

**FINAL DRAFT**

[2-20-20]

**DEPARTMENT OF VISUAL ARTS**

**MENTORING PLAN**

**PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT**

As stipulated by the Provost and the Dean of the Humanities Division, this document has been drafted by the members of the Department of Visual Arts Mentoring Committee to assist in guiding students through our graduate MFA program.

Madeline Gallucci  
Matthew Jesse Jackson  
Jason Salavon  
Jessica Stockholder  
Brett Swenson

**PREAMBLE**

Graduate student mentoring in the Department of Visual Arts is shared by all of the faculty, and mentoring occurs across a broad spectrum of pedagogical structures. In 2007 the Department embraced this approach, and in the intervening years, it has become one of the Department's hallmarks. In place of a traditional "advising structure," students are required to interact face-to-face with all faculty in frequent and varied ways (as described below).

This structure has proven successful as it enables and enforces a high degree of interpersonal mentorship between students and faculty. This structure emphasizes breadth, and guarantees a high degree of distributed mentoring, while allowing for, and encouraging, the depth that comes with traditional one-on-one advising. As faculty often work collectively, this structure also allows for peer review and affords frequent opportunities for the discussion of didactic practice.

**ACADEMIC ADVISING**

## **Initiation of Advising**

*When and how does advising and mentoring begin?*

Mentoring begins when a graduate student enters the MFA program. All faculty members in residence are considered mentors to enrolled graduate students. Additionally, the first-year cohort takes one seminar each of three quarters with one of DoVA's faculty members. First and second year students take a critique class in the fall and winter quarter of each year.

Advising formally begins when a student is assigned two thesis advisors at the beginning of the second year of the MFA program.

*Does the department help match students with academic advisors?*

Yes, the Department assigns second-year students to work with two faculty advisors on a thesis committee based on student preference and availability of faculty.

## **Eligibility**

*Who in the department is eligible to serve as a thesis advisor?*

Any faculty member in residence or instructional professor in residence.

*What role do faculty external to the department or the University play in academic advising?*

External faculty do not typically play any formal role in thesis committees, though students are encouraged to seek out a wide range of mentoring experiences throughout the university.

## **Responsibilities**

*What are the basic responsibilities of faculty?*

Faculty provide verbal feedback concerning a student's work.

Faculty are available to provide career advice (whether in a more or less formal manner, depending on the student's preference).

Faculty are available for discussion outside of courses and critiques, either through regularly scheduled studio visits or by making an appointment.

Thesis advisors should meet with their advisees regularly during the second year (e.g., twice per quarter, or each month during the fall and winter quarters).

*Faculty will report unsatisfactory progress toward the MFA degree to the Director of Graduate Studies.*

## **Capacity and Distribution**

*How are advising and mentoring responsibilities distributed in the department?*

All resident faculty can be understood to be student mentors, while each student has only two designated thesis advisors.

## **Oversight**

*What role does the department play in overseeing and facilitating thesis advising and faculty mentoring?*

The Director of Graduate Studies and the Chair—with the assistance of the Associate Director of Programs and Student Affairs—are responsible for overseeing thesis advising and mentoring within the department. The thesis committee structure involves inherent oversight because faculty work in pairs on the committees.

## **TEACHING**

*How does the department's mentoring plan relate to pedagogy?*

Each graduate student usually serves as a Teaching Assistant (TA) for three undergraduate courses offered within the department each year. The specific pedagogical demands of each course should be discussed in advance with the relevant faculty instructor. The instructor and the teaching assistant are strongly encouraged to meet both before the course begins and after its conclusion to discuss goals and evaluate performance.

As students prepare their dossiers for the Visual Arts Teaching Fellow position, they consult faculty and the Associate Director as needed.

## **PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

*The Department makes available a wide range of opportunities and experiences designed to enhance key professional skills.*

## **Studio Visits**

Faculty are encouraged to invite groups of students to visit their studios and/or to discuss the faculty member's career trajectory.

### **External Grants and Fellowships**

The Associate Director of Programs and Student Affairs—in consultation with the Director of Graduate Studies and the Chair—assists students with questions about external grants and fellowships (which are rarely available for MFA students). Additionally, the department subscribes all students to an opportunities list serve and sends out funding and residency information to that list regularly.

### **Service**

*What role do students in the department play on departmental committees or extra-departmental workshops?*

Graduate students are encouraged to take an active role in departmental governance either by acting as a departmental student representative, or by consulting the designated student representative. DoVA currently enlists MFA students to serve on the following committees: Faculty Meeting MFA Representative, Cluster Talk Committee, Grad Council Committee, Interdepartmental Critique Coordinators, and the Dean's Student Advisory Group. Students are strongly encouraged to participate in extra-departmental workshops, such as the *Research and Visual Evidence (RAVE) workshop* and the *20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup> Century workshop*, among many others.

*How are student committee members or workshop coordinators mentored?*

The Director of Graduate Studies and the Chair, as well as the Associate Director of Programs and Student Affairs, are available for consultation concerning student committee work.

### **Career Advising**

*How does the department deploy campus resources, such as UChicagoGRAD, to assist with academic and nonacademic career advising?*

The Associate Director encourages students to take advantage of UChicagoGRAD's resources. Given that our students follow very diverse paths and have divergent interests, the department encourages them to ask for assistance that is tailored to their needs.

## **DEGREE PROGRESS**

### **Academic Milestones**

*How does the department mentor students through the progress and completion of significant academic milestones and degree requirements?*

The Department guides graduate students toward completion of their MFA degree requirements (course requirements, the MFA abstract, the Thesis Exhibition, and the Exhibition Review) by assigning a two-person thesis committee. This committee monitors a student's progress toward completion of all significant academic milestones, in consultation with the Associate Director, Director of Graduate Studies, the Chair, and the faculty.

