Lehman College Art Department
Self-Study: Review and Recommendations
Outside Reviewer: Laura Nova

1. **Department Vision, Mission, Objectives, Goals:**
   - The Fine Arts and Art History program fosters critical thinking and visual literacy within a broad art context.
   - The department's objectives include education, empowerment, and engagement of students in a global society while enhancing personal and career development.
   - Lehman, a predominantly minority-serving institution, emphasizes social mobility, particularly for low-income Latino households.
   - The Art Department offers high-quality traditional and digital art studies, promoting innovative problem-solving and creative thinking.
   - As an urban public institution, Lehman fosters social mobility, equity, and cultural enrichment, while acting as an economic catalyst in the Bronx.
   - Lehman has initiated the 90x30 degree program, aiming to increase the number of advanced degrees awarded, further supporting economic mobility.

2. **Facilities**
   Strengths:
   - The Art Department is housed in the inspirational Marcel Breuer mid-century modern building, providing a unique and aesthetically pleasing environment for students and faculty.
   - The shared space with the Lehman College Art Gallery allows for easy access to exhibitions and enhances the artistic atmosphere on campus.
   - The availability of shared spaces and collaborations across disciplines fosters a creative and interdisciplinary learning environment.
   - Effective utilization of common spaces as teaching galleries and for showcasing student work enhances the learning experience and promotes student engagement.
   - The presence of unique spaces, such as the two-story rotunda, allows for site-specific work and adds to the artistic versatility of the department.
   - Providing thesis students with studios is essential for their artistic development and enables them to focus on their work.
   - The donation of life casts by the Newington Crospey Foundation is a valuable resource that enhances the teaching of drawing skills.

   Areas for Improvement:
   - Limited space for senior thesis studios and graduate studios restricts the enrollment capacity of these programs.
   - Allocating funds to renovate and update classrooms that are affected by toxic mold is crucial for the health and well-being of students, particularly in the animation program.

- The growing CGI and Animation programs require reconfiguration of the space in FA047 to accommodate additional workstations and stop motion setups to support the expanding program.
- Access to fully functioning slop sinks in the painting studios is necessary to facilitate proper clean-up and maintenance.
- The built-in furniture in the painting studios needs to be replaced to optimize space and storage capacity.
- Installing new lighting in the painting studios is essential to ensure the health of students and enable accurate color perception.
- The printmaking shop requires regular maintenance and adequate health and safety measures, including the appointment of shop monitors to oversee equipment and processes.

Recommendations:
- Introduce work-study students, internships, or graduate teaching assistants to fulfill maintenance roles in the printmaking shop. This would provide students with hands-on experience, improve their skills, and prepare them for professional settings outside of Lehman College.
- Allocate funds for capital improvements in the photography area, including plumbing repairs, cabinetry updates, and the replacement of outdated equipment. Upgrading to standard mirrorless cameras, up-to-date computers, printers, and LED lighting equipment will enhance student learning experiences and prepare them for the professional media industry.
- Consider implementing leasing programs for equipment on a three-year cycle to ensure access to up-to-date hardware and maintain industry standards in areas like CGI and photography.
- Establish a library or lab of drawing objects where students can explore the natural world and its systems, providing additional resources for artistic inspiration and research.
- Invest in up-to-date software and hardware to meet industry standards and enhance competitiveness in the job market across specializations. Leasing programs with three-year renewal cycles can help manage costs associated with frequent updates and ensure access to the latest tools and technology.
- Seek outside grants, including a historic building grant, to refurbish the facility and address infrastructure needs, thereby creating a safer, healthier, and functional environment for students and faculty.

3. **Curriculum Program**

Strengths:
- 9 concentrations offered in the BFA program. Only program in the CUNY system offering a degree in animation.
- Emphasis on interdisciplinary work and collaboration across disciplines.

