

VII. STANDING COMMITTEES

A. Academic and Student Affairs Committee

School of Art – Degree Title Change for the Master of Fine Arts

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

It is the recommendation of the administration and the Academic and Student Affairs Committee that the Board of Regents grant authority to the School of Art to change the title for the Master of Fine Arts (MFA) degree to the Master of Design (MDes), effective Autumn Quarter, 2011. The Master of Design degree program will be reviewed with the School of Art's undergraduate and other graduate programs in 2019-2020.

BACKGROUND:

On May 25, 2011, the Graduate School received a memorandum from the Director of the School of Art requesting approval to change the degree title of the Master of Fine Arts to the Master of Design. The College of Arts and Sciences Dean supports the request for the degree title change.

The curriculum and requirements will remain the same. Students who graduated in Spring Quarter 2011 are the last class to receive the Master of Fine Arts degree. Five continuing students who will graduate in Spring Quarter 2012 will be given the option to receive either an MFA or the MDes degree. Students in the Division of Design will thereafter receive the MDes degree.

In the 2009-2010 academic year, the Graduate School conducted the 10-year review of the School of Art. One review committee recommendation was that the School “continue discussion of name change and degree changes (in design) that will more accurately represent the current program offerings to various stakeholders including prospective students and their parents, the campus community, external constituents, peer institutions, and prospective sponsors and employers.”

The design industry emerged only in the late nineteenth century. Early in the profession, the boundaries between fine arts and design were blurred—both disciplines were concerned primarily with aesthetics and the development of visual form. Design has evolved into a profession that requires competency in the creation of form and other skills, knowledge and abilities. The required competencies have led to clear differences between the School of Art's Divisions of Art and Design, both in terms of an overall philosophical approach and specific curricular requirements. Prospective employers seek and prefer to hire graduates with degrees in design. The term “MFA” has become specific to academic

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employers seeking faculty candidates in the Fine Arts; the “Master of Design” is increasingly specified in search listings for design faculty positions. The Master of Design is also more attractive to corporations seeking to employ designers as it signifies a greater focus on design research and problem solving—activities appropriate to the UW’s reputation as a major research institution.

A specific degree in Design will acknowledge the distinctions that have emerged between the traditional areas of study in the Fine Arts (i.e., Painting, Ceramics, Sculpture, Printmaking, Fibers, Metals, etc.) and the more recent disciplines of Design (Visual Communication Design, Industrial Design, Interaction Design, etc.). The Master of Design would reduce emphasis on a specific program specialization. Students will benefit from this change by having a more flexible overall degree that will qualify them for a wide variety of professional opportunities. The change to a Master of Design will increase the visibility of the Design degree program. Finally, it will more accurately reflect the cross-disciplinary teaching that is fostered in the Division where all design students have the opportunity to take courses across all three programs.

The Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School, the Dean and Divisional Dean of Arts and Humanities in the College of Arts and Sciences, and the Interim Provost have reviewed and approved the recommendation for the degree title change. The Higher Education Coordinating Board will be informed of the Board of Regents’ action on the degree title change for the Master of Fine Arts to the Master of Design.