



(../index.html)

▲ Home

(../index.html) ◀

Contents

(index.html)

## College Quarterly

Winter 2013 - Volume 16 Number 1

---

### Does Accreditation Matter for Art & Design Schools in Canada?

By *Reiko (Leiko) Shimizu*

Studio-based degrees in fine arts and design are not often written about in higher education literature. Perhaps it is because art and design education is misunderstood – students are viewed as “finding themselves” or have unrealistic dreams of becoming the next big artist. Perhaps the studio-based nature of the curriculum does not intrigue researchers to write about issues that concern it, or perhaps it is because anyone can call themselves an artist without having an academic credential. Ten years ago, urban theorist Richard Florida coined the term the “creative class” as individuals who “do a wide variety of work in a wide variety of industries – from technology to entertainment, journalism to finance, high-end manufacturing to the arts....they share a common ethos that values creativity, individuality, difference, and merit” (Florida, 2002, para. 8). According to Florida the creative class helps build economic development; therefore, our cities should be nurtured to be more inviting to these types of individuals. This emphasis on culture and creativity is at the foundation of art and design education. Groys (2009) argues that art education is complicated and subjective; it ultimately has no rules and that “teaching art means teaching life” (as cited in Madoff, 2009, p. 27). If that is the case, how does one measure quality in a field that is viewed as so subjective? How does one define and value art and design education? One’s notion of good art and design can be vastly different from another’s, and both views may come from experts in the field. This paper is written first, to give context to art and design education specifically in the higher education institutions that specialize in these areas – the independent art and design schools. In Canada there are four such institutions, which I have not found written about in relation to one another. These institutions are: the Emily Carr University of Art + Design in Vancouver, the Alberta College of Art + Design in Calgary, OCAD University in Toronto, and NSCAD University (Nova Scotia College of Art & Design) in Halifax. There are abundant reports discussing the issues of colleges and universities in Canada, and although these art and design schools are now part of the college and university environment, they are quite unique in their mandates, in their learning environments and teaching delivery, and most definitely in their curriculum.

The second purpose for this paper is to compare quality measures in Canada and the U.S. and how this relates to schools of art and design. The National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD) is an American body that accredits art and design schools and programs. Canada does not have such an organization but one school in Canada, the Alberta College of Art + Design (ACAD) decided to attain substantial equivalency status by NASAD in 2009. Finally the third part of this paper will discuss whether accreditation matters for Canadian art and design schools. How does recognition from NASAD impact the type of education a student receives from ACAD in comparison to the three other independent art and design schools in Canada?

#### **A Brief History of Art and Design Education in North America**

Art and design education was not traditionally taught in the universities but instead in special academies of art and design. In North America, Pennsylvania established its first academy of art in 1797, and in 1807, the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts became America’s first successful academy that still exists today (Efland, 1990, p. 62). By the mid-1800s, various academies began appearing in the U.S., and formed the

National Academy of Design and the Arts Students League in New York. These were modeled after European academies and provided training in visual art for art's sake with no practical use up until the latter part of the 19th century when industrial application became the top priority. Rhode Island School of Design, the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn and the Cooper Union in New York were among these first art institutes in America (Efland, 1990, p. 63).

Canada's history of art and design postsecondary education follows a similar timeline as that of the U.S. Egerton Ryerson was influential with the introduction of linear drawing in Ontario schools for vocational purposes in the mid-to-late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Pearse, 2006, p. 7). Britain's South Kensington school system of industrial art and design and British educator Walter Smith are credited for being extremely influential in the development of art and design education in the U.S., Canada, Brazil, Australia, and New Zealand (Pearse, 2006, p. 56). During the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, art and design schools were popping up across Canada: Halifax's Victoria School of Art and Design (now NSCAD University), Ontario had eight art schools during its peak (one being today's OCAD University), the Écoles des Beaux Arts in Montreal and Quebec, the Vancouver School of Art (now Emily Carr University of Art + Design), the Winnipeg School of Art, and Calgary's Alberta College of Art (now the Alberta College of Art + Design) (Pearse, 2006, p. 13). What started as technical schools for the sole purpose of training in industrial drawing and to educate teachers of art and design has evolved into programs in colleges and universities, some as specialized schools of art and design and others as part of more comprehensive university and college offerings. Curriculum has evolved from basic drawing skills to programs like ceramics, animation, and photography, and credentials are earned at the certificate, diploma, undergraduate, and graduate levels.

### **Independent Art and Design Schools in Canada**

Canada's postsecondary system tends to be categorized into two camps: colleges and universities; however, our system is more complex than this. Jones (2004) classifies Canada's postsecondary institutions into five types: "universities and degree granting institutions, colleges and institutes, school boards that operate adult and postsecondary programs; government institutions; and career colleges" (p. 2). Although there is much discussion and literature regarding issues impacting Canada's mainstream colleges and universities, I have found very little regarding Canada's independent art and design schools. Generally not included in the same conversation as traditional colleges and universities, these schools were named "colleges" and in most cases, have been renamed to "universities". The early 1990s saw an increasing demand for undergraduate degrees in Canada, and these former technical schools-turned-colleges began the approval process of offering bachelor's and master's degrees in Fine Arts and Design; in most cases these schools have now received full university status. These schools are also publicly funded and function similarly to other colleges and universities in Canada; their structure and governance is comparable, and they are also dealing with the same issues most higher education institutions are facing: access, funding, and quality. Why did I not find literature that acknowledges Canada's four independent art and design schools? Are these institutions not an important part of Canada's postsecondary education history? The next section will give some context and background on these four art and design institutions in Canada: the Emily Carr University of Art + Design, the Alberta College of Art + Design, OCAD University, and NSCAD University (see Appendix for a comparison snapshot).

