



**THOMPSON
RIVERS
UNIVERSITY**

**Faculty of
Arts**

Office of the Dean

To: Dr. Gillian Balfour, Provost
Cc: Dr. Brett Fairbairn, President
From: Dr. Richard McCutcheon, Dean
Date: October 20, 2023
Re: Feedback on BRD 8-4 Program Reductions and Eliminations

As per your request of September 28, 2023, please find below my feedback and suggestions regarding Visual Arts programming in the Faculty of Arts.

Of the six Visual Arts programs identified by you for elimination or reduction I suggest that three of those programs continue to be offered – albeit with significant revisions. I suggest three of those Visual Arts programs be phased out; *however*, I also strongly support incorporating elements of those three programs into a major and minor in Communication Design.

The three programs that I suggest be *retained* are:

1. Visual Arts Diploma
2. Certificate in Literary and Art History
3. Certificate in Drawing and Painting

The three programs that I suggest be *phased out* are:

1. Bachelor of Fine Arts
2. Bachelor of Arts Minor in Visual Arts
3. Visual Arts Studio Certificate

Two programs that have direct bearing on this discussion, and which are being prepared for consideration in the academic approval process, are:

1. Communication Design Major
2. Communication Design Minor

I strongly support these two latter additions to our program offerings in the Faculty of Arts as our research shows they would meet many needs and would be highly desirable to students in Kamloops and the region.

My recommendation to the Board regarding Visual Arts has been reinforced by careful strategic thinking done in the Faculty of Arts by faculty members over the past several years. I do not arrive at the above conclusions lightly or with any suggestion that the work done in Visual Arts is not important. Every program area in Arts is important and has value. But there are harsh realities facing faculties of arts across the province and in the country that we cannot ignore. My

goal continues to be to encourage decisions that will lead to a vital and viable Faculty of Arts at TRU over the next decade. I believe we now must make some difficult strategic decisions with the resources that we have available. We know from available research that domestic enrollments across all TRU program areas are projected to decline over the next ten years. At the same time, students are telling us where their priorities are in the current socioeconomic climate. To remain relevant to students and financially sustainable in the longer term, we need to introduce new programming into our curriculum. To resource this new programming, we need to phase out current programming that is no longer viable.

Attached are two documents that provide context and further information to support this memo. The first document is a 5-year Strategic Plan that was created by the Faculty of Arts in a collaborative and collegial manner. The second attachment is a PowerPoint presentation that I prepared at your request for the Senate, which explains significant difficulties related to cost per student in the three programs of greatest concern, a severe decline in students from first to fourth year, consistently low enrolments in upper level courses, severe workload inequities as a result of this program, and an unsustainable physical footprint and facilities cost in an institution that has so many pressing needs for space.

Programs to be Retained and Strengthened

The three program areas that I believe should stay active are the Visual Arts Diploma and two of the current certificates. It is my belief that modifying and strengthening these three programs will result in two positive outcomes. First, these credentials will be highly attractive to community members and students who wish to engage in fine arts programming. We have good data to show that a viable number of students take first- and second-year courses in this area; we have also received substantial feedback that the community would like to have access to this learning opportunity. Second, there are a small number of students in the region who do want to pursue an education in fine arts; this Diploma, if reworked, will provide the platform for us to partner with other institutions in BC, potentially allowing us to ladder students into a BFA offered at a larger institution with specialized resources. I will remind board members of data in the presentations attached that show the number of such students is very small – on average 9 students have annually completed the BFA over the last ten years.

Programs to be Phased Out

The three programs that I believe need to be phased out – the Bachelor of Fine Arts, the Bachelor of Arts Minor in Visual Arts, and the Visual Arts Studio Certificate – are costly to run. They require significant resource allocations, not only in terms of teaching resources, but also space allocations. These programs are highly structured studio-based programs tailored to a limited number of students. Developed in our UCC days, they were well designed for the student body they were originally intended to attract and serve; however, they are increasingly unsustainable in the current higher education and socioeconomic climate. The heart of the matter is that a traditional fine arts degree is an expensive degree in any institution, but

especially so for a medium sized institution such as TRU. And the analysis that I present here is not a new one. In considering the situation of Visual Arts, I consulted three previous Deans of this Faculty of Arts, and I had an analysis from a fourth Dean, who was not available for conversation. All four of these previous Deans had made the same analysis that the studio-based BFA, Minor, and Certificate programs are not sustainable. We have now arrived at a critical juncture – brought on by projected overall domestic student decline and higher operational costs – that requires leadership and action on this question.

Phasing out these three studio-based programs will allow the Faculty of Arts to redirect teaching resources to new program areas while strengthening the remaining Visual Arts programs. At the same time, this direction will also allow the university to reduce the current substantial physical footprint of Visual Arts, allowing TRU to develop the space more effectively to meet a wider range of student and program needs across the institution. My colleagues in several disciplines have been consistently asking for better space for teaching and learning. The decisions currently under review will help that become a reality.

In recommending this direction, I fully acknowledge that there will be a group of students, alumni and community members who will be disappointed by the elimination of these credentials. And faculty members who have dedicated significant parts of their careers to building these programs in Visual Arts understandably do not accept this direction. Change is always difficult and is often accompanied by grief and conflict. I remain convinced that the direction articulated in this memo is best for the Faculty of Arts and TRU as a whole.

Alternative Program Development

One of the new program areas that will be resourced by the above changes will be a new Communication Design Major and Minor. In the process of creating the attached 5-year Academic Plan for Arts, the research revealed these programs (also known as Digital Art and Design in some institutions) would be of great interest to students in Kamloops and the region. A Communication Design Major and Minor will incorporate several key Visual Arts courses already found in the current BFA – by merging Communications and Visual Arts courses together in one program, we will create an attractive program and credential.

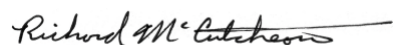
Acknowledgements and Thanks

The BRD 8-4 process has been intense and has required hundreds of conversations and meetings. As I bring this brief response to a close, I wish to publicly thank the dozens of individuals – faculty members and community members – who have taken the time to weigh in on the Visual Arts process. I have worked hard to stay open and engaged by all the contributions made to the conversation. I consider all of them to be helpful to the process. There is a great diversity of perspective within the Faculty of Arts on this matter. This has been a challenging process for all and regardless of whether colleagues agree or disagree with the

recommended direction our respect for each other and our commitment to students is unwavering.

Please extend my thanks to the TRU Board for this opportunity to provide feedback on the BRD 8-4 process. I remain available and open to further communication in whatever form is appropriate.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard McEwen", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.