- Mentorship provided by full-time faculty members specializing in specific disciplines.
- BFA program includes a final year dedicated to thesis coursework and exhibition.
- Positioned within the School of Humanities, providing an engaged liberal arts education.
- Art department offers multiple undergraduate degree programs, including Art History, Studio Arts, and CGI.
- Curriculum maps are provided, allowing for attainable 4-year graduation rates.
- Opportunities for professional advancement in various fields, such as digital imaging, arts management, teaching, and museum education.
- Coordination with other departments, such as the Lehman Art Gallery and Film and Media Studies, for interdisciplinary arts and design courses.
- Internship opportunities in the Art History program at Lehman College Art Gallery.
- Study abroad experiential program in documentary filmmaking.
- Master Classes in Media production and Design Lecture Series contribute to student learning.
- Cohort building for BFA students, providing dedicated time and space for thesis work, access to faculty mentors, and a close-knit community.
- Fastest-growing area in the department is the BS in CGI, which focuses on web design, animation, and motion graphics.
- Drawing concentration is popular, and there is potential to incorporate digital drawing for project proposals or illustration for media publication.
- Printmaking specialization serves as a bridge between disciplines and can be integrated into other curriculum ladders.
- Photography and related media integrate traditional and contemporary practices, with potential for growth by updating equipment, facility and incorporating interdisciplinary courses.
- UI/UX design curriculum emphasizes accessibility, empathy, and emerging areas of design, such as design thinking and social design.

Opportunities for improvement:
- Incorporate more professional development and professional writing into the curriculum.
- Improve coordination and integration between different aspects of the curriculum, such as time and sequence, digital media tools, and traditional visual arts.
- Increase focus on non-western and global arts perspectives, from ancient to contemporary art.
- Strengthen connections with professionals and industries through internships, mentorship programs, and industry events.
- Foster greater cross-over between traditional and digital sides of the art department through classes and projects that span different media.

Recommendations:

- Formally introduce students to the ladders of concentrations and advise them on what curricular paths to take for better retention.
- Explore opportunities for interdisciplinary courses and collaboration, such as combining computer imaging and photography.
- Evaluate the balance of concentrations and course offerings to optimize resources and ensure students have access to the courses they need.
- Update the curriculum of Sculpture + Extended Media into a specialization that includes 3D design, urban design, and social design. Enable students to conceive, design, and build "sculpture" in a contemporary context.

4. **Enrollment**

Strengths:
- Significant Transfer Student Population: 65% of the student body are transfers.
- Solid Articulation Agreements: The program has effective articulation agreements with Bronx Community College, Hostos Community College, and Westchester Community College.
- Consistent Growth: Despite a minor drop from 15K students in 2020 to 12-13K in 2023, the college has doubled in size in the past three years.
- Expansion of BFA Program: There are currently 90 BFA students, a considerable increase from just 7 a decade ago.
- Declared BAs: There are 120 declared BAs in the program.
- Popular Specializations: Drawing and Digital Imaging are the most enrolled courses, supporting the view that illustration and digital design are paths to employment.
- Successful Art History Program: The Art History program has the largest number of full-time equivalency students in the department.
- Rapid Growth of the CGI Program: The BS in CGI is the fastest-growing area in the department with 121 students currently enrolled, showcasing a strong trend and interest in this field.
- Open BFA Program: The removal of the portfolio requirement to enter the BFA program has led to increased enrollment.
- Positive Student Culture: There's a significant cohort that boosts student community and culture in the art department.

Areas for Improvement and Recommendations:
- Need for Diverse Faculty: A third full-time faculty member is needed in Art History, preferably with a specialty that aligns with and reflects the diverse student population.
- Declining Sculpture Major: With declining numbers following a national trend, the sculpture major requires a full-time faculty member who can redefine the scope of sculpture and 3D space. This includes practice, methods, materials, and tools. Without proper advisement and professional experience sharing, the enrollment will continue to drop.

- Printmaking Sub specialization: Despite no enrollment in Printmaking, the upper-level multiples class is a requirement for many specializations. Hence, it is recommended to offer Printmaking as a sub specialization or minor for students majoring in painting, photography, drawing, sculpture, etc.

5. **Faculty and Staff**

Strengths:
- New faculty line in accessibility design funded by The Sara Little Turnbull Foundation Design initiative.
- Strong Contingency of adjunct faculty who specialize in areas that tenured faculty cannot cover. This will ensure a diverse and comprehensive curriculum for students.