### **Emily Carr University of Art + Design (ECUAD)**

Mission: "Emily Carr University of Art + Design is a learning community devoted to excellence and innovation in Visual Arts, Media Arts and Design" (ECUAD, n.d.).

What began with 89 students as the Vancouver School of Decorative and Applied Arts in 1925 has evolved into 1,800 students at the Emily Carr University of Art + Design. The school was established to provide training in drawing and design and included the study of the history of art in the curriculum in 1934 (Henry, 2001, p. 106). The school was originally under the authority of the Vancouver School Board until 1978 when it became provincially mandated as an independent art college and renamed the Emily Carr College of Art. In 1989, the institution began offering Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) and Bachelor of Design (BD) degrees through the Open Learning Institute until 1994 when it received degree-granting status and was renamed the Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design (Henry, 2001, p. 123-145). In 2006, the institution was granted authority to offer graduate degrees, and received official university status in 2008. Today, the campus of ECUAD consists of two buildings on Granville Island, Vancouver and offers certificates, continuing education courses, four-year Bachelor of Fine Arts and Bachelor of Design degrees, and Master of Applied Arts degrees in Visual Arts, Media Arts and Design (ECUAD, n.d.). Programs total 17 and range from Interaction Design to Sculpture to Animation.

### **Alberta College of Art and Design (ACAD)**

Mission: "ACAD is a leading centre for education and research, and a catalyst for creative inquiry and cultural development. We engage the world and create possibilities" (ACAD, n.d.).

The Alberta College of Art + Design (ACAD) was established in Calgary in 1926 as the Art Department of the Provincial Institute of Technology of Art. At the end of the 1930s, students could earn an Elementary Diploma in drawing and watercolour and continue into a two-year Advanced Diploma in Fine Arts, Commercial Arts, or Applied Arts and Crafts. In 1960, the school was renamed the Alberta College of Art but was still a department of the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology (formerly the Provincial Institute of Technology and Art) (Laviolette & Sammon, 2001, p. 11-25). In an example of comparison and competition with the three other art colleges in Canada, Ken Sturdy, an instructor of the school was quoted saying: "We've been producing students at least equal in calibre to those in any other Canadian school. Add to that the fact that we have equipment and premises here second to none in Canada and you have two more reasons why we're worthy of the name 'college'" (as quoted in Laviolette & Sammon, 2001, p. 25). In 1985, the college gained autonomy as an independent self-governing college, and 10 years later was renamed to include "Design" and approved to offer Bachelor of Fine Arts degrees (Laviolette & Sammon, 2001, p. 35-40). Bachelor of Design degrees followed five years later in 2000. Once the largest art and design college in Canada, ACAD is now the second smallest with 1,200 students, one building, and an annual budget of \$12 million (ACAD, n.d.). Unlike the three other art and design schools, ACAD does not have university status and solely focuses on undergraduate education; programs total 12 and include programs such as Fibre, Print Media, and Visual Communications Design. In 2009, ACAD became the first and only institution in Canada to receive substantial equivalency status from the National Association of Schools of Art and Design, and one of only two institutions outside of the U.S. to receive such status (ACAD, n.d.).

### **OCAD University (OCAD U)**

Mission: "OCAD helps shape imagination through the delivery of art and design education at the undergraduate and graduate levels in a learning environment that integrates studio-based education with historical, critical and scientific inquiry. OCAD values accessibility, cultural diversity, equitable global citizenship, art and design advocacy, aesthetic and formal excellence, sustainability and entrepreneurship" (OCAD, 2006, p. 1).

OCAD University's history began in Toronto in 1876 as the Ontario School of Art. Over the course of 15 years, its tumultuous past included affiliations with the Department of Education and the Toronto School of Art until 1891 when the Central Ontario School of Art and Design opened its doors (OCA& AGO, 1997). Its purpose in the early 1900s was "not to turn out only picture painters or sculptors, the main object of its promoters and guardians is, and has been, to meet the need for designers for manufactures in which decoration is essential" (OCA & AGO, 1997, p. 14). An act incorporating the school as the Ontario College of Art was passed in 1921 giving the college authority to offer diplomas, and in the same year, its own building was opened as Canada's first building solely dedicated to art education (OCAD U, n.d.). In 2002, the college (now called the Ontario College of Art and Design) was given authority to confer Bachelor of Fine Arts and Bachelor of Design degrees, and graduate degrees followed five years later. In 2010, the college was officially recognized as a university and its name was changed to reflect this. Today the university is the largest art and design school in Canada with approximately 4,000 students, seven buildings in downtown Toronto, and an annual budget of \$52 million (OCAD U, n.d.). The university no longer offers diploma programs but offers bachelor's and master's degrees, post-graduate certificates, and continuing education courses. There are 17 different programs that range from Drawing and Painting to Environmental Design, and Aboriginal Visual Culture to Inclusive Design. OCAD U is currently seeking approval to offer Bachelor of Arts degrees in Visual and Critical Studies.

