assessment tools, and involve feedback from multiple stakeholders. The revised plan should also map learning outcomes to specific courses and projects and should describe measures used to evaluate graduate projects and how they will be applied. The committee asks the Arts Technology program to submit its revised student learning outcomes assessment plan to the Office of the Provost by December 1, 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 recommends that the program formalize and implement recruitment strategies to attract and enroll the most meritorious students and to ensure stable enrollment. The committee recommends that the program include strategies for recruiting beyond regional liberal arts institutions. Recruitment strategies should also include strategies for attracting more domestic students from racial/ethnic groups traditionally underrepresented at Illinois State in addition to strategies for attracting international students. As the program becomes more selective in its admissions, the committee encourages involvement of all faculty members in admissions decisions.

- Program faculty has established a goal of creating a culture of presentations and exhibitions of student work, both on campus and beyond. To further that effort, the committee supports the program goal of increasing faculty participation in national and international professional conferences, including presentations of research and creative works resulting from faculty-student collaborations.

- The program review self-study report indicates that current efforts to locate and communicate with alumni are informal. The committee recommends that the program develop and implement a formal plan for tracking alumni, to document their successes including their creative achievements and to periodically solicit feedback from alumni regarding the program.

- 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 urges Arts Technology faculty to 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.

- 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.