UCC Program Review Committee summary of review

Program – School of Visual Communications

This program includes the following degrees, minors, and certificates:

- B.S. Visual Communications - Photojournalism
- B.S. Visual Communications – Commercial Photography
- B.S. Visual Communications – Information Design: Publication
- B.S. Visual Communications – Information Design: Interactive Media
- M.A. Photography

Recommendation

This program is found to be viable, see report for commendations, concerns, and recommendations.

Date of last review – AY 2007

Date of this review – AY 2017

This review has been sent to school director and the dean, their responses are attached.

The report has been sent to Graduate Council, they have no comments.
Ohio University Curriculum Committee
External/Internal Academic Program Review

School of Visual Communication
Undergraduate and Graduate Programs
College of Communication
Ohio University

Prof. William Snyder, External Reviewer, RIT
Dr. Lauren McMills, Assistant Professor, Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry
Dr. Kathleen Sullivan, Associate Professor, Political Science
Dr. Robert L. Williams II, Professor, Mechanical Engineering Department

October 13, 2016

Executive Summary

VIABLE
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Introduction & Process Overview

The School of Visual Communication in the College of Communication at Ohio University underwent an external/internal academic program review in February 2016. The Academic Program Review Committee was comprised of external reviewer Prof. William Snyder, Photojournalism Chair of RIT, and three internal reviewers, Dr. Lauren McMills (Chemistry and Biochemistry), Dr. Kathleen Sullivan (Political Science), and Dr. Robert L. Williams II (Mechanical Engineering).

Over the course of two days (October 10 and 11, 2016), the team met privately and independently with Associate Provost Dewald; the Dean of the College of Communication; and the School of Visual Communications Director, tenured Group I faculty, untenured Group I faculty, Group II faculty, staff, graduate students, and undergraduate students. The team also toured the Schoonover Center.

Ohio University’s School of Visual Communication struck us as a strong, viable program as evidenced by a dedicated faculty, engaged and strongly motivated students that are well-prepared for both jobs and graduate study.

This report is divided into seven sections, directly organized as requested by the Ohio University Academic Program Review effort.
1. The Program as a Whole

The program as a whole:

a. Is the current number and distribution of faculty sufficient to carry out the broad overall mission of the Department (Teaching; Research, Scholarship and Creative Activity; Service).

- VisCom strives to stay ahead or at the very least, stay current with an industry that adopts and sheds new technology and processes very quickly. It makes finding adequate teaching expertise/experience outside of Group 2 faculty extremely difficult. They are currently searching for a Group 1 position after a faculty member left for a much more lucrative career as a freelancer and they expect it to be difficult to find a suitable hire.

- A Group 2 faculty position was cut due to budget constraints earlier this year and that will make it more difficult to fully staff the growing areas of Interactive and Data Visualization.

- In addition, the amount of service each faculty member performs is well above the normal requirements which - in conjunction with their teaching loads - leaves little time for RSCA. It is also very clear that if this amount of service weren’t being performed, VisCom would not function at the high level expected by students. Faculty perform equipment maintenance, advise 30-40 students, perform prospective student interviews, organize speaker visits and event planning, manage the equipment cage and equipment, perform recruiting activities (interviews, open houses, etc.), run the studios, manage the gallery, create promotional materials, help students enter contests, create workshops for students, advise student groups, and help students find internships.

- Within the next several years there will be faculty turnover within the school. A handful of senior VisCom faculty will be retiring. A few have already made their plans known. The school will be significantly different by the next review. Faculty will decide the future direction of the program through the hires they will be making, whether for specific teaching needs and/or the expertise new faculty members will bring to the program. A major concern is what will happen when Terry Eiler’s “retirement” finally takes affect? He has been able to step in during the current Grad Director’s absence. But, there will be a time when he will not be available to help fill-in in the classroom or administratively. While any one of the other VisCom faculty can fulfill those duties, the cascading effect of them sliding into those roles that Terry would fill will diminish the program.