#### **NSCAD University (NSCAD U)**

Mission: "NSCAD will solidify our position as Canada's premier university of the visual arts and strengthen our reputation for excellence both nationally and internationally. NSCAD will continue to be a leader in creative and artistic innovation...will reinforce our position as a vital component of Canada's cultural fabric...will be become widely recognized as a leading contributor to Canada's creative economy" (NSCAD U, 2009, p. 4).

NSCAD University began with 282 students in Halifax as the Victoria School of Art and Design (VSAD) in 1887 during Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee (Soucy & Pearse, 1993, p. 2-29). Like many other art schools during this time, VSAD's purpose was "to sharpen the graphic skills of working class industrial designers, to provide the more well-to-do with instruction in polite artistic pursuits, and to train drawing teachers for the private and public schools" (Soucy & Pearse, 1993, p. 2). In 1906, a technical college opened in Halifax, which seemed to compete with the art school so VSAD began to emphasize fine art rather than industrial design and architecture. In 1925, a new legislative act gave the school the status of college and VSAD was renamed the Nova Scotia College of Art (Soucy & Pearse, 1993, p. 52-95). In 1969, the college received degree-granting status and added "Design" back into its name (although design had always been a part of the curriculum). At the time, the college was the only degree-granting professional art college in Canada and the first to be approved to do so. During the 1970s, it was regarded as one of the best art schools in North America (Soucy & Pearse, 1993, p. 147), well known for conceptual art, and began offering its first graduate programs (p. 161).

Today, NSCAD University (renamed in 2003) has three campuses in Halifax, a student population of slightly below 1,000, and an annual budget of \$21 million (Windsor, 2011, p. 3). NSCAD U offers bachelor's degrees in Art, Fine Arts, and Design, as well as master's degrees in Fine Arts and Design. The university offers 15 different areas of study such as Art History, Craft, Textiles, and Intermedia.

### **Quality Measures in the U.S. and Canada**

#### **Accreditation in the U.S.**

Quality assessment and assurance procedures in Canada and the U.S. are vastly different. Canada uses provincial government authority while the U.S. uses non-governmental, private organizations. Accreditation is a term widely recognized in the U.S. but not so much in Canada. In the U.S. "Accreditation is a process of external quality review created and used by higher education to scrutinize colleges, universities and programs for quality assurance and quality improvement" (Eaton, 2011. p.1). Accreditation in the U.S. was the result of European universities unwilling to recognize American degrees in the early 1900s unless they came from institutions that were members of the Association of American Universities (AAU) (Areena, 2011, p. 1478). The AAU did not want to get involved in the quality review business so six regional accreditors were established. Today, there are other types of accreditors that exist such as accreditors for private career institutions, faith-based institutions, and specific professional programs (e.g., medical and law schools) (Areena, 2011, p. 1479). Accreditation in the U.S. has six main principles:

(1) accrediting bodies are non-governmental; (2) accreditation is conducted primarily by volunteers;...(3) accreditation is repeated at regular intervals....(4) the accreditation process relies on self-studies and peer evaluation; (5) the goal of accreditation is quality enhancement, not just assurance; and (6) the accreditation process takes into account the mission of the institution being accredited (Areena, 2011, p. 1479).

Accreditation in the U.S. has other important implications like student access to financial aid, smoother mobility between accredited institutions, and standards of quality required for credentials in specific professions (CHEA, 2010, p. 3).

#### **Quality Assessment and Assurance in Canada**

There is no federal education system in Canada; therefore, each province and territory oversees its own. Since the provinces and territories give institutions the authority to confer degrees, the institution has been deemed "accredited" by the government; as Marshall (2004) describes the method in Canada, "accreditation by legislation" (p. 72). Marshall argues that the quality standards in Canada are not homogenous and that each jurisdiction runs itself differently in terms of who can award diplomas and degrees, and how institutions interact and relate to one another; therefore, there is "a need, for the first time in Canada, (for) a strong national presence in defining a Canadian 'standard of practice' in various areas of post-secondary education" (2004, p. 73). Marshall focuses on various events that have impacted the way in which degrees are valued in Canada; the first was granting university status to unique institutions like Nipissing University in North Bay in 1992 and Ryerson University in Toronto in 1993. Nipissing University and Ryerson University both had very specific mandates: the former being Canada's first solely undergraduate university and the latter being Canada's first vocationally oriented university (2004, p. 83). It is interesting to note that Marshall does not mention any of Canada's art and design schools as part of this change in

Canada's degree-granting business when all four have received degree-granting status; the earliest in 1969 (NSCAD U) and the latest in 2002 (OCAD U). These art and design schools also have unique mandates — different from the traditional universities in Canada — which is art and design studio-based instruction. Other events that have put a “crack”, as Marshall calls it, in our degree credibility was the establishment of the diploma/degree hybrid institutions known as the “university colleges” in British Columbia, the establishment of private degree-granting institutions (non-profit faith-based and for profit institutions like DeVry in Alberta), and the granting of authority to colleges to offer applied baccalaureate degrees (Mount Royal College in Alberta was the first in Canada in 1995) (Marshall, 2004, p. 84-85).

