

Review Brief - 4D Bill Seaman

Through considerations of the factors set out under Background Above, in conjunction with the college Goals attached, the Academic and Administrative Review Committee is invited to provide the Dean and Director, COFA with advice and where appropriate, recommends on the following issues:

3.1 Is the present AOU (School / Dept) model appropriate in the current economic climate? Should there be fewer schools or could they be constructed differently?

The fact that "Area Heads" do not exist on the books is a mistake. A hierarchical structure is very important in order to maintain an efficient system.

Schools should be rewarded for their successes in both the area of research and professional practice. An appropriate structure should be developed to deal with this in terms of "Artistic" criteria in that we are a "College of Fine Arts".

In the present model, full time staff are stretched to the maximum. A restructuring would only destroy the delicate balance which exists between teaching and professional practice/research. Restructuring only disrupts the gains made over the past years, destabilises the area, and makes more work for all those involved. It also damages the quality of education by forcing energies to be spent on restructuring instead of on the quality of education itself.

3.2 Do you believe that the present range of course offerings accommodate current demand? If not what changes could be made?

The 4D area in the School of Media Art has worked for years to develop an appropriate, balanced curriculum. New areas (such as Multi-media computing) are added as contemporary necessity dictates. Such new areas do not discredit more traditional structures. In fact, in order to approach computer related arts, an education grounded in a number of more traditional areas i.e. Film, Video, Sound, Performance, and Installation provides an articulate background for contemporary art practice. Artists at COFA understand the relationships between media, as well as the complete potentials of contemporary media in all of its forms. The problem with much computer related art is that it is devoid of content - the latest technique... At COFA we pride ourselves on

providing a well rounded artistic education, one in which the artist uses the appropriate vehicle for their particular expression. To destroy the balanced curriculum in the name of cost saving is to destroy the quality of education which has taken years to develop. A curriculum which has proven itself through the numerous professional successes as well as by the quality of student that is attracted to attending the school at this time, both on the Undergraduate and Graduate Level. It must also be seen that the quality of Undergraduate education feeds the quality of the Graduate course. One can not be eliminated without drastically affecting the other. No other school provides the quality of contemporary education related to media art in the Greater Sydney Area.

3.3 Is the college teaching across too broad a range of disciplines, or should the range be even broader?

There are numerous requests to add classes in 4D particularly in the beginning film and video areas. Classes could also be added in the area of applied computer related art as well. Classes could also be added that augment the conceptual use of sound, as well as the history of the use of sound in media art practice.

3.4 If too broad, what should be dropped? If not broad enough what should be added?

All classes that are scheduled are necessary for the quality of education to be maintained. Classes could be added to broaden the scope of computer/media art practice as it pertains to digital video as well as to sculptural potentials engendered by computer related practice in terms of installation/environmental art. We are now living at a time that computer related media is shifting the paradigm away from the traditional use of books. Such a paradigm shift should be acknowledged and the School of Media Art should be properly maintained to educate for this shift.

3.5 Should greater flexibility be encouraged in the offerings by full-time academic staff at undergraduate level to offset some of the costs associated with casual staff?

Full time staff are currently over extended in this area. Casual staff help to maintain a balanced diversity which in turn augment the quality of education at COFA. To eliminate casual staff is to

destroy the quality of education. We must work hard to maintain excellence and not to sacrifice any quality of education by cost cutting measures. If greater autonomy was given to individual schools the role of the Dean and Director could be made toward raising monies for all areas, as is their role in UNSW, and the quality of education could be maintained. We must remember that our role is to educate - "This school would run smoothly if we just didn't have any students to take care of..."

3.6 How should the responsibility and cost burden for high and advanced technology teaching and research resources be apportioned?

