

CAA Guidelines | Standards & Guidelines

College Art Association

Guidelines for Faculty Teaching in New-Media Arts

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By its nature, new media art is a rapidly evolving and highly interdisciplinary arena of creative practice that presents unique challenges and opportunities for those institutions and individuals working within and intersecting with this field. Over the years, the scope of new media art practice has flourished to include animations, blogs, interactive media, design, engineering, games, mobile media, desktop interactive works, websites and internet art, time-based pieces, digital installation, performance, sound installations, sculptural works, 3D CG, augmented reality, digital fabrication, kiosks, robotics, biological and DNA art, and networked activities. Because it is in the nature of new media arts to invent new modes of practice, this incomplete list will only grow longer during the drafting, adoption, and revision of this document. Practitioners view this expansive territory as a sign of success and vitality, and they see the challenges it presents as worthwhile. This document addresses specific academic and administrative issues concerning the teaching and research of new media, including recognizing and encouraging growth of new forms.

In particular, these guidelines were developed to assist in faculty hiring, promotion and tenure, workload assessment, funding, and understanding of the support necessary for artists working in this field. While these guidelines are intended to be viewed as supplementary to an individual institution's standards and criteria for evaluation and review, the intention to provide further insight about the field of new media arts is meant to assist in accurate and comprehensive evaluations of faculty members on the tenure track. This document is presented to CAA by members working in new media arts education as a description of standards and practices within the field. It also addresses some of the issues facing faculty in new media art education in order to assist colleagues, administrators, department chairs, governance committees, and individual faculty as they plan and present their professional development.

1. Scholarship and Research

Artistic production in the area of technology-based media encompasses many formats. In this emergent field, contributions to theory can be seen as equally significant to aesthetic production. As the field evolves, faculty in new media art should be free to pursue whatever new forms are most appropriate to their creative practice, for their personal artistic and technological growth, and for their students.

Assessing Venues

Creative experimentation and production are the dominant forms of research in new media art, with exhibitions (including web-based, networked, distributed forms, installations, and performances) occupying the position of peer-reviewed journals in most other academic fields. At the same time, it is important to recognize that critical participation in the discourse of new media art may take many forms, including the production of theory in expository forms such as journal articles. For established disciplines, the range, type, and relative ranking of primary and secondary venues for sharing the fruits of academic research are more widely recognized. However, for emerging disciplines and practices, these venues are often new, experimental, and in constant flux. In the tradition of many schools of modern and postmodern genres, new media may be specifically employed to challenge and redefine the very notion of venue, such as relying on self-organizing networks or presentation to a narrow audience. Nor are new media venues singular in nature: media forms as unlike one another as web-based and biological lend themselves to different forms of dissemination. Similarly, some venues will lead in hosting certain forms of new media and not others. These circumstances place an expectation on faculty members under review to articulate the visibility and influence of the venues where work was presented, indicating the importance of artists and curators involved with the venue and the level of its programming. It is also important for peer reviewers to thoroughly understand and address the nature of these venues when assessing the visibility and impact of the work itself.

In addition, when a work of new media is exhibited, it is often carefully calibrated to the presentation space, particularly in the case of installation and performance work. When subsequently exhibited in a different context, the work may have to be reconfigured completely for the new space and for a new audience, creating an entirely new iteration. In such cases, each showing should be viewed as a separate act of dissemination. Multiple showings are not the equivalent of reprints of scholarly work.

Assessing Productivity

Assessing productivity for creative projects developed in the context of new media art presents unique challenges to reviewers. While the length or scope of a finished work typically factors into its consideration, such measurements are not always indicative of the effort required to complete a given work of new media. For example, a short experimental video piece, multimedia production, or website might require a greater expenditure of time and creative effort than a relatively straightforward hourlong documentary. For example, an animation of only a few seconds may require rendering hundreds or thousands of individual drawings. Likewise, an interactive artwork might be the result of thousands of hours of electronics prototyping and coding, where the greatest effort was devoted to reducing the electronics and code to as few physical elements and as few lines of programming as possible. When peers evaluate a new media work, they must determine the probable effort required for particular projects. An evaluator's task is analogous to that of judging the importance of a multiyear horizontal study in the social sciences: such a study might require many years of effort, while resulting in a single article of modest length. This task can be aided by technical notes provided by the artist, documenting the production process and its duration.

