



Wednesday, May 20th, 2020

Dear Charles Falzon, Robert Ott, and Faculty at the School of Image Arts,

This is an open letter by students from the Graduating Class of 2021, on behalf of the Image Arts program at Ryerson University.

The world that we live in is changing. As students of photography, film, and digital media, our industry seemed unpredictable even when we started studying at Ryerson. But now, as we prepare to enter our graduating year, things look even more uncertain than ever.

We respectfully ask that our concerns be addressed in order to instill in us confidence that continuing our education in the fall semester is the right thing to do. Not just for our graduating class, but for all of the students following us whose education will be impacted by this pandemic. We are in no way demanding that our school put the health and safety of students and faculty at risk.

Introduction

A few weeks ago, a poll was posted in the Film '21 Facebook group hoping to spark a conversation. The question asked was: "If we were to go online for our thesis year, how would you be feeling?". The majority of students responded to the poll saying that if the university were to go online, they would defer for a year. 25 voted in favor of deferring, while 11 voted that an online Fall Semester might be okay for pre-production, as long as they could move forward with physical production as usual in the Winter Semester.

Ryerson's recent announcement to move the majority of classes online for the Fall Semester has put all of us in a state of unrest. Based on feedback from subsequent polls that have been posted to Film, Photography and Integrated Digital Facebook groups, students are

primarily concerned about the impact that going online will have on how courses will take shape and/or be affected. We are also concerned about what equipment and facilities we will have access to throughout the year, especially with the lingering concern of another complete shutdown.

Instead of coming to a consensus to defer until a vaccine is available, we simply want to be a part of the conversation - conversations we know our school's faculty are having. We, the students directly affected by your decisions, wish to know how our ability to produce work throughout our upcoming academic year will be impacted. This time is critical as students participate in mandatory Course Intentions, especially for students living across Canada and internationally as they plan their Fall Semester housing situations.

Requests

The following requests are summaries of the comments gathered from brainstorming sessions with peers from all years, across the three streams of Image Arts. These requests are what we, the student body, would like to see incorporated into the program this upcoming year.

1. Access: *Equipment and Facilities*

We would like to start by asking for the assurance that despite moving online, we will have access to Image Arts building facilities and Cage equipment during the school year. This includes, but is not limited to the soundstage, editing suites, computer labs, darkrooms, PIC Lab printing and scanning rooms, and various studio spaces. Students rely on laptops equipped with the Adobe Creative Suite for day to day use. A large enough space, equipped with studio lights, accessories, backdrops, and props is necessary to create a set and complete a shoot. For any at-home assignments that may be required; will it still be possible to rent out this equipment? Upon assignment submission, will there be room to display installation-based work in spaces such as the Image Factory, or Gallery 310? Will we have access to the FCAD Open Space and the woodshop area on the third floor, with assistance from technical staff? With that, what is the protocol in the event that COVID cases surge and our building has to close its doors again?

In addition to this, we are requesting a written agreement that if COVID-19 hinders any production or access to equipment and facilities, that we are allowed to complete this work at a later date using the Image Arts facilities and equipment. Here, we would like to highlight the

importance of our Fourth Year thesis projects. Thesis is a launchpad for our creative careers following graduation. It is also a rare opportunity to create a passion project without the same expenses we will encounter after leaving university. Once we graduate, we lose access to Image Arts equipment and facilities covered by our tuition. Cast and crew become an added expense, and equipment and studio space rates go through the roof.

We want to know that in the event that our projects are canceled, we will get more than a pat on the shoulder, an apology, and encouragement to produce our films and bodies of work without assistance from the school. The response to our issues and our concerns has often been, "Get creative and deal with the problems." However, an international tragedy should not penalize us. We request access to the school's facilities into the following year in order to finish the capstone projects that we are paying for. That means that students who graduate in 2021 should be able to coordinate with the school to complete their projects at the earliest possible convenience, even after graduation. We would be willing to start a conversation about this contingency plan, as it is imperative that the school supports its alumni in the completion of the projects that were started at Image Arts.