These four events can be perceived as eroding the quality of degree programs in Canada, but it can also be perceived as adding diversity to the higher education landscape. Because of Canada's fragmented education system, it is understandably considered in terms of jurisdictions. For example, many have identified the lack of institutional differentiation in Ontario (Clark et al., 2009). All of the universities in Ontario are research universities and all of the colleges focus on applied education. This is true; however, when you examine the higher education institutions across Canada, diversity exists. The independent schools of art and design located in four different provinces add to this diversity. This erosion or expansion of the degree-granting business in Canada may initiate a need for a different type of quality control system, perhaps one body that oversees all higher education institutions across Canada. Institutional accreditation might be something Canada will need to consider when students, employers, graduate schools, and international higher education institutions are left wondering what a university degree means in Canada; are they all created equal? Areena (2011) describes the government “hands-off” approach in the U.S. as one that promotes quality by valuing competition, institutional differentiation, and autonomy. This contrasts the rest of the world where ministries of education oversee higher education institutions (p. 1474). There may be a move for accreditation implied in the 2009 report from the Canadian Council on Learning which states: “As Canadian PSE (Post-secondary Education) becomes more internationalized (i.e., increasing student mobility and growing international reach), it will be important for Canada to develop a quality-assurance approach comparable to those of countries with whom we compete as a desirable post-secondary destination” (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009, p. 13). In Ontario, the Ontario College Quality Assurance Service (OCQAS) is currently working towards becoming an accrediting body by 2015 for the Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology (OCQAS, n.d.). They are doing so through the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAHE) by meeting the standards of good practice as an accrediting agency. One reason for this is to attract international students who are looking for accredited institutions, as accreditation is accepted as an indicator of quality and excellence worldwide (Klassen, 2012).

### **Quality Councils in Canada**

In lieu of a national accrediting body for Canadian universities, there is the Association of Universities and Colleges in Canada (AUCC), which is a non-governmental, non-profit association that promotes higher education in Canada through advocacy, public policy development, and university research (AUCC, n.d.). If an institution is a member of AUCC, it has met certain criteria as set by Canadian universities, but AUCC is not considered a quality review agency. Similar to accreditation in the U.S., AUCC members must undergo self and peer evaluations, campus visits, and submission of reports, but unlike accreditation, there is no regular review of the member institutions. Once a member, the university is listed

on the AUCC website which students can use in search of a university. Three out of the four independent art and design schools are members of AUCC, all except the Alberta College of Art +Design (ACAD). Marshall (2004) argues that with the expansion of degree-granting status in the colleges, "AUCC became the dividing line between accredited degrees and non-accredited degrees and institutions" (p. 89). This gives some context as to why ACAD may have worked towards recognition from the National Association of Schools of Art and Design, which will be discussed later.

The four art and design schools in Canada are also reviewed by different quality councils from each of their provinces. ECUAD has the British Columbia Education Quality Assurance designation contracted by the Ministry of Advanced Education, Innovation, and Technology; ACAD has the Campus Alberta Quality Council contracted by the Ministry of Enterprise and Advanced Education; OCAD University has the Ontario University Council on Quality Assurance contracted by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities; and NSCAD U has the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission contracted by the Nova Scotia Department of Education. With four different quality councils that recognize four different art and design institutions, one can assume that standards of quality exist and that each province is defining and regulating what quality means in their jurisdiction. However, how can one compare the quality of similar programs being offered by these institutions? An accrediting agency for art and design schools is the answer in the U.S. so why not in Canada?

#### **National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD)**

The National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD) was established in 1944 as the national accrediting agency for art and design institutions and programs in the U.S. It has over 300 art and design institution members and provides professional development, institutional research and statistics, and policy studies and is also an accrediting agency (NASAD, n.d.). NASAD members contribute to art and design educational quality standards that are imposed on institutions when a voluntary application is made; these standards are revised annually in its 200-page NASAD handbook. Membership is open to degree granting and non-degree granting colleges, universities, independent art and design schools, two-year institutions, and graduate-only institutions. Once a member, institutions are granted accreditation for five years and after this period they must apply to renew their membership; once the renewal is approved accreditation is granted for ten years (NASAD, 2012, p. 7). NASAD is also part of an overarching council, the Council of Arts Accrediting Association that includes three other national associations of schools in music, theatre, and dance.

The Council of Arts Accrediting Association (CAAA) outlines various issues related to the value of arts accreditation in its 1997 briefing paper titled "Tough Questions and Straight Answers About Arts Accreditation". How arts accreditation approaches its work is discussed at length but there are two important points made: one is that arts accreditation is completely voluntary since accreditation has no connection to licensure in arts related fields. This means that institutions that seek accreditation have bought into NASAD's value of quality standards and methods of evaluation, and accountability. The other point is that accreditation standards are related directly to student competencies that "emphasize function over method, ends over means, artistic intellectual development over specification of resources" (CAAA, 1997, p. 4). The NASAD handbook outlines basic student competencies in 23 areas ranging from Illustration to Sculpture and Glass to Printmaking. CAAA claims that specialized accreditation in the arts has value for the public, students, and institutions.