Recommendations:
- Hire a full-time faculty member dedicated to sculpture who can provide guidance, share professional experiences, and update the curriculum. Recognize the declining numbers in sculpture majors and address this by providing leadership to update and expand the sculpture specialization. Introduce areas such as digital fabrication, design for public space, and social sculpture. By incorporating digital and urban design practices, the major will become more marketable and attractive to students seeking employment opportunities. This individual should be interdisciplinary to establish connections with other specializations.
- Create a full-time faculty line in art history with a specialization outside Western art: Hire a full-time art historian who specializes in Latin American, Meso-American, Pre-Columbian, Native American, African, or South Pacific Island art. This will provide students with a broader understanding of art history beyond the Western canon.
- Faculty oversight for the foundation year: Assign a faculty member to oversee and coordinate staff, pedagogy, curriculum, and advising for the foundation year. This will ensure a cohesive and supportive experience for students during their initial year.
- Encourage interdisciplinary courses and collaborations.
- Develop a pipeline for adjuncts.
- Support faculty in leadership roles: Provide support and resources for faculty members to serve as chairs or take on leadership roles within the department. This will help promote effective administration and decision-making.
- Encourage faculty to pursue promotion: Establish a culture that encourages and supports faculty members in seeking promotions. Offer mentorship programs, professional development opportunities, and recognition for achievements to motivate faculty members to advance their careers.

**Academic Program Review
of the Lehman College Art Department**

**External Reviewer Report
by Rees Shad, MFA, MS, EdS**

Overview

First off, I would like to tell you that I was honored to be invited to review the Lehman Art Programs and impressed by what I saw. The work the students are doing is incredibly impressive, and the dedicated and energetic faculty even more so.

One of the challenges that I see with an outsider stepping in and critiquing an academic program, is that there are often far more opportunities to suggest ways to improve things than express admiration. This is the nature of such critiques. Not much is learned from a critic merely saying "great job, folks! Keep up the good work." So, we tend to end up highlighting areas in need of improvement. As a parent, an educator, and a creative I am all too aware of the fact that people tend to attenuate good feedback and amplify the negative. You and your colleagues must hear me when I say that you all are doing TERRIFIC things. I see my job here, however, as being to bring up suggestions for improvement that (from my perspective) take into account your stellar work and introduce opportunities for growth and improvement that you may or may not be aware of. Some of my feedback is curricular, while still other feedback is focused on how you might be able to more clearly and effectively express the great job the department is doing so that the administration can be more keenly aware of the wonderful impact you are having *and* be more inclined to invest in your endeavor.

To this end, I will provide feedback here regarding three primary areas:

➤ Necessary Areas of Investment

In the self-study report there were several issues raised regarding physical plant, technical requirements, and faculty lines which it took very little effort to verify as valid and extremely necessary.

- Without question the spaces I visited, especially hallways, and basement computer labs were musty and **in need of new carpeting and furniture**. Traditional art equipment such as easels, pottery wheels, and drafting tables were sorely in need of replacement, and I observed many tables and chairs in disrepair due to use *not* abuse.

- Having overseen the digital programs at Hostos for a decade, I am well aware of the wear and tear subjected to computer equipment even when it is replaced on a reasonably consistent basis. In my experience, "reasonably consistent" in a technical educational setting translates to a **five-year cycle**. That your department has not been supported in the replacement and updating of equipment even while student numbers have increased is highly problematic.

    - I recommend a **yearly replacement schedule of 20% of computer and technical equipment** paid for by the college's Tech Fee. This will both provide a consistent updating of equipment while giving those in charge of the budgeting an anticipatable budget number to work with.

        - Later in my review I will touch on the need for consistently presenting relatable data and deliverables to administrators. This will be vital to securing the budget I suggest here.

- Faculty lines are undoubtedly a problem in the program as they are Across CUNY at the moment. In my years here I have seen an escalation in administrative payroll that undoubtedly has impacted available funds for the faculty, and while I see a need for administrators, I must stress that austerity measures should be directed toward administrative offices to an equal if not greater degree than to an institution's faculty or physical plant. The faculty are the heart and soul of the institution, and discontinuing lines to this art program, or hesitating to replace faculty while the overall department proves to be growing and prosperous serves only to undermine the degree of success that the institution should expect from said program.

    - The University needs to **support the program with adequate faculty lines**

- That said, I strongly urge the department to endeavor to **find crossover lines** for the department, where traditional artists and historians can cover a wider swath of creative practices. Such adaption has been necessary in the field, where artists cross genres to remain relevant, for decades. Our institutions should mirror this reality for our students in order to prepare them for the professional world they seek to engage with.