The School of Media art is seen as an expensive school on paper. In fact if one was to look at the revenue brought in through research in the area, as well as the the actual numbers serviced college wide - these costs come down. Media art and computing also represent a growth area for the Australian economy. Students who leave the School of Media Art leave both as well rounded educated artists as well as people who have gained valued skills in terms of contemporary culture. May government initiatives have been to augment studies in this area. The potential of economies built on entertainment, infotainment, educational software, and related computer/video based interactive projects represents an important growth area for the country. To cut such an educational area is to compromise the potential future of the country. Yes these technologies can be seen as expensive but they are also at the centre of future investment of Australian culture. COFA at this time has an international profile in the area of Media Arts. Such a profile (both as a valuable educational base as well as exhibiting an international standard of practice) would be jeopardized with any additional cuts to the Area.

3.7 Are the teaching spaces (studio and tutorial) being utilised fully across the 12 hour day (Monday to Thursday) and 9 hour on Friday?

Teaching spaces are fully utilized across the 12 hour day. Many spaces function in more than one way at a time ie a computer room and video classroom in one. There are no studio spaces for students on either a Graduate or Undergraduate level in the 4D area, thus spatial work suffers as well as natural group discussion of concepts outside of class time (a behaviour which is facilitated in most art schools in "studios". A number of proposals to extend

access to facilities in a cost effective manner have been brought to the attention of the Dean and Director - ie Selected post graduate students could gain over- night access to facilities with keys and security code. This would free up daytime access which is booked for weeks in advance. The quality of work would be enhanced by such a cost saving mechanism. At this point in time only 4 hours per week access to the editing facilities is granted. The quality of work would be enhanced by such a cost saving mechanism. There is also a possibility of funding additional security for late access through the student union or other non-school budgets and fund raising mechanisms. Student volunteers could also function in the capacity of security people. M-ART post graduate students who work on a 52 week a year schedule (see COFA Handbook) are penalised by not having evening access during the breaks (a common procedure for researchers at the UNSW campus). These students work full time jobs during the day and for the most part can not use daytime access without disrupting their normal lives. Classes are generally over subscribed, thus the quality of education suffers - although on paper this looks like a successful solution to the Student-Per-Hour equation. This equation should be questioned in terms of Art education and a feasible standard which promotes quality education be maintained.

3.8 Is the present department structure for administration, appropriate, efficient and economic? Could there be amalgamations in this area?

The present department structure for administration is appropriate although the position of "Area Head" should be created and supported in an official capacity.

3.9 What changes might be considered to improve the effectiveness of teaching support services?

Support services are adequate at this time and could be extended into having a member of support staff on the floor in the evening, as well as a member of staff could be named to staff the audio area. Cutting back on staff (by not renewing the contracts that are now in existence in the 4D area) will only damage the quality of education and generate a student uprising. Students are demanding the quality of education be maintained. Full time staff can not suddenly add the amount of hours which were be serviced by support staff, thus the quality of education again suffers. The use of support staff in the 4D area has been honed and carefully

developed to work in tandem with the curriculum. To remove existing support staff positions is to destroy a working balance in the area, and to erode the positive environment which has taken years of planning to develop.

3.10 Are there any other strategies which might enhance overall efficiency and effectiveness in the College?

A director of development should become a paid position in the department. This staff member could seek funding, grants, and in kind support on a full or part time basis and potentially fund their own position as well as liase with corporations, software companies etc.. Autonomy of the area should be maintained as well as budgets which are not "floating" and removed without notice. Schools should not be made to pay for bad administration mistakes. Schools that earn money by outside classes should not be penalised by having that money used for non school purposes. Access to existing facilities should be extended in a cost cost transparent manner to maintain and enhance the quality of education. Student volunteer mechanisms might become part of the curriculum where each student functions as a part time support staff at some point in their educational process. The school should be adequately budgeted based the the quality of service and necessity of education. In one year 2/3 of the budget was removed. How can the school expect to maintain quality education with additional cuts. Adequate repair budgets and future equipment expenditures must be made carefully. Increased use of existing facilities outside of the current time structure must be developed.