For the public, arts accreditation makes institutions more accountable to the public in terms of the quality of programs offered in art and design disciplines, produces competent professionals and practitioners who have graduated from accredited programs, and acts as a quality review mechanism for those who pursue teaching in art and design fields (CAAA, 1997, p. 4). For students, arts accreditation gives out information on the fundamental competencies needed to succeed in art or design related professions, gives students assurance that accredited programs meet nationally established standards, and may help facilitate employment opportunities (CAAA, 1997, p. 5). For institutions, arts accreditation helps facilitate internal quality review of educational programs, improves accountability procedures and quality measures through peer evaluation by respected experts of art and design education, helps determine whether transfer of credit from an institution is worthy of acceptance, and assists with determining eligibility for public and private financial support (CAAA, 1997, p. 5). In the article "What Art-school Accreditation Means to Students", author Daniel Grant argues that students should choose an institution based on the program and curriculum, and not based on whether the school is accredited by NASAD; he calls accreditation a marketing tool for some institutions (2009, para. 2). He cites two institutions in the state of Maine that offer Master of Fine Arts (MFA) programs: the Maine College of Art in Portland, which is accredited by NASAD, and Heartwood College of Art in Kennebunk, which is not. Grant's argument is based on the fact that the Maine Department of Education has already licensed Heartwood College of Art; therefore, NASAD accreditation is useless, as it does not inform prospective students much about teaching style, curriculum, graduation rates etc. CAAA responds to this criticism by stating, "State reviews are often targeted in specific directions, or conducted for a specific purpose such as resources or program allocation among institutions" (CAAA, 1997, p. 8). NASAD standards are developed by professional consensus and do not change from state to state or based on external political pressures. Grant also mentions the downside to the cost and time involved with obtaining accreditation. The \$500 application fee and \$500 site visit fee plus the cost of travel and accommodations for external reviewers may be expensive for some institutions. CAAA responds to this type of criticism by stating that arts accreditation remains one of the lowest costs in comparison to other accreditations, and in comparison to the cost of running an art and design institution or program, it is relatively minimal; the investment in acquiring accreditation pays off through quality development of their programs (CAAA, 1997, p. 6). NASAD may just be another accrediting body to add to list of many that exist in the U.S., but at the very least this body is attempting to establish and enforce standards made by participating art and design professionals and education experts.

### **Association of Independent Colleges of Art and Design (AICAD)**

Another organization worth mentioning in relation to art and design schools is the Association of Independent Colleges of Art and Design (AICAD), a non-profit association of 43 art and design schools in the U.S. and Canada founded in 1991 by a group of college and university presidents. Their mission is to educate the public on the value of art and design education, and work together to mutually develop the programs and schools of its members. Membership is open to private, non-profit, free-standing colleges and universities in the U.S. and Canada that specialize in art and design education, offer BFA and MFA degrees and are accredited by NASAD and their regional accrediting agency (AICAD, n.d.). AICAD promotes art and design education by putting on regular conferences and meetings to discuss art and design education related issues, disseminating information to students regarding choosing an art and design school, assisting with mobility exchanges with institutional



members, and collecting and analyzing data related to art and design schools (AICAD, n.d.). All four of Canada's art and design schools are members of AICAD even though our schools are public institutions, are not recognized by NASAD (except ACAD), and are not required to be accredited by the regional accrediting agencies of the U.S; each has been provincially approved. AICAD is not an accrediting body but is a collective of art and design schools that work together and share information. What sets the community of NASAD members and AICAD members apart is that NASAD members include public institutions and institutions that are not free-standing independent schools of art and design. In addition to accrediting specialized art and design institutions, NASAD also accredits specific art and design programs that are part of larger college and university offerings (e.g., the California State University's BA, MA and MFA programs within the Department of Art in the College of Arts and Letters are accredited). AICAD seems to recognize the value of NASAD accreditation since it is a requirement for American Schools to become a member; however, it also seems to recognize the value and uniqueness of independent art and design schools by creating a specific collective. Issues related to independent art and design schools are different than for research universities, liberal arts colleges, and community colleges. Studio-based courses have to rely on specific space and equipment requirements and class sizes must be kept to a minimum (ideally no more than 25 students as per NASAD standards), which greatly affect the cost of running an institution. Graduation rates and career placement rates out of college are also factors that must be considered which may be unique to an art and design related education. Statistical data coming from independent art and design schools prove to be important for these institutions to accurately compare how one institution is performing against another similar institution. In relation to other more comprehensive institutional benchmarks, these may not be realistic or appropriate for schools of art and design to compare with.