- Besides faculty retirement, the school will be affected by the proposed Masters of Fine Arts degree, which is at the state government level in the approval process. Since all full-time faculty in VisCom teach both undergraduate and graduate courses, the school must make sure all hires going forward are contributors to the success of this new graduate degree program. The school’s next hire (to start Fall 2017-2018) will be a Group I tenure-track faculty member, who must have industry experience and expertise in multimedia design and at minimum an MFA degree. A hiring committee made up of VisCom faculty and one Media Arts & Studies faculty member has been chosen to start the search process.
b. Is the level of the Department’s RSCA appropriate for the program given the size of the faculty and the resources available to the Department? Is the Department’s level of external funding at an appropriate level?

- The faculty is unable to spend the appropriate amount on RSCA as designated by their TRS due to the extreme amount of service they perform for the program, college and university. It is overwhelming and it’s not their fault. The program would be greatly diminished without this service. And, over time, this lower level of RSCA will adversely affect the quality of their teaching as many of them use their creative work to inform their class work as well as use it to keep up with the latest developments in industry.

- External funding is not a major expectation for this program.

c. Is the level of service, outside of teaching, appropriate for the program given its size and the role that it plays in the University and broader communities it interacts with? Is the Department able to fulfill its service mission?

- The amount of service that is required for the program to run smoothly and well is very, very high since the university cut support staff several years ago. A large amount of the service - running the equipment cage, equipment maintenance, event/speaker planning, studio management, gallery management, creating recruiting materials, workshop logistics - could be handled by replacing the administrative position. That would greatly reduce the service for the faculty. The faculty would still have a large amount of service - advising 30-40 students, advising student groups, helping students with contest entries, helping students find appropriate internships, creating workshop curricula, interviewing prospective students/recruiting - but the reduction in service that an additional admin could bring would then allow them more time for RSCA.

d. Does the Department have an appropriate level of financial resources, staff, physical facilities, library resources, and technology to fulfill its mission?

- What VisCom lacks in comparison to peer institutions is access to non-faculty resources. VisCom, unlike other bench-mark programs, is a standalone school within a communication college. Most peer visual communication programs, such as at Syracuse and UNC, are simply taught as part of the curriculum in much larger schools of mass communication and journalism. In addition, nearly all peers to VisCom are located in endowed schools that have funding to market their programs in many different and productive ways, such as coordinated mailings, advertising in trade journals and online, website upkeep, multiple workshops, and student trips to events. While the quality of the education a student receives at one of these schools is not better than VisCom, there is a growing perception among potential students that these programs are better because of their initial visibility. The effectiveness of this type of marketing matters.

- In addition to faculty needs, VisCom faculty performs a tremendous amount of service activities that could best be handled by a staff member, thus allowing them more time to pursue RSCA. In particular, that person needs to focus on promoting the program to potential students. Peer VisCom programs have become more attractive to potential students because they have additional staff designated solely to promoting their school.
Since moving into the newly remodeled Schoonover Center for Communication, VisCom has a great physical plant that received very positive comments from everyone, with one small exception: Many students and some faculty lamented how spread out offices and classrooms are and the lack of a “gathering area” where students of all years/program could interact, exchange ideas and become acquainted with one another in a convenient location - in much the same way that the hallway outside the offices and classrooms of the old facility served that purpose.

The financial resources are inadequate to stay current with rapidly evolving technology used in the industry - be it camera and studio equipment for the cages and studios, computers, software, printers, new devices such as drones, or VR/360 cameras. While Enlight Tech Funds have helped with this, the fund is finite. There are 34 computers that will only last for another year or so, with no replacement funding beyond these computers on the horizon. The computers are crucial for teaching the Design, Interactive and Data Visualization Programs. Funding for student publications - which provide great practical experience as well as portfolio pieces - are lacking. Despite some help from the major camera manufacturers, money for bringing top level industry speakers on campus is also inadequate. Funding sustainability is a concern.
2. Undergraduate Program

a. Is the Department fulfilling its service role, adequately preparing non-majors for future coursework and/or satisfying the needs for general education?

- VICO 1000 is a Tier II course (Humanities and Literature). This is a large survey course, with 200+ students. It is offered during the semesters and online during the summer. This course is also required for VisCom majors.

- VICO 2514 Introduction to Design, VICO 2521 Introduction to Photography, and VICO 2561 Introduction to Web Design are all popular with non-majors and are offered both in the classroom and on-line. The School is developing a new large capacity course in Data Visualization, in response to trends in the field, planned to be offered beginning Fall 2017.

b. Is the program attracting majors likely to succeed in the program? Is the number of majors appropriate for the program? Is the program attracting a diverse group of students?