2. *Online Learning Modifications and Accommodations*

For students of all years, it is necessary that our production work is given leeway and allowed to be rescheduled in the event that regulations are imposed due to COVID-19. If we are struggling with completing projects due to social distancing or with access to locations due to closures, we deserve the right to delay our productions without repercussions, and again, with the support of the school to finish them when things reopen. Especially for students in Photography and Integrated Digital, the final critique and installation is an essential part of the creative processes and overall success of a piece. How will it be accommodated?

As students that have completed three years of the program, we appreciate the value that in-person experiences offer. Tangibility is lost with online learning, especially when project aspects such as print quality or VR interactivity cannot be assessed. Since our programs benefit heavily from in-person interaction and collaboration, online learning also poses other challenges. Is there any sense in having a semester where first-year students don't get to experience the foundational analog processes? What about the benefits of getting real-time

feedback from peers, while pouring over photo prints in the lab and assisting each other during studio shoots by sharing ideas and tips? With zoom classes comes a decreased sense of community; how will this be addressed?

Based on the Facebook poll of how online classes will take shape and/or be affected, we request that the faculty release plans of how course content and structure will be changing to reflect the current situation. This is a hands-on program, and we would like to see detailed plans of how the faculty will transition engaging and interactive experiences into an online setting. This is especially important for the number of students who will not excel in an online learning environment, due to differences in learning style and varying disabilities. How will the School of Image Arts continue to bolster the inclusivity of differently-abled students in its approach to online teaching?

One argument has been brought up in student discussions is, “What can you learn here that you can’t get from a YouTube tutorial?”. We need something that is beyond what can be delivered by free and easily accessible content. We would like to see the faculty bring in speakers and guest lecturers from Toronto’s booming creative industries, who are currently working on plans for the industry in a post-COVID world. Netflix, Technicolor, Entertainment One, and Pinewood Studios all have offices and facilities in Toronto, not to mention the constant stream of productions that use our city. There are endless brands and agencies with valuable insight gained from working with clients across various industries. We should be hearing from people within these organizations about how they are planning to move forward post-COVID-19, which may give students a better sense of the industry that they will be entering post-graduation. Additionally, connecting students to industry professionals will provide an opportunity to follow up with these contacts for post-graduation client work.

3. Tuition

Our final request is to lower tuition and fees. The quality of our education must be reflected in its cost. We don’t want to be paying for empty studios, labs, and workspaces. If we are not experiencing the parts of our program that make it unique and hands-on, our tuition should be lowered to reflect that. If the tuition costs cannot be altered, we would like to see full financial transparency from the school in regard to how our money is being spent during

COVID-19. We realize that building a new online infrastructure is costly and complex, but the quality of our education must be reflected in the cost.

Conclusion

We ask that you listen to the thoughts of many concerned students across all years and streams of our program. This pandemic has been difficult for all of us, but we don't want to live with the uncertainty of starting the Fall Semester without a fail-safe in place.

Please include us in the conversation going forward to ensure that your final decisions positively impact our education. We trust in your ability to support our academic success and to provide us with the necessary conditions to complete our projects.

We look forward to working with you to come up with agreeable solutions that will benefit the whole of the Image Arts student body.