### **Does NASAD Accreditation Matter in Canada?**

It may seem that NASAD accreditation does not matter for Canada's art and design institutions. Only four schools exist in Canada and these schools are geographically spread out across the country so one can assume they are not competing for the same students. Degree programs in Canada are government-approved by jurisdiction, and arms-length government quality councils in each province put quality measures in place. It would seem that appropriate standards have been met by each of these institutions, not only art and design schools, but also for all post-secondary degree granting institutions. What NASAD would do for Canada's art and design schools is create a mechanism of enforced standards that recognizes them all together. In addition, a mechanism like NASAD could recognize degree programs in fine arts and design that are offered as part of larger university offerings (e.g., University of Guelph's art history and studio degrees in the School of Fine Art and Music). There is nothing like this in Canada. The Association of Universities and Colleges in Canada (AUCC) is not a quality review body but does recognize degree-granting institutions in Canada. The Alberta College of Art + Design (ACAD) is not a member of AUCC even though it received degree-granting status by the government of Alberta in 1995; no college that offers baccalaureate degrees is a member of AUCC. There is a deliberate disconnect between provincial degree-granting status and national recognition as a university. Skolnik (2006) argues that Canada has separated the types of degrees it offers – academic and applied – and have indirectly created a hierarchy of one being valued more than the other (p. 7). This has created problems for students who wish to pursue graduate studies coming out of colleges that award baccalaureates. Skolnik(2006) argues for more research to be done on comparing the

curriculum and learning outcomes of the degrees offered by colleges and universities since there is no evidence that a student could not succeed in a graduate program coming from a college degree program. This lack of recognition by AUCC leads me to assume that NASAD accreditation was important to ACAD and therefore substantial equivalency status was obtained in 2009. ACAD's response to receiving NASAD recognition is:

By earning this designation, ACAD is recognized by NASAD as having met rigorous qualifications and standards related to educational quality and institutional integrity. For our students, ACAD's NASAD Foreign-Equivalency status will mean that our Bachelor of Fine Arts and Bachelor of Design degrees, and their individual class components, will be recognized as equivalent in post secondary institutions throughout North America. This important designation will ensure that ACAD artists and designers will be able to pursue graduate degrees internationally, and will become a crucial factor in our own imminent graduate program offering. (ACAD, n.d.)

Substantial or foreign equivalency status is given to programs from institutions that are outside of the U.S. but are not considered accredited by NASAD. "It implies reasonable confidence that graduates possess the competencies expected of those holding particular U.S. degrees and credentials, or needed to begin professional practice at the entry level" (NASAD, 2010, p. 1). Emily Carr University of Art + Design responds to accreditation by stating:

As a result of the 2001 application process and acceptance into the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, all of our credentials were fully recognized both nationally and internationally. Emily Carr degrees are recognized and accepted worldwide as evidenced by the fact that we have students in graduate programs ranging from Goldsmiths in London, England to Pratt in New York to all the major universities in Canada and all of the universities in BC. (ECUAD, 2011, p. 14)

OCAD U also responds to accreditation by stating:

OCAD has operated as a fully accredited university offering undergraduate degrees since 2002, and graduate degrees since 2008. In 2006, the institution was granted membership in the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, which represents 95 public and private not-for-profit universities and university-degree level colleges across Canada.(OCAD U, n.d.)

Since graduates of ECUAD, OCAD U, and NSCAD U can fall back on the status and reputation of being members of AUCC, they are not likely to run into problems of being eligible for graduate studies in Canada. It is unknown, however, what kind of influence AUCC membership holds internationally. The Ontario colleges have acknowledged the need to be internationally recognized and are working towards recognition by a global quality assurance body. Marshall (2008) acknowledges the argument that AUCC membership is an inappropriate mechanism for valuing degrees in Canada since it is not an accrediting agency and membership reflects the commonly held assumptions of what a university is (para. 29). According to Marshall (2008) these new types of degrees are only going to increase and will continue to be an issue of controversy and debate. Students need to be informed on what kind of degree they are getting themselves into and what the implications of having such a degree will be for their future endeavors.

## **Conclusion**

Quality in art and design education is a challenging subject to examine largely because of the lack of literature on this topic. Not only did I not find any literature that references in detail Canada's four art and design post-secondary institutions, I found no information that compares these institutions, and certainly no literature that examines issues of their quality. Maclean's University Rankings and the Globe and Mail's Canadian University Report do not compare fine art and design programs in Canada. Perhaps comparing only four schools is not worthwhile, but there are many Bachelor of Fine Arts and Bachelor of Design programs across the country in universities and colleges. It is important to note that Maclean's does compare and rank specific institutions like Medical Doctoral universities and Law schools; art and design schools are not on their radar. This is not to say that these reports are accurate measures of quality but they are tools used by students for choosing the right institution for them. Like accreditation in the U.S. It might be useful to compare the quality of these programs that exist in independent art and design schools in relation to other universities and colleges. Some type of accrediting organization like the National Association of Schools of Art and Design in the U.S. could be a tool used to define quality standards for these studio-based degrees. What is known is that Canada's four art and design schools have a long history and have evolved throughout the years to adapt to the climate of the Canadian post-secondary education environment. All four institutions are degree granting; they no longer offer diploma programs, and three of the four schools have been offering graduate degrees for many years. All except the Alberta College of Art + Design (ACAD) are officially recognized as members of the Association of Universities and Colleges in Canada, currently the only national proxy for degree quality and "accreditation". ACAD has taken measures into its own hands by earning substantial equivalency status from the only accrediting body of art and design institutions and programs in North America. These institutions are unique and should be given consideration when conducting educational research in Canada. The nature of Canada's education system – or lack of a national system – has made it difficult, if not almost impossible, to consider these four schools in relation to one another. Although they were born out of four provincial systems, what ties them together is art and design education. It is unfortunate that the only organization that is serving to unite these Canadian institutions is based in the U.S., the Association of Independent Colleges of Art and Design.