- The School currently has 273 undergraduate majors. This is the same number it had at the time of the last review. Enrollment has remained remarkably steady from year to year. These majors are likely to succeed in the program, given the application requirements to enter the program and self-selection of students. The School has a high yield rate; in 2016, 129 students applied, 112 were admitted, and 66 accepted a place in the class. These figures are generally consistent from year to year. The School requires that students earn a grade of C or better in the courses required in their major. The School has a high retention rate and graduation rate. The first-year retention rate is 90%, among the highest in the university. About 70% of students graduate within 4 years. Among the 30% of students who do not graduate in four years are students who transferred into the program and need more time to complete the sequence of courses and students who extended an internship, pushing them into an extra semester of coursework. The faculty work together to plan the curriculum so that all courses are offered in sequence, ensuring that courses are available to students so that students can graduate on time.

- The School has been active in recruiting new majors and is seeking permission to reintroduce portfolio submission and interviews as an admissions requirement. In the past, the School interviewed high school seniors interested in the major. It has removed the interview requirement but still asks to look over portfolios. This requirement has had mixed results. On the one hand, some students without a formal portfolio may count themselves out. This, despite the School’s urging that a portfolio is widely understood (it could be a scrapbook or any evidence of visual communication). On the other hand, not having a portfolio requirement could make the program look less prestigious to prospective students. Faculty members have pointed out that the portfolio is a chance to get to know the student, to know whether VisCom is the right program for them and is the chance to direct them to the program that is the best fit for the prospective student’s talents and interests (such as Journalism or Fine Arts), and to start academic advising right away. Given pressures to increase major size, the School will need to find a way to conduct outreach and recruit while maintaining its selective standards. The School actively publicizes its program to high school seniors by sending postcards to accepted students. It holds interview days for transfer students. With more resources, the School could enhance its recruitment efforts with promotional materials.
The School keeps students on track through close and regular advising. The School maintains a presence at Bobcat Student Orientation. Each faculty member is assigned approx. 30 advisees, matched by major. The School has developed an annual checklist for advisor and advisee to fill out. Each semester, the School holds advising night in the innovative classroom, Schoonover 450. There, students can visit different professoors, while faculty members can cross-check their information and serve students with accurate advice.

We do not have figures on diversity rates of the undergraduate students. The School has indicated, however, that attracting a diverse set of students to the major is a problem. The School has been working with Cultural Connections to conduct outreach to a variety of students in its recruitment efforts. This is coupled with the School’s efforts to recruit diverse faculty by such practices as remaining active in professional associations such as the National Association for Black journalists and inviting qualified diversity applicants to apply in every search.

c. Does the undergraduate curriculum provide majors with an adequate background to pursue discipline-related careers or graduate work following graduation?

The program prepares majors for careers at every stage of the process.

- Access to equipment and studios--As students progress through the program, they have increasingly more access to check out equipment from the equipment room, to reserve space in one of the two studios, and to access the computers in the lab. This access provides students with plenty of time to explore their medium and to teach themselves. Undergraduate students indicated that they spend hours outside of class for every credit hour they spend in class. The freedom and responsibility afforded students allows them to develop their skills, to explore their creative capacities and know their own style. The School has contracted with Canon, Nikon, and Sony with such deals as lending equipment and returning it at the end of the year. Such arrangements give students access to up-to-date equipment at a price affordable to the School.

- Collaboration in classes--The School offers four majors, which allows students to specialize, but students are exposed to skills in all of the majors, which offers them a breadth of skills. In addition, there are courses that invite students to collaborate on a project together. Faculty members indicate that it is not uncommon to offer courses concurrently so that the classes can occasionally come together as a larger group. These sorts of practices build cooperation and flexibility into the everyday aspects of learning. Students work on projects together, drawing upon their respective skills. A senior photography major may work with a senior design major to develop a magazine cover, for example. These collaborative efforts teach students the important professional skills of teamwork and exchange, that will make them cooperative collaborators in the workplace. While it is clear that faculty are being innovative in making these opportunities possible, students did indicate that they wish they experienced this earlier in the program.