➢ Curricular Development Opportunities

I am intently aware of the current societal pressures on institutions of higher learning regarding the return on investment provided by a college degree. The expectation of the society for graduate 'hireability' is not unreasonable, and it is incredibly important to provide skill sets that produce a graduate who has potential to be an effective and productive employee in the marketplace. When that marketplace involves the arts, we are confronted with a serious shortcoming of a whole other layer of societal perception…that a *true* artist is a *starving* artist.

While your programs have made curricular advancements that prepare students to have stronger communication skills, build stronger portfolios, and even navigate the art community with a toolbox of creative and communication tools, I feel strongly that **there are greater opportunities** that should be pursued. These can be integrated into each and every degree program in deliberate and demonstrable ways. I need to stress that the following should not be offered simply as elective courses.

- **A required class in basic economics** – using both a personal as well as creative business lens. This should encapsulate applied mathematics for budgeting, some degree of market analysis, and an introduction to the concept of grant writing (an undeniable necessity for the professional artist).

- A separate course wholly dedicated to **grant writing** which is required for graduate students and an elective for undergraduates.

  - While I recognize that ARH477 touches upon grant writing from a curatorial perspective, this needs to be expanded to address an artist's need to support their practice and the student given a series of writing opportunities to learn the subtleties of grantsmanship.

  - Perhaps a course solely dedicated to grant writing would become a popular WI course.

- I suggest some sort of course work involving a **future-focused perspective**. Such a course might be best applied to the Art History program and made available as an elective for the other programs. It should provide a greater awareness of change in technologies, society, and markets as well as the effects such changes can potentially have in order for students to be better prepared to be adaptable in the onslaught of change.

- Such future-focus could be adaptable to a wide range of courses as a wrap up for a semester's work. Exploring what has traditionally happened, what current practices represent, and what might be done in the years to come in an anticipatory framework rather than fictionalized framework.

- While you have a significant design program growing here there is only cursory exploration of **usability studies** in ART202/302 & 221. An individual course in user centered design and *how to test for design efficacy* is essential to the program as it both prepares students for their professional hire-ability (usability testing has long been a strong selling point on design resumes), but creates an opportunity for strengthening relationships between the programs and industry.

  - Several universities and colleges in the country have actually developed usability **testing labs and programs** which have become important support environments for local industry. This in turn has led to companies underwriting work in these labs and providing important funding for the schools' design programs.

One of the most promising aspects of the Lehman College Art Programs lays not in technology or in practice but in an apparent willingness to explore **trans-disciplinary curriculum**. Further development of credit earning classes and programmatic opportunities (certificates?) in art therapy, visual marketing, visual communication, arts education, and the like will not only bolster the hireability of graduates, but bolster student numbers and thereby provide greater opportunities for financial support from both the university administration as well as the business community.

These are incredibly important for students in art programs to become professional artists who are able to diversify their creative work to meet a more diverse selection of applications in their professional lives. The continuance of their creative practice often hinges on a means of monetizing their art outside of traditional avenues such as gallery shows, grants, and patronage. Rather than bifurcating their existence between a paying (often non-artistic and less rewarding) form of employment and their creative work, artists who can weave the two together often find more success in life.

For this reason, **transdisciplinary explorations should be more formally drawn into the programs**. Some opportunities that I see here:
- There is mention of collaboration between the school of social work and the art program (p. 6), but no specific credit bearing class mentioned. An **Introduction to Art Therapy** should be introduced.

- I was dismayed to find that there was an art teaching degree offered in the school of education that seems to be dormant and that the faculty in the Art Program knows little to nothing about (P. 61). This is an extreme example of siloed instability and flies in the face of the Report's student preparedness statement (P.8) where students are supposedly prepared for "art related careers" in "teaching."

  - A bridge must be built between the education and art departments that will facilitate the development of *at the very least* a specialized **Introduction to arts education** course.

    - Such a course would be highly valuable (and should be required) for training of the Teaching Assistants suggested on page 64.

- That **the ceramics program** has no class that might fulfill "any liberal arts requirements," (P.29) is unacceptable. There must certainly be an opportunity in some pathways bucket or an opportunity for the development of an interdisciplinary course with the social work or education departments. It would be hard for administration to invest in an isolated silo in the best of times. The program faculty must explore potential curricular opportunities if it seeks greater support.