Assessing Authorship

Not unlike science and theater, new media art often relies on collaboration. The finished artwork may include lighting, video, sculpture, and interactive programmable instructions. It may involve multiple participants, such as in a distributed cell phone work. Some artists manage all these elements individually, while others collaborate across disciplines. Authorship itself is among the issues these new media arts address in their work. Emphasis on audience participation, interaction, and feedback loops deliberately challenges authorship itself. Evaluators outside the field must understand that the role of the individual practitioner, particularly as this pertains to expenditures of time and effort, may not be readily apparent. In cases of shared authorship, the artist is responsible for clarifying the nature and relative importance of each individual's contribution.

It is particularly important to note that the model of open-source project development for hardware and software—as well as development of curriculum, concepts, and ideas—is a significant aspect of practice and engagement within new media art. This model, which distributes authorship among a community of individuals, presents challenges to assessment. For example, when artists contribute or scaffold their creative efforts from an open-source project, clear identification of provenance remains the responsibility of the individual artist. At the other end of the spectrum, however, particular recognition should be made in the case of those individuals whose creative practice leads, mobilizes, or otherwise engenders networks of individuals to participate and contribute to open-source projects. This latter method of contribution to knowledge generation can sometimes be misidentified as service to the discipline rather than creative research.

Additional Criteria

Evaluation of new media work should be considered in light of the institutional support its offered. The high cost and rapid obsolescence of various technologies used as well as challenges practitioners face in keeping up with emerging methods and techniques can significantly impact the quality of work and artists' levels of productivity.

Meaningful reviews of faculty members' creative work appear in scholarly and professional publications, library-media publications, and even, in some cases, newspapers, art magazines, and journals, published either in print or notable critical online outlets. In evaluating reviews of artists' work, the status of the reviewer and the reputation of the periodical, print publication, or website are important.

Some professional associations, including CAA, regularly provide written evaluations of works selected for exhibition at their conferences and exhibitions. Letters evaluating a faculty member's work can be requested from responsible individuals at museums, media centers, colleges and universities, and other institutions at which the work has been shown. As in the case of scholarly reviews, it is important to consider the reputation of the individual or institution contributing the evaluation.

2. Teaching

Teaching in the field of new media art is a multipart challenge. Certainly, it shares with other disciplines the requirement to remain current with the

various practices and trends in the particular field of knowledge in order to keep ideas in the classroom attuned to developments in the broader community. The unique challenges in this field are more closely mirrored in other highly technological fields where the teacher must also be aware of and trained in the constantly changing tool sets used in the field or working to develop those not yet in use. Significant portions of the technical knowledge and equipment base necessary to practice and teach in this emergent discipline change with increasing frequency. This continuous technical obsolescence and genre development require faculty to constantly rewrite their curriculum. In addition, technology-based media programs are largely dependent on equipment designed to compete in the rapidly changing commercial marketplace. Equipment that is six years old is almost completely incompatible with today's models, and equipment even just three years old is seriously limited in usefulness, especially for courses requiring extensive rendering and/or experimental research computing. The same is true for aesthetic and conceptual concerns in the medium. These factors significantly affect the time it takes a faculty member to perform the most basic tasks related to teaching. For these reasons, careful attention must be given to teaching loads, service commitments, funding for training, and technical staffing to assure that faculty will be able to deliver an up-to-date and high-quality education in the new media arts.