- Integration of professional development into course work--The School recognizes that many graduates are likely to work freelance when they graduate, and will have to run their own businesses. The Commercial Photography major requires students to complete 6 credit hours in Business skills. In addition, faculty members integrate business skills into their courses. Student projects include developing their own self-promotion materials and branding. Students learn to prepare an invoice.
Internships--All VisCom majors must complete at least one paid internship, equivalent to 400 hours of work. Although there is no formal internship placement service in the School, the School does provide students with the tools and networks to find a position. Students have found internship opportunities through the College’s bi-weekly email announcements, alumni postings on various active Facebook groups, attendance at alumni events and professional conferences, and faculty suggestions. Students indicate that they have received valuable experience through these placements. Informally, students tend to seek out an internship after their sophomore year to “get their foot in the door” and pursue a more rigorous placement after their junior year, to exercise more responsibility and learn even more.

Creative Activities--Student work is shown in the VisCom gallery in 140 Schoonover. This opportunity allows students to present their work in a professional setting and to be involved in the process of curation and putting together of a show. The Soul of Athens project involves students at every level of the visual storytelling process, from making connections with their subjects, to the photographing, to writing copy for the essay. This responsibility for the overall process is also important professional training.

Extracurricular activities--VisCom students lend their skills to campus publications such as The Post or magazines such as Thread, Backdrop, or WOUB. Students thus are able to add to their portfolio while on campus, and to gain experience in an environment working with others, meeting deadlines, and taking on leadership roles. The School supports these venues by providing advising, equipment, and venues.

Professional Visitors, many of whom are graduates in the program--The program review committee was told that once someone is part of VisCom, they are “part of VisCom’s family forever.” the committee found this borne out in the sheer number of alumni who enthusiastically maintain contact with the School. Many of the professionals who visit the School, either in person or through Skype or other virtual ways, are alumni of the program working in the profession. These visitors provide lectures to students and review student work, offering critique.

High Standards--faculty have indicated that they set professional standards in the design and deadlines of their assignments. If they are preparing students for the “real world,” then they model the real world in their classes. From the start, students are subject to strict deadlines and required to provide caption information on photos, for example, as common professional practice that is expected of them. The practice of critique, which is common in industry, encourages students to be able to articulate what it is they do, equipping them with communication skills that they can use right away in the workplace.

d. Are the resources and the number of and distribution of faculty sufficient to support the undergraduate program?

The curriculum includes a large 1000-level survey course, introductory courses, and small, 20-seat upper level courses. The communication and cooperation of the faculty members has made it possible to offer courses at every level and in proper sequence, so that students have the courses they need to graduate on time.
- The School has 10 Group I and one Group II faculty members, who taught 164 credit hours in AY 2015-16. Group II faculty taught 53 credit hours in AY 2015-16 year, and will be expected to teach 69 credit hours in 2016-17. The increasing use of Group III teaching presents some problems to the program. The School assures the quality of Group III instructors through a careful vetting process. It can be difficult, however, to find people qualified in some areas (such as scripting/coding) to teach on a Group III basis when they can make more in industry. Group III faculty are not required to provide service to the School. Finally, the collaborative features of the School will be more difficult to maintain when a greater proportion of the faculty are Group III, because so much of the development of the curriculum is done in close and frequent collaboration of the full-time faculty.

e. Are pedagogical practices appropriate? Is teaching adequately assessed?

- Pedagogical practices exceed expectations. The School’s innovative and effective teaching begins with the curriculum. Faculty members, whose creative work keeps them in touch with the industry, keep abreast of industry trends and discuss the curriculum regularly. They are “nimble” enough to “tweak” the curriculum. This may involve large changes, such as merging the design tracks, offering new courses, or introducing new lessons in existing courses. Faculty commitment to student learning is very high. Students receive feedback, both in class and in office hours. Although there is not an open-door policy, students and staff have resoundingly said that faculty are accessible to students, talking with them one-on-one about their projects or career interests. Students have even said that they will bring work to a faculty member who is not teaching their class to get another review. The generosity and welcoming nature of professors is promoting student learning. That said, the classes are tough. Expectations are high, and student work hard to live up to them. Students are motivated to learn skills, improve their existing skills, and engage in friendly competition with one another. All in all, it promotes excellence.