**Appendix - Snapshot of Canada's independent art and design institutions**

Institution	Year Established	Degree-granting Status	Degrees Offered	Student Population	Memberships
Emily Carr University of Art + Design	1925	1994	BFA, BDes, BMA, MAA	1,800	AUCC, AICAD
Alberta College of Art + Design	1926	1995	BFA, BDes	1,200	AICAD, NASAD substantial equivalency
OCAD University	1876	2002	BFA, BDes, MA, MFA, MDes, Executive MDes	4,000	AUCC, AICAD
NSCAD			BFA, BA,		

University	1887	1969	BDes, MFA, MDes	900	AUCC, AICAD
------------	------	------	--------------------	-----	-------------

## References

Alberta College of Art + Design (ACAD). (n.d.). About the Alberta College of Art + Design. Retrieved December 8, 2012, from [http://www.acad.ca/about\\_acad.html](http://www.acad.ca/about_acad.html)

Alberta College of Art + Design (ACAD). (n.d.). ACAD's history. Retrieved December 8, 2012, from [http://www.acad.ca/reputation\\_history.html](http://www.acad.ca/reputation_history.html)

Alberta College of Art + Design (ACAD). (n.d.). ACAD granted foreign-equivalency status by the National Association of Schools of Art and Design. Retrieved December 8, 2012, from [http://www.acad.ca/wh\\_news\\_granted\\_nasad\\_090614.html](http://www.acad.ca/wh_news_granted_nasad_090614.html)

Areana, J. (2011, July). Accreditation reconsidered. *Iowa Law Review*, 96(5), 1471+. Retrieved from [http://go.galegroup.com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA262884703&v=2.1&u=utoronto\\_main&it=r&p=AONE&sw=w](http://go.galegroup.com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA262884703&v=2.1&u=utoronto_main&it=r&p=AONE&sw=w)

Association of Independent Colleges of Art and Design (AICAD). (n.d.). About. Retrieved December 1, 2012, from <http://www.aicad.org/about/>

Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC). (n.d.). What we do. Retrieved December 15, 2012, from <http://www.aucc.ca/about-us/what-we-do/>

Canadian Council on Learning. (2009). Up to par: The challenge of demonstrating quality in Canadian post-secondary education. Retrieved December 15, 2012, from [http://www.ccl-cca.ca/pdfs/PSE/2009/PSEChallengesInPost-SecondaryEducationNOV2009\\_EN.pdf](http://www.ccl-cca.ca/pdfs/PSE/2009/PSEChallengesInPost-SecondaryEducationNOV2009_EN.pdf)

Clark, I.D., Moran, G., Skolnik, M.L. & Trick, D. (2009). *Academic Transformation: The Forces Reshaping Higher Education in Ontario*. Kingston, ON: Robert Sutherland Hall.

Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). (2010). The value of accreditation. Retrieved December 1, 2012, from [http://www.chea.org/pdf/Value%20of%20US%20Accreditation%2006.29.2010\\_buttons.pdf](http://www.chea.org/pdf/Value%20of%20US%20Accreditation%2006.29.2010_buttons.pdf)

Council of Arts Accrediting Association (CAAA). (1997). Tough questions and straight answers about arts accreditation. Retrieved December 1, 2012, from [http://nasm.arts-accredit.org/site/docs/CAAA\\_PAPERS/CAAA-Tough\\_Questions-2009.pdf](http://nasm.arts-accredit.org/site/docs/CAAA_PAPERS/CAAA-Tough_Questions-2009.pdf)

Eaton, J. S. (2011). An overview of U.S. accreditation. Council for Higher Education Accreditation. Retrieved December 1, 2012, from <http://www.chea.org/pdf/Overview%20of%20US%20Accreditation%2003.2011.pdf>

Efland, A. D. (1990). *A history of art education: Intellectual and social currents in teaching the visual arts*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press, Columbia University.

Emily Carr University of Art + Design (ECUAD). (n.d.). Facts and figures. Retrieved December 9, 2012, from <http://www.ecuad.ca/about/facts>

Emily Carr University of Art + Design (ECUAD). (2011). 2011/12 – 2013/14 Institutional accountability plan + report. Retrieved December 9, 2012, from <http://www.ecuad.ca/sites/www.ecuad.ca/files/pages/3/Accountability%20Plan%20and%20Report%202011.12%20to%202013.14.pdf>

Florida, R. (2002, May). The rise of the creative class. *Washington Monthly*. Retrieved from December 15, 2012, <http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/features/2001/0205.florida.html>

Grant, D. (2009, November). What art-school accreditation means to students. *American Artist*, 73(803), 74+. Retrieved December 15, 2012, from [http://go.galegroup.com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA208747003&v=2.1&u=utoronto\\_main&it=r&p=AONE&sw=w](http://go.galegroup.com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA208747003&v=2.1&u=utoronto_main&it=r&p=AONE&sw=w)

Henry, K., & Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design. (2001). *Art is all over: Emily Carr Institute of Art + Design*. Vancouver: Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design.