Signed by,

Matthew Downs
Film: Class of 2021

Jordana Petruccelli
Photo: Class of 2021

Benjamin Fieschi-Rose
Film: Class of 2021

Taye Alvis
Film: Class of 2021

Kelsey Myler
Photo: Class of 2022

Arnaud Weissenburger
Film: Class of 2021

Egan Yi
Film: Class of 2021

Samantha Jackson
Photo: Class of 2021

Sam Mohan
Integrated Digital: Class of 2021

Kashif Ahmed Bin Arif
Photo: Class of 2021

Gloria Burke
Film: Class of 2021

Teagan Lopes
Photo: Class of 2021

Hannah Joosse
Film: Class of 2021

Emily DeBackere
Film: Class of 2021

Julia Edmiston
Film: Class of 2021

Andrew Donnelly
Photo: Class of 2021

Connor Borisenko
Photo: Class of 2021

Tommy Calderon
Photo: Class of 2021

Esteban Powell
Film: Class of 2023

Caitlin Davidson
Film: Class of 2021

Liam DeBoer
Film: Class of 2021

Daegan Tyrtle Photo: Class of 2022	Caeden Wigston Photo: Class of 2022	Jessica Bemis Photo: Class of 2023
Josiah Botting Photo: Class of 2022	Aley Luzuriaga Photo: Class of 2021	John Magee Film: Class of 2021
Tyler Hall Film: Class of 2021	Alexander Thompson Film: Class of 2021	Nick Garel-Jones Integrated Digital: Class of 2021
Daniel Hackborn Film: Class of 2021	Nicole Vacval Film: Class of 2021	Alex Mallon Film: Class of 2021
Charlie Hill Film: Class of 2023	Max Mezo Film: Class of 2023	Jasmine Louisy Integrated Digital: Class of 2021
Madi Bowman Photo: Class of 2021	Sam Campbell Film: Class of 2021	Opal Benhanoh Photo: Class of 2022
Alyssa Mackenzie Photo: Class of 2023	Daniel Lane Film: Class of 2023	Angel Fonseca Photo: Class of 2023
Harrison Clark Film: Class of 2021	Andy Villanueva Film: Class of 2021	Alma Hadzimustafic Film: Class of 2021
Kirsten Brass Film: Class of 2021	Olivia Weatherall Film: Class of 2021	Naja Pereira Film: Class of 2021
Matthew Ochal Film: Class of 2021	William Murata Shields Film: Class of 2021	Maddie Genier Film: Class of 2021
Natalia Urquiza Film: Class of 2022	Abby Bangod Film: Class of 2021	Birintan Mohanraj Integrated Digital: Class of 2021
Tat Havens Photo: Class of 2022	Xiaoqi Qu Photo: Class of 2022	Kyle Fraser Integrated Digital: Class of 2021
Audrey Abergel-Preston Photo: Class of 2023	Shikha Dhunnoo Photo: Class of 2023	Sean Schallberger Photo: Class of 2023

Jamie Marshall Photo: Class of 2023	Lauren Fong Photo: Class of 2023	Ollie Lauricella Photo: Class of 2023
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Ashley Ruiz
Photo: Class of 2023

Korben Lirette
Film: Class of 2022

Brooke Robertson-Pittman
Film: Class of 2022

Kristen Walsh
Film: Class of 2022

Jordan Harvey
Film: Class of 2023

Lauren Eden
Film: Class of 2023

Sydonnae Simon
Film: Class of 2021

Samantha Deck
Photo: Class of 2023

Tyler Dillman
Integrated Digital: Class of 2021

Aidan Elmy
Film: Class of 2021

Alexandra Dunlop
Film: Class of 2022

Ramzi Khalil
Photo: Class of 2021

Yuwen Wang
Photo: Class of 2022

Kiana Tagabing
Film: Class of 2021

Tommy Pàl
Film: Class of 2022

Kassy Gascho
Film: Class of 2022

Maxine Lemieux
Film: Class of 2022

Christina Oyawale
Photo: Class of 2022

Dana Bickram
Photo: Class of 2022

Line Duperron
Photo: Class of 2021

Judith Toth
Integrated Digital: Class of 2021

Patricia Daszkowski
Photo: Class of 2021

Sam Colman
Photo: Class of 2021

Andrew Balint
Film: Class of 2023

Zephra Navarro
Photo: Class of 2021

Amanda Lalonde
Film: Class of 2021

Lori Si
Film: Class of 2022

Kamal Ismail
Film: Class of 2022

Rachel McCarroll
Film: Class of 2022

Trinity Wong
Film: Class of 2022

Hayden Salter
Film: Class of 2022

Tavish Gunasena
Film: Class of 2022

Kesava Kumar
Film: Class of 2022

Ammar Bowaihl
Photo: Class of 2023

John Delante
Photo: Class of 2022