- Assessment of students is evident in their creative products. Student projects demonstrate that they can use appropriate tools to communicate ideas. They show progress in their skills through the maintaining of a portfolio. Their exposure to the different fields in the School requires them to embrace new technology. Their collaborative projects allow them to practice their appreciation for the value of collaboration. Faculty assess their classroom performance through examinations, critique of creative work, outside assessment by industry professionals, peer- and instructor-critique of portfolios, contests and awards, and one-on-one meetings with faculty. Finally, their placement in leading jobs in the industry and attainment of awards, as students and as professionals, attests to the success of learning outcomes.

f. Are students able to move into discipline-related careers and/or pursue further academic work?

- VisCom graduates have achieved remarkable success in the profession. Numerous students have won Hearst Photojournalism awards, Student Photographer of the Year, College Photographer of the Year, and the MSUSND College Design Competition. Alumni are placed in major newspapers, magazines, social media companies. Nearly thirty Pulitzer Prizes have been awarded to alumni.
3. Graduate Program

a. Is the program attracting students likely to succeed in the program? Is the number of students appropriate for the program? Is the program attracting a diverse group of students?

- Yes, the School is attracting students likely to succeed in the program. The graduate program currently consists of a Master of Arts in Photography with a focus in photojournalism, design or commercial photography. The ideal number of students in the program is 20-22 with about a third of the students in each area. There are currently 30 graduate students in the program. The program as originally designed focused on attracting photojournalists in their 30s who were interested in attaining leadership positions in their field. Over time, the population of incoming students has changed to a younger set of students who have either just graduated from college or are a year or two out of college. The program does include a diverse group of students with women outnumbering men.

- The School has also put in a proposal for a VisCom and Media Arts & Studies Master of Fine Arts in Media Communications. The proposal is awaiting final approval from the Chancellor.

b. Does the graduate curriculum provide an adequate background to pursue discipline-related careers following graduation?

- The graduate curriculum does provide adequate preparation for students in the program. The curriculum includes 32 courses that span each of the focus areas in addition to an individual study course and a Master’s Project course.

c. Does the program provide adequate mentoring and advising to students to prepare them for discipline-related careers?

- The School provides excellent mentoring and advising to students and does an excellent job in preparing them for their careers. Advising is taken very seriously by the faculty and the students are very appreciative of the advising and mentoring that they receive. The faculty also spend a significant amount of time critiquing student work.

- Students indicated an interest in learning about business practices, protecting intellectual property and copyright issues. They would like to see these topics more ingrained in the curriculum to prepare for the needs of a freelance career.

d. Are the resources and the number of and distribution of faculty sufficient to support the graduate program?

- As mentioned above, the School is currently undergoing a change in the number and distribution of faculty as two faculty members have recently left and several faculty members will be retiring over the next several years. There is currently a need for a faculty member in interactive multimedia and a search is currently underway.
• Resources are adequate, although there are several concerns. There are a large number of computers available to students however, a large number will need to be replaced in the next year or two. In addition, there is a concern about available funds being available for new up to date technology for students.

e. Does the program offer appropriate financial support to graduate students?

• The School offers graduate recruitment scholarships each year which waives tuition for the first semester. Students are required to work 6 hours per week. Students are eligible to receive a tuition waiver for their second semester if they pass a mid-semester review.

• The School also has seven graduate assistantships each year. These students work at various places on campus such as the Voinovich School, the Heritage College of Osteopathic Medicine, Alden Library and the Scripps College of Communication.

• The School also offers one fellowship per year to a mid-career professional who wishes to earn a master’s degree. The Knight Fellowship awardee receives a $25,000 stipend and full tuition support.

• The School expects to be able to offer 6 graduate fellowships per year when the Masters of Fine Arts start up in the 2017-2018 academic year.

f. Is teaching adequately assessed?

• Students are asked to fill out course evaluations each semester. The surveys are administered in the final week of class rather than by e-mail in order to increase the completion rate. The results of these surveys are included as part of a faculty member’s annual merit documents which are reviewed by the school’s Promotion and Tenure committee.

• In addition, the School gauges the success of their students as an assessment of their teaching methods. The faculty are active within the industry and receive feedback as to the quality of the graduates. Faculty take the feedback very seriously and disseminate the information at weekly faculty meetings.

g. Are students able to move in to discipline-related careers?