Rapidly Changing Curricula

Technology-based programs at most institutions are fairly new, and curricula are still developing and under constant review. The variety and number of courses that any program can offer change with the goals of the program, the number and skills of the instructors available, the availability and kind of computers and other technologies, and the amount of students' available lab time. In concert with the evolution of technology, many of these factors change from one semester to the next, requiring that curricula and syllabi constantly be rewritten. Like many cutting-edge fields, the concepts, content, and practice of the discipline may substantially change within a few academic years, requiring re-adaptation by the instructor to address changing aesthetics, systems, ideas, and output. Therefore, faculty in new media will likely prepare new syllabi more frequently than others in the department (often having to change a course significantly every time it is taught), and they are involved in more frequent discussions of revision of curricula than their peers in other artistic disciplines. Consequently, dedicated time for this continual redesign should be factored into the workload of new media arts faculty. With a field that often reshapes itself every few months, courses and curricula need to be given time and consideration allowing for quick and nimble transformation. Support for training and sharing at academic conferences is paramount in order to make these transformations successful, as discussed more fully below.

Interdisciplinarity and Team Teaching

Technological innovations expand an artist's vocabulary, raising crucial aesthetic issues that must be addressed in course content. Characteristically, the use of technology-based media encourages formation of interdisciplinary links with other media and programs, including photography, printmaking, sculpture, video, film, theater, dance, and music. These links increasingly extend to developing connections between art and science through interdisciplinary experimentation including computer science, engineering,

biology, and genetics programs. While such connections are to be encouraged on general principle, their impact on teaching loads can be significant and invisible when combining teachers and/or groups of students from different majors into one course. Notably, interdisciplinarity is about the potential space/ideas/learning/media/forms that may emerge in between the disciplines. Therefore, consideration must be given not only for shared learning of the structures of different disciplines and areas of communality, but also to pedagogically adapting ideas to a structure that can allow for the unknown. Institutions may employ various formulas for team-taught classes that presume sharing teaching responsibility for a class means less work for individual faculty members, even to the point of only crediting one of the instructors for the class. However, if institutions support these types of interdisciplinary courses, they must account for actual workload and pedagogical complexities. Beyond this, colleagues wishing to venture into computer applications often request informal advice from new media faculty without realizing the significant burden these requests can entail, most evident in current pushes into digital humanities. Care must be taken to avoid turning new media artists into technical trainers who help others add technological tools to their research areas.

Need for Continuing Faculty Development

When assessing a faculty member's teaching, an institution should factor in its support of the development needed for faculty to remain current in the field—not just in terms of the conceptual and broad knowledge bases required by every discipline, but also in terms of technical training in rapidly changing tools. As in other fast-changing technical and professional fields, continuing education and training is vital for new media arts—and often difficult to obtain beyond rudimentary lessons. Furthermore, faculty are frequently involved in the development of novel and/or hybrid approaches to tools and techniques for which there are no existing roadmaps or available training. Attendance at professional conferences is central to a faculty member's ability to remain current in the field, specifically through opportunities to share successes and failures in courses, projects, and curricula. The evolutionary nature of this discipline makes it highly unlikely that faculty members received instruction that could serve as a model for their current course offerings while in their higher education experience. Lack of support in this area negatively influences student satisfaction and students' potential for meeting prescribed learning outcomes.

While skills and techniques may remain constant over decades or even centuries in other disciplines, changes in technology-based media are so frequent that one could be completely lost without up-to-date training. Incoming students are generally aware of innovations in the field and expect instruction in the current tools and ideas that will enable them to continue working with industry-standard technology once they have left the institution. More critically, they need to learn how to continue to learn about new technological tools for the rest of their careers.

As interest in emerging technologies grows, new media arts faculty are often expected to be resource persons in areas from data visualization to interactive networks. They are also asked to expand their programs to accommodate these expectations. Knowledge in the use of technologies in art and design does not equal the capacity to apply these technologies to other disciplines. Institutions must seek out alternative methods for encouraging use of technologies in other

disciplines such as funding visits and workshops by guest experts, or by funding collaborative research by faculty from other disciplines.