PLEASE NOTE: The Art Department's faculty should not simply be expected to double down and work on developing all this curriculum. I suggest that the dean and chair **provide release time** to appropriate faculty members in order to allow them the time to focus on developing these curricula and also consider hiring outside experts[1] to help. Having developed three degree programs from the ground up and iterated those programs over the years I was coordinating them, I know all too well that the process of curricular iteration at CUNY requires patience and fortitude. I believe your faculty is up to the challenge, and that the University would and should support such an endeavor.

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[1] Lest this critique be misunderstood, I must express that **I am in no way putting my hat into the ring** for such an enterprise. I have recently retired from academia.

➢ Notes on the 2022-2023 Self-Study Report

I implore you to open up your reports with an **executive summary**. It is my experience that there are a number of administrators who are unable to dedicate the time to read through seventy plus pages to get to the summary your chair provides at the end of this document.

The report is **statistically light** and most amazing of all has not a single informational graphic. **Information design** is incredibly important to your enterprise in that it offers you the opportunity to solidify your statistical impact in a direct and *skim-able* fashion.

- It would be tremendously helpful to your cause for you to provide statistical information showing how the increase in FTE's and program majors has changed over time *in comparison to other funded programs* at the institution.

- In addition, it has been stated in the report that the Arts Department is the fastest growing department in the Arts & Humanities, but it has literally not been well illustrated. In my experience administrators who hold the purse strings need to be given a clear graphical depiction of these sorts of statistics in order to more effectively support your requests for funding.

- Other data points I either had to work hard to uncover here or were not otherwise accessible, and which would be incredibly beneficial to your cause:

   - Data on time to degree completion
   - The number of degrees granted
   - Graduation rates
   - Comparison of these statistics to other programs
   - Any other data that might provide information regarding department contribution and financial value regarding income and budget numbers.

I would also suggest that future reports incorporate **consistent points of analysis** (heuristic continuity) from program to program in order to provide data in a more parseable manner for executive administrators at the institution. For example, each program overview statement should hit the same talking points in the same order so that a reader can move back and forth through the document comparing programs, their achievements, and their needs.

- This lack of continuity suggests a fractured community that I did NOT experience upon visiting the department, as well as an inconsistent attention to

its stated mission of preparing students for their professional lives across the programs.

I note that the **CGI program** is described on page 8 as not having separate learning goals which seems very odd, but to not have the program conducting program specific assessment – especially in light of the dramatically evolving tech design landscape – seems highly problematic.

I did not see mention of **recruitment activities** until page 73 of the document, and what I see is not what I would consider a great deal of outreach recruitment considering the size of the department. When recruitment does emerge, it focuses primarily on transfer students, which if we're being honest, is already primarily stabilized and predictable thanks to previous articulation agreements and the fact that you are working in a large university system with so many community colleges set to feed you new students.

- Members of the department estimated that 30-40% of your incoming students are transfers. The Associate Provost estimated 65% of incoming Lehman students are transfer students. This suggests that the transfer numbers are not actually on par with the rest of the college. I would suggest that the department explore where the short fall is and work to address that.

More importantly **establish strong feeder programs** from the arts and designed focus schools in the Department of Education. Doing so was immensely important to the Hostos Design Programs and should be a priority for you to bolster your numbers – especially in the waning programs – moving forward.

Also, the report mentions "our **recruitment goals**" on page 80. These are not clearly described at the outset and they should be. What are your ideal numbers? Where do you see the ideal balance sitting for each program in terms of personnel and budget? I find having such budget-oriented thinking clearly illustrated in such reports is appreciated by administrators as well as overworked P&B committees.

It should go without saying that the department should **establish strong ties with the Admissions Department** of the college. They have the budget to pay for the development of promotional materials, and your students have been learning to create such materials. If this potentially mutually beneficial relationship is not already established, I suggest making it a priority in the coming year and developing materials which can then be used for recruitment to Department of Education and Community Colleges.

- You may already be doing this, but providing students with course work that involve graphic design **projects for the Admissions (and other) Department's** not only provides students with valuable portfolio pieces, it extends good will to other departments and helps win support for curricular initiatives in the faculty senate and beyond.

In Closing

Thank you for introducing me to your programs. I hope the critique I have provided is helpful, and I look forward to seeing your growth and successes moving forward.

Respectfully submitted,

Rees E. E. Shad
5/1//23