• There is currently a high demand for the school’s students and therefore students are able to find jobs in the industry. A downside of this high demand is that students who leave before finishing their Master’s Project often find it difficult to complete it within the 6-year time limit.
4. Areas of Concern

- Loss of Pete Souza’s Group I faculty position.
- Ohio University is increasingly asking for VisCom faculty expertise (e.g. informational graphics to represent data for potential donor presentations, etc.), which is hard to say no to but which should be paid for by OU.
- Lack of school technician / IT person - hiring this person could significantly unload faculty time, who are currently doing this job.
- Administrative assistant overworked - needs a part-time assistant for event planning, recruiting, assist purchasing, etc.
- Faculty overloaded in service - this is also a commendation, see below.
- New printers must be brought on-line since old printers are not available.
- School funding insufficient to undertake new initiatives.

5. Recommendations

- More ethics should be presented throughout the curriculum.
- Keep small class sizes.
- Protect time for faculty creative activities to ensure they keep up with rapid changes in the industry.
- More School support for students to find paid internships.
- Nurturing of the recently-formed (1-year) Director’s Advisory Board (ten industry professionals, of whom nine are VisCom alumni).

6. Commendations

- The Q2S transition went well and is now finished.
- New facilities in Schoonover Center are excellent.
- The faculty, students, and staff all say VisCom is a family, with good bonding and collegiality.
- The faculty place high expectations and standards on their students, including ability to meet firm deadlines.
- Real-world focus is brought into many activities in the classroom.
- Alumni - good love of school.
- Lots of local publications for student work publishing.
- High faculty service by choice.
- Semester in DC program.
- Recently Ohio University’s VisCom has established an international partner with a university in Augsburg, Germany.
- Tim Goheen’s smooth hiring and transition into the Director’s role.
- Creative use of scheduling in order to increase collaboration between classes.

7. Overall Judgment

VERY VIABLE.
TO: Scott Titsworth, Dean, Scripps College of Communication;  
David Ingram, Chair, UCC Program Review Committee;  
Howard Dewald, Associate Provost for Faculty and Academic Planning  
FROM: Timothy Goheen, Director, School of Visual Communication  
RE: Review of School of Visual Communication

Esteemed Ohio University faculty and colleagues:

The School of Visual Communication, as noted in its Self-Review document and in the Review document written by internal and external reviewers of the program, maintains the highest quality of student-centered learning in the field of visual communication. The school takes great pride in being rated “Very Viable” by its program reviewers.

Maintaining the success noted in the review report requires faculty go above and beyond in terms of service to the community, the university, the college and to the individual student. By using service to sustain the high-quality of the program, faculty in the school are often unable to spend a TRS appropriate amount of time on their RSCA. As noted in its self-study, RSCA is part of the school’s pedagogical legacy. Therefore, a lack of faculty RSCA time can be a detriment to teaching and lead to unfavorable student learning outcomes. Lack of RSCA can also be deleterious to faculty morale. These were all correctly pointed out in the review of the program.

Besides overload in faculty service, the review highlighted areas of concern, such as current and future losses of faculty, administrative staff overload and insufficient funding for new initiatives, promotion and recruitment.

As director of the school, I take all the concerns and recommendations from students, faculty and the reviewers of the program very seriously. For example:

• To elevate service concerns, the school is working toward creating a Tier II survey class centered around Data Visualization. This class will not only serve a large number of Ohio University students, but help the school secure a much needed Group II hire (one that will
include a service component). The school is doing this with the consent of the Scripps College Dean. In addition, the advent of the shared MFA degree with the School of Media Arts & Studies in 2018 will add graduate students who will be able to help with teaching and service load, freeing faculty to spend more time with their RSCA.

- The school has just posted a listing for a Group I tenure-track professor to teach in its multimedia design sequence. Service will be a component of this hire’s contract.

The school seeks assistance from the college and university for future initiatives, such as the following:

- Semester in DC program in collaboration with the Scripps School of Journalism.
- Workshops, degree programs, research initiatives, student exchanges, etc., with faculty and students from Augsburg University in Germany, using the VisCom initiated MOU (signed) between Ohio University and Augsburg University.
- VisCom led workshops featuring multimedia, design, photography, video, and data visualization for students (high school and university), instructors (high school and university) and industry professionals.
- Recruitment, promotion and fund generating initiatives involving VisCom alumni and the VisCom Director’s Advisory Board (noted in the review).
- Administrative assistance to assist with event planning, recruiting, and VisCom-specific IT and print lab issues (noted in the review).