*How does the department ensure fair assessments of student progress at different milestones?*

The Department meets collectively at the one-year mark and again before final conferral of degree in the second year to assess a student's progress.

## **Protections**

*What protections are in place to guard students from getting off track?*

The Director of Graduate Studies and the Chair consult with a student formally if they believe that the student has gotten off track. Typically, first efforts to guide the student forward will be informal in character; if the problem(s) persist, then a formal meeting will be held with relevant stakeholders, including the Director of Graduate Studies, the Chair and (potentially) the student's advisors and/or the Dean of Students.

## **Reviews**

*When and how often does the department formally review student progress?*

The Department meets collectively at the one-year mark and again before final conferral of degree in the second year to assess a student's progress.

*Who participates in formal reviews of student progress?*

All line faculty in residence and all instructional professors in residence.

*How does the department ensure objective evaluations of student progress?*

The Department discusses the progress of students collectively and agrees collectively on the appropriate, objective evaluation of each student's progress.

*How are reviews conducted?*

Reviews are conducted verbally.

*How are the results of reviews conveyed to students?*

If the results of the review are broadly positive, the student receives no specific communication from the department. If the results are broadly negative, the student will be requested to meet with the Director of Graduate Studies and the Chair to discuss the results of the departmental review.

*What process, policies, and practices does the department employ for counselling a student out of its program?*

Such a process is rare in our department.

If a student's progress becomes prohibitively deficient, the Chair will call a meeting of the line faculty to discuss the appropriate measures to ensure progress. The student will then be requested to meet with the Director of Graduate Studies and the Chair to agree upon an appropriate path forward to ensure adequate progress toward the MFA degree. If progress continues to be deficient, the student will be placed on academic probation with stated expectations and timeline to return to good academic standing. If that does not occur, the student will be withdrawn from the program.

### **Faculty Accountability**

*How does the department assess the quality of its mentoring?*

As faculty work collectively in relationship to mentoring and gather frequently through the year, they often have opportunities to discuss and assess mentoring.

*What measures does the department use to ensure faculty are accessible, available, and responsive advisors?*

Such a problem is rare in our department because of our clear mentoring, advising, and curricular structure. On the rare occasion that it occurs, the Chair intervenes.

*What role does student feedback play?*

Students are encouraged to contact the Associate Director, who communicates with the Chair as needed.

### **ADDITIONAL FORMS OF MENTORING**

*What other forms of mentoring does the department employ?*

## **Departmental Activities**

Students are required to attend Open Practice Committee events. They are further encouraged to be actively engaged in these events and to take advantage of studio visits offered through Open Practice Committee programming. Our MFA candidates are encouraged to take the initiative in proposing original and/or experimental programming and/or activities. The department is emphatically open to suggestions concerning experiences that MFAs believe would be beneficial to their education.

Most years a faculty member will organize a travel seminar for the first-year cohort.

*What extracurricular activities, both intellectual and social, exist for interaction between all students and faculty in the department?*

The Department organizes various parties where students and faculty can socialize together. First year MFA students are also involved with the admissions process and participate with faculty in interviews and in deliberations.

## **Peer Mentoring**

*Does the department engage in peer mentoring, matching new students with advanced students?*

MFAs and BAs can enter into voluntary mentoring relationships, facilitated by the department.

## **Alumni Mentoring**

*Does the department create opportunities for current students to interact with alumni (either within or beyond the academy)?*

The department offers an annual alumni talk through the Open Practice Committee. Current students are encouraged to interact with our past students at such events, both formally and informally.

## **Professional Mentoring**

*Does the department have any programs to bring current students into contact with other professionals beyond the academy?*

The department offers a robust schedule of public and departmental critiques, lectures, and related events throughout the year. These occasions offer students the opportunity to engage with professionals from the artworld and from other academic institutions.

## **STUDENT SUPPORT**

## **Communication**

*How does the department disseminate mentoring information to new and continuing students, including at departmental new student orientations?*

The Associate Director and the Faculty conduct a formal orientation event, and the Associate Director maintains a wiki with resources and consults students on how these resources can be improved to better meet their needs.

## **Diverse Backgrounds**

*What effort does the department make to help students from diverse backgrounds—including international students, underrepresented minority students, first-generation students, and students with disabilities—acclimate and succeed?*

The Associate Director makes students aware of Student Disability Services, The Center for the Study of Gender and Sexuality, The Center for the Study of Race, Politics, and Culture, The Center for Identity + Inclusion, Student Support Services, and various other resources that are available to them, including programs through UChicagoGRAD and the Bursar's office to mitigate food insecurity and other financial pressures. The Division of the Humanities Dean of Students Office also employs an Assistant Dean of Students for Diversity and Inclusion who can be helpful in identifying resources and measures of support.

## **FACULTY SUPPORT**

### **Communication**

*How does the department disseminate information about mentoring to current faculty?*

The yearly faculty retreat is the formal mechanism for disseminating information about current mentoring strategies among the faculty.

*How will it make new faculty aware of its mentoring policies and practices?*

The department will share the mentoring policy with new faculty.

### **Recognition**

*How does the department recognize good mentoring?*

Our critique structure lends itself to self-awareness concerning issues of mentoring.



### **AMENDMENTS TO MENTORING PLAN**

*What procedures will the department use for an annual evaluation of the mentoring plan and for making updates to it?*

The mentoring plan will be distributed annually, along with the curriculum and TA policy, for faculty to evaluate. Faculty may also suggest changes to the policy at any time, to be discussed at a quarterly faculty meeting or at the yearly retreat.