Student Support

Because of the complexity of technology applications, students frequently call upon faculty for help with technical problems experienced outside of class. This may be true even when other support is available. No single individual has a complete knowledge of more than a small number of computer applications or platforms. Administrators, staff, and faculty must accept the fact that the useful life of information and technology is short, and that instructors, staff, and students are on a constant learning curve. While a new media art program may or may not have significant hardware maintenance needs, having specially trained and supported staff who can guide students, faculty, and administration through technological changes, and support student and faculty projects, is a critical requirement for any program, accounting for additional scopes of technical knowledge.

Tools and Materials

Because of this constant level of change, tasks that appear to be similar in comparable areas may in fact represent widely disparate demands of time and energy. For example, the ordering of supplies in other studio areas may be routine, occurring on an annual basis with little or no review. In technology-based media, however, every software and hardware upgrade demands careful study and testing, weighing the desirability of one product over another. In some cases, these decisions are made outside of the program due to the false notion that all computer labs should be equal for all purposes. However, a new media art program must have significant input in order to assure their specific needs are met. Limited budgets increase the pressure on these decisions as faculty attempt to predict the future.

Faculty members must both read a tremendous quantity of technical literature and keep up on theoretical issues in the field. Regular attendance at conferences and trade shows is a must for the purpose of acquiring advice from industry experts and other faculty and artists. Since new media information has an increasingly short lifespan, such events serve as the most current and accurate source of information. Software companies, unlike textbook companies, rarely give review/preview copies of software to professors. Hardware changes are equally difficult to assess on an individual basis. The industry is still finding its way when dealing with higher education, and the flow of information is not smooth. This reality, coupled with the fact that creative artists push technology in directions developers and marketing teams never imagined, magnifies the challenge of keeping current in a manner not found in any other field.

Attendance at conferences and workshops is one way to achieve this goal. These include: ISEA (Inter-Society for Electronic Art), SIGGRAPH (Special Interest Group in Graphics of the Association for Computing Machinery), IDMAA, FILE, Ars Electronica, CAA, and numerous regional events offering workshops at such events as EYEO, Mutek, ART && CODE, Resonate, and many more.

In some instances, technology-based art and design program faculty often have sole or partial responsibility for the labs they use. These faculty often install the software, hardware, networking, and lab security themselves and carry

responsibility for maintaining, upgrading, troubleshooting, and repairing the same. Administrators may not be aware that lab maintenance itself is often a full-time job, and that an intense investment of time is necessary to run a facility, requiring course load reductions. Once any new media art program reaches a significant number of faculty and students, technical staff must be hired to assure a basic level of maintenance, organization, and support.

3. Service

Faculty in new media programs must have a strong voice in the design and management of digital facilities to ensure that they can support the curricula and research needs of the program. In the event that faculty are solely responsible for the provision of adequate facilities, this significant undertaking should be recognized as a considerable portion of their expected service. Laboratory resources range from specialized dedicated facilities within the department to shared, generalized workspaces, each requiring extensive administration and maintenance. Some faculty in technologically-based new media programs have sole responsibility for the daily management of all program staff, students, and equipment. Because some new media programs are subsidized by various technology grants, program faculty may also be responsible for the management and administration of these grants. In addition, new media faculty may also bear the responsibility for recruitment and supervision of adjunct faculty. The extent of a faculty member's administrative responsibilities may interfere with other essential duties in teaching and research. In environments where a large proportion of the staff works part time, these burdens may be even more extreme, with part-time instructors being asked to perform tasks out of title and with little or no additional compensation. Such administrative and maintenance activities must be viewed as significant contributions to service to the academic community or be compensated as activities acknowledged as beyond the normal scope of service.