The School of Visual Communication plans to remain a well-known and very viable program in the field of visual communication with the continued support of the Scripps College of Communication and Ohio University. It plans to grow, innovate and maintain the high level of student-centered learning, expected by both students and the university. The school has no objections to the review report or the review report going forward.

Thank you for your support and consideration.

Sincerely,

Tim Goheen
Director, Associate Professor, School of Visual Communication
Scripps College of Communication, Ohio University
Friday, November 18, 2016

Dr. David Ingram
Chair, Programs Review Committee
University Curriculum Council
Ohio University

Dr. Ingram:

I have had the opportunity to review comments provided by the program review team assigned to the School of Visual Communication, as well as their own self-report documents. I appreciate the time of the review team as well as their attention to detail in providing thoughtful suggestions and comments. As I read the report, there were several excellent suggestions, to which I’m sure the School will give direct attention. I focus on three areas in this letter: faculty staffing, service by faculty, and overall program excellence.

1. Faculty Staffing and Development

The School is currently searching for a Group 1 faculty member who will focus on the growing need for “digital skills” in the field. With that hire, and future hires that will result from potential retirements, the School will need to plan carefully to advance needs in particular content areas, like digital and interactive design, while also maintaining capability in more traditional areas. With regard to the appropriate number of faculty, the student-to-faculty ratio has decreased from around 14 students for every faculty member in AYs 2010-2012 to approximately 11 students per faculty member in AY 2015. There has also been a general decline in the number of credit hours taught in the school during that same period. Under the current scope of majors in the program and credit-hour generation for both majors and “non major” classes, the current staffing level for VisCom appears sufficient.

Director Goheen and I have discussed scenarios under which the School will explore options for new “non-major” classes. If those classes are created and show demand, there exist options for potentially creating a Group II position to serve that demand while also assisting other needs of the School.

One of my objectives is to find ways in which VisCom faculty can further collaborate with faculty from other schools. For instance, I believe there are very exciting research possibilities that could involve VisCom expertise in collaboration with faculty/students in JOUR, MDIA, and COMS. Through such collaboration, I believe the research/creative/professional (RCP) activity of the School can be further elevated. Furthermore, the creation of the MFA program, in collaboration with the School of Media Arts & Studies and College of Fine Arts, will provide opportunities for project-centered work that has the potential to raise the RCP activity of the School.
2. Service by Faculty

Faculty in the School of Visual Communication perform significant service to the benefit of the School (as well as the College and broader University). As noted in the review report, some of those service activities are “by choice.” Based on my assessment, faculty in VisCom perform service at generally the same rate as many faculty in other programs, both in the College and across the University.

The Scripps College provides various options for technical support and logistics that are available to the School of Visual Communication. For instance, we offer IT support and also have an integrated equipment room. The School of Visual Communication could reduce some service obligations of faculty by better utilizing those options. However, as noted in the external review, some faculty in the School view that type of service as important to the mission of the School. I remain open to VisCom taking advantage of these options if the School feels that the they will allow faculty more time for other activities.

The College is changing the focus of one of our student service staff to provide advising for first year VisCom students. While not completely eliminating the advising duties of faculty, who will still advise more advanced students, this action by the college will reduce faculty advising load by a substantial amount. In addition, the College recently hired a procurement specialist who can assist School staff and faculty with some procurement activities that are more time-consuming and difficult. We will continue to explore ways in which such shared service options can assist the School with service issues.

3. Program Success

Although the review committee and self-report identified appropriate areas that deserve continued attention and planning, my overall conclusion is that the School of Visual Communication is a highly effective academic unit that has distinction as a national leader, prepares students well, and enhances the Scripps College of Communication by the expertise advanced by the School. I am particularly excited by the ways in which the School has envisioned its growth and ways to react to changes in the field, particularly in interactive/digital production.

In closing, the review team correctly observed that the School of Visual Communication is “very viable.” I concur with that statement, noting that there are always areas in which improvement is possible. The areas highlighted in this area will be given explicit attention in the next year and beyond.

Sincerely,

Scott Titsworth, Ph.D.
Professor and Dean

Cc: Tim Goheen Director, School of Visual Communication