Jones, G. A. (2004). Canada. In James J.F. Forest and Philip G. Altbach (Eds.). *International handbook of higher education*. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Klassen, T. (2012). Quality assurance in Ontario's post-secondary education sector. *College Quarterly*. 15(3). Retrieved December 8, 2012, from <http://www.collegequarterly.ca/2012-vol15-num03-summer/klassen.html>

Lavolette, M. & Sammon, C.E. (Eds.). (2001). *75 years of art: Alberta College of Art + Design: 1926-2001*. Calgary, AB: Alberta College of Art and Design.

Madoff, S. H. (Ed.). (2009). *Art school: (propositions for the 21st century)*. Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press.

Ontario College of Art and Art Gallery of Ontario (OCA & AGO). (1976). *100 years evolution of the Ontario College of Art*. Toronto, ON: Art Gallery of Ontario, Ontario College of Art.

OCAD University (OCAD U). (n.d.). Historical summary. Retrieved December 9, 2012, from [http://www.ocadu.ca/about\\_ocad/overview/historical\\_summary.htm](http://www.ocadu.ca/about_ocad/overview/historical_summary.htm)

OCAD University (OCAD U). (n.d.) Facts and indicators. Retrieved from December 9, 2012, [http://www.ocadu.ca/about\\_ocad/overview/facts\\_indicators.htm](http://www.ocadu.ca/about_ocad/overview/facts_indicators.htm)

OCAD University (OCAD U). (n.d.). OCAD to be renamed "OCAD University". Retrieved December 9, 2012, from [http://www.ocadu.ca/export/about\\_ocad/articles/stories/20100429\\_ocad\\_to\\_be\\_renamed\\_university.htm](http://www.ocadu.ca/export/about_ocad/articles/stories/20100429_ocad_to_be_renamed_university.htm)

Ontario College of Art & Design (OCAD). (2006). Leading in the age of imagination: A strategic plan for the Ontario College of Art and Design 2006-2012. Retrieved December 9, 2012, from [http://www.ocadu.ca/Assets/pdf\\_media/ocad/about/Strategic+Planning/Leading\\_in\\_the\\_Age\\_of\\_Imagination\\_full.pdf](http://www.ocadu.ca/Assets/pdf_media/ocad/about/Strategic+Planning/Leading_in_the_Age_of_Imagination_full.pdf)

Ontario College Quality Assurance Service (OCQAS). (n.d.) News. Retrieved December 8, 2012, from <http://www.ocqas.org/news.html>

Marshall, D. (2004). Degree accreditation in Canada. *The Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, 34(2), 69-96. Retrieved from December 15, 2012, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/221212847?accountid=14771>

Marshall, D. (2008). Differentiation by degrees: System design and the changing undergraduate environment in Canada. *The Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, 38(3), 1-20. Retrieved from December 15, 2012, from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/221136601?accountid=14771>

National Association of Schools of Art and Design. (n.d.) About NASAD. Retrieved November 25, 2012, from <http://nasad.arts-accredit.org/index.jsp?page=About+NASAD>

National Association of Schools of Art and Design. (2010). Policies and procedures for NASAD substantial equivalency review. Retrieved November 25, 2012, from [http://nasad.arts-accredit.org/site/docs/EQUIVALENCY-NASAD/Substantial\\_Equivalency-NASAD.pdf](http://nasad.arts-accredit.org/site/docs/EQUIVALENCY-NASAD/Substantial_Equivalency-NASAD.pdf)

National Association of Schools of Art and Design (2012). NASAD handbook 2012-13. Retrieved November 25, 2012, from [http://nasad.arts-accredit.org/site/docs/Handbook/NASAD\\_HANDBOOK\\_2012-13.pdf](http://nasad.arts-accredit.org/site/docs/Handbook/NASAD_HANDBOOK_2012-13.pdf)

NSCAD University (NSCAD U). (2009). Building opportunities: NSCAD University's strategic plan 2009-2012. Retrieved December 2, 2012, from <http://nscad.ca/site-nscad/media/nscad/strategicplan.pdf>

Pearse, H. (Ed.) (2006). *From drawing to visual culture: A history of art education in Canada*. Montreal, Quebec: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Skolnik, M. L. (2006). Some thoughts on the meaning of and values that influence degree recognition in Canada. *College Quarterly*, 9(4). Retrieved December 15, 2012, from <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/EJ835431.pdf>

Soucy, D. & Pearse, H. (1993). *The first hundred years: A history of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design*. Fredericton, NB & Halifax, NS: University of New Brunswick and the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design.

Windsor, H. (2011). Report on the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design: Time to act. Retrieved December 8, 2012, from <http://www.gov.ns.ca/lae/dept/docs/NSCADReport.pdf>

**Reiko (Leiko) Shimizu** has worked at OCAD University since 2005 and has been in the role of Student Advisor since 2007. She is currently pursuing her M.Ed. in Higher Education part-time at OISE/UT. She can be reached at [reikoshimizu@gmail.com](mailto:reikoshimizu@gmail.com) (<mailto:reikoshimizu@gmail.com?subject=CQ%20Article>)

◀ **Contents** ([index.html](#))