Providing Resources

In a field defined by continuous, rapid technological change, institutional support of design, implementation, and maintenance of necessary electronic program infrastructure is essential. Continuous acquisition of new equipment is essential to staying current in the field, requiring constant research into and installation of new equipment. Depending on institutional scale, meeting this need may require fundraising or negotiations with software and hardware companies and with other areas within the institution. Without this resource-intensive support, programs rapidly become obsolete, failing our students and research in the field at large. Many faculty members faced with this dilemma must take on the additional task of fundraising and lobbying for resources rather than see their program lag behind, but such activities may detract from their preparedness for teaching and research leadership. Therefore, recognition of such activities as significant contributions to service is crucial.

Program Promotion

Faculty of technology-based media programs actively promote their programs by arranging exhibitions and demonstrations of their own and student work, by publishing articles about their programs across diverse relevant media, and by developing publicity materials, including websites and blog posts. In addition,

new media programs and their faculty must educate people about their specific program, because the field is not well-understood broadly or locally. Joint events with related departments such as music, theater, or dance, may be used to promote a program, underscoring the unique interdisciplinary potentials innate to the field and fostering productive engagements that help strengthen all participating disciplines. Additionally, faculty in these programs work with developers, manufacturers, and service bureaus for mutual promotion. Links with industry and the media are an important component of program support, development, and promotion. It is crucial that faculty engagement in such activities be understood as significant contributions to service.

4. Conclusion

By endorsing this document, CAA agrees to inform department chairs and other higher-education administrators about the unique demands placed on many full-time faculty in digital media.

The responsibilities of faculty in new media art programs are inherently ever changing. At less-well-funded or teaching-centric colleges, these changes may be shouldered entirely by the new media faculty, often a single individual who may also bear responsibility for fundraising activities to purchase new equipment. At more well-funded or research-centric institutions, multiple new media faculty, and technicians employed to maintain equipment and software, may share the burden of these constant technological changes. It is important to consider the nature of the institution and availability of human and monetary resources when evaluating the faculty member's responsibilities and service.

Descriptions of positions in CAA's Online Career Center indicate that institutions search for candidates who can teach in a wide variety of areas within the domain of computer and new media technology. Departments must recognize that maintaining skills in several subspecialties is difficult in the context of full-time teaching and other responsibilities. Job descriptions framed in terms of a desired focus with additional areas of working knowledge would be very helpful.

Recommendations

We endorse the following recommendations as additional, specific guidelines for faculty of new media programs:

- Individual faculty members and department chairs should review institutional standards in relation to these guidelines when planning and preparing for evaluation. As necessary, institutional guidelines should be revised to include new media as a vital area in the arts.
- Evaluation of professional contributions must include recognition of alternative exhibition and research opportunities outside traditional gallery/museum structures and acknowledge theory-based inquiry and scholarship as an element of cultural production.
- Evaluation of research and scholarship must include an assessment of the effort and time required in the production of that research and scholarship.
- Provisions must be made to support faculty development, which is especially important in an ever-evolving discipline. We urge faculty to work closely with administrators to find the best solutions for

each institution, including the following possibilities: grants for research time; collaboration on cross-disciplinary research grants; funding faculty attendance at grant workshops specific to new media art; and supporting attendance at conferences. Both scholarship and teaching should be assessed in relation to available support for such development.

- Decisions on hiring, reappointment, and tenure should consider the following points:
 - The difficult balance between the production of quality art and maintaining an evolving technical expertise may impact the volume of scholarly and creative activity.
 - Evaluation of teaching performance should consider the demands of ongoing integration of new materials, processes, and critical understandings into a course curriculum.
 - Further consideration should be granted for additional effort required for any interdisciplinary and team teaching and the burdens this places on both students and faculty.
- In accordance with CAA guidelines, faculty in technology-based media should be expected only to carry out duties specifically related to their position as faculty. This should not include acting in an advisory capacity to colleagues, within the department and outside it, who want to adopt new digital technology; the installation and maintenance of computer equipment unrelated to the faculty member's teaching and research; and the production of digital materials for institutional use.
- Institutions must recognize the specific demands of the medium and its culture on professional education, the impact of these elements on their research, and the need for a sustainable financial commitment to the evolving field.

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