

Summary

These documents, together, are a remarkable effort. It is clear that all four Faculties in the College have taken-on the task of reconceptualising the curriculum of each department with an eye to shared structure, and yet they also maintain individual distinction. In my opinion, you have achieved the critical objective of putting forth a vision of a 3-year program of undergraduate education. This is not a mere cramming of four years of study into three years. You have mapped a program of education that could very well produce student performance that exceeds the efforts of 4-year programs.

Three factors in particular distinguish the curriculum plan:

- 1) A rigorous structure of formative and summative assessment, with summative assessments applied at the end of each academic year of study.
- 2) A highly flexible time structure that breaks from the constrictions of the semester and the quarter systems and allows for new systems of tuition.
- 3) A conceptualisation of the progression of the student through the curriculum as grounded in research and enquiry.

Some Faculties are more articulate in these factors than others. Nevertheless, there is a fundamental agreement of vision, which—from a reviewer based in the United States—appears highly visionary.

To begin this review, I would like to discuss each of distinguishing factors that I identified: assessment, tuition, and research.

Assessment

A rigorous program of assessment at the end of each year is essential to the 3-year program's transcendence of the appearance of academic compression. As is mentioned in the Fine Arts curriculum, this will pose new challenges for students who are judged unprepared to advance to next year study. Nevertheless, holding students accountable for learning, and creating these gateways will create a more intense learning atmosphere that promises to build a culture where students become more accountable for their learning.

As reflected in principles of Backward Design, assessment will link with learning objectives. Therefore, assessment needs to manifest the Faculties' definition of research. The Core Program defines research as process characterized by four sequential and yet reiterative stages: Identify, Gather, Analysis, and Respond. Is this a model of enquiry that the College might ask students to continue to develop for the full three years, and thus form a model of research assessment across Faculties? Would this process be a framework for assessing student growth at the end of each year?

If this is the case, then one could envision core Essential Questions that should govern instruction and critique for the full three years of education: How does this work demonstrate identifying? How does this work demonstrate gathering? How does this work demonstrate analysis? What is the caliber of your verbal and written response to this work? In addition to an expectation that students continually should improve in their ability to respond to these four questions over the three years, there would also be an expectation that students would continually be able to improve in each of these four factors when discussing the work of other artists and their peers.

Tuition

Twenty-first century technology has changed learning. The visual arts and design have always had, and will always have, a need for strong skills foundation for the successful completion of work. The visual arts train the mind through the hand and eye. That means there needs to be time to train the hand. But today, with 24-7 access to YouTube and information resources on-line, students have constant access to tutorials in training the hand. It is not necessary to devote as much tuition to these skills as in the past. It is time to get smart about this new reality of how young people are learning. The new NCAD curriculum does this.

What YouTube cannot do, is help students connect the link of eye and hand to mind in a sustained curriculum that offers feedback from engaged tutors. Therefore, what NCAD will be offering in the future through its curriculum is not so much the manual training of visual artists (YouTube can do that). NCAD will be offering to train people to think in and through visual arts and design. However, that training will need to be thorough enough that NCAD can be sure undergraduates will have a strong enough skill and knowledge base to complete later graduate training in a specialty subject.

Research

A commitment to framing art and design study as research is a gem in NCAD's crown. The admission brief to NCAD is brilliant. Simply completing the admission brief is the equivalent of one semester of foundations studies. As a result, Core Programs can assume a competency on the part of every student from the first day of instruction. In contrast, many schools regard their students as blank slates with no prior knowledge. Through its admission's tradition, NCAD can demand more of its students, and expect students to rapidly prototype responses to these challenges.

Throughout these documents there is a clear call to educate students in the methods and methodologies of visual research. This leads to my largest concern with the curriculum. Is there adequate articulation of how methodologies of visual research transcend the methods of visual research? I am not sure there is a consistent base of explicit knowledge in the faculty on this issue. How will students step beyond learning the methods of visual enquiry to learn the methodologies?

Studio practice in the visual arts has a long way to go in conceptualising and articulating research methodologies in a clear format so that students understand the menu that they can draw from or intuitively embrace. The methodologies of visual research are not as well defined as in the social sciences, or even in approaches to art historical research. For example, Sullivan discusses three methodologies that visual artists work with: Discursive, Dialectical, and Deconstructive.¹ Is there an adequate knowledge base in the faculty to understand what this means? Are students exposed to debate in how to make art around these different approaches? Granted, Sullivan's categories for methodology are not canonical. Nevertheless, does NCAD have conceptual models that teachers guide students to consider? The First Year Core program does a fine job, but its training in research methodology remains an implicit curriculum. It would be important for this work to be made more explicit for two reasons:

¹ Sullivan, G. (2010). *Art practice as research: Inquiry in visual arts* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks CA: Sage.

- 1) To more fully capture the contributions that Core faculty has made and will continue to make in this new curriculum.
- 2) To leave students with a structure for continuing research after they have completed Core studies.

Coherency of the learning experience, from philosophy to sequencing of learning/modules

Philosophically the curriculum is sound. The sequencing works. For example at the University of Georgia, students take 6 ½ semesters of art study to complete their BFA degree – about 7 weeks more than what is proposed here. However considering that NCAD's entrance brief is so rigorous, students come in at a higher level. They encounter a far more challenging program than UGA students encounter in their first year. Thus, it would be my expectation that an 3-year NCAD student would exceed a 4-year UGA student.

The appropriateness of the Learning Outcomes

Overall, the learning outcomes reflect an explicit awareness of 21st century goals, and thoughtful concerns for the breadth of skills that visual artists will need to make meaningful contributions to society.

Negotiating the Field might be better conceived of as Professional Structure and Development. The term *practice* is used in reference to skills and techniques in the first thematic core: *Materials and Practices*. Therefore, the life-long skill that is a learning outcome is *praxis*.

The strengths and weaknesses of the programme

1. The program as it currently existis does not define interdisciplinarity as reaching across the colleges of University College Dublin. For those students with a deep interest in exploring the liberal arts (or sciences), could there be a UCD 4-year Honours program similar to the Education programme?
2. The documents refer to the curriculum as problem-based, but whose problem is it? A curriculum that is fully student-centered needs to emphasize from the first day the need for the students to find their problems and not wait for the professors to give them the problems. Core Programs does an excellent job of instilling a culture of student-centered problem-based curriculum. Other programs, like Ceramics, begin to explicitly define problems that students must deal with. Is a culture of student finding being fostered within these limitations? I can imagine that it is possible; however, I could also imagine that the problems could become overly didactic.
3. Ensure that there is a consistent emphasis placed on skills in critique and collaborative teamwork throughout the documents. Both of these skills emphasize the importance of constructive communication with others to work toward a shared goal.

How the programmes relate to international standards / best practice in this area.

Overall the programmes reflect the best ideas in international practice. One area of weakness might be more aggressively linking with and drawing from resources at

University College Dublin that share interests in visual communication, visual thinking, and visual research. How these traditions feed a 21st century visual arts curriculum is still to be addressed.