

# ***REVIEW TEAM REPORT***

## **MAINE MEDIA COLLEGE**

**Concerning the Application to Reaffirm Authorization  
to Award a Master of Fine Arts Degree  
in the State of Maine**

Rockport, Maine - August 12, 2009

**Program Review Team:**

**James Baker, Team Chair  
Charles Lyons  
Argy Nestor**

**State Board Observer: Marilyn Temple Tardy**

**State Consultant: Harry Osgood  
Higher Education Specialist**

## **Introduction:**

Maine Media College is a small, non-profit college located in Rockport, Maine on a campus of five academic and residential buildings. In 1995, Rockport College, formerly known as Maine Photographic Workshops, was authorized by an Act of the Maine State Legislature to award the Associate in the Arts and the Master of Fine Arts degree. In the 2007, the school changed ownership and ceased to offer an Associate in Arts Degree. Later that year, the school was granted temporary approval to confer degrees and in 2009, the school was granted permission to change the name of Rockport College to Maine Media College and to grant the Master of Fine Arts degree until June 30, 2010. In order to continue granting degrees past this date the school has sought a State Board of Education review.

A Team of three educators, plus one representative from the Maine State Board of Education, and a member of the Maine Department of Education, conducted a review of the Maine Media College application for reaffirmation of its Master of Fine Arts degree. The Team met at the College on August 12, 2009 and conducted a full day's review of the work of the College and the graduate program of study. Administrators, faculty, Board members and students were interviewed as part of the information gathering process.

## **Program:**

Maine Media College is seeking reaffirmation of authorization to grant a Master of Fine Arts degree. This 60 credit hour, studio-based degree is designed for students who are likely to thrive in a low-residency environment, have extensive practical and/or academic experience in their area of endeavor and are conversant with the history of their chosen media.

## **Program Goals:**

The overall program goal is to support the development of artists at the highest level of quality and achievement in the areas of photography, multi-media and filmmaking. The College strives to provide a highly individualized program of on-site and independent study.

## **Standard A - Organization and Governance**

Maine Media College (MMC) is a branch of Maine Media Workshops (the Workshops). The Workshops was registered as a non-profit corporation in the State of Maine in 2006. In 2007, it received approval from the Internal Revenue Service as a 501 (c) (3) non-profit institution. A Board of Directors that currently numbers 12 including a Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary and Treasurer governs the Workshops. The Bylaws permit up to 21 members. The responsibilities of the Board include the hiring of the Executive

Director of the Workshops. This individual also serves as President of Maine Media College. The Board meets quarterly and decisions are reached by a majority vote.

The Board has convened six committees as follows: Finance and Investment, Audit, Nominating and Governance, Development, Program and Student Affairs and Executive. Membership on these committees, except for Executive, can be made up of Board members and other community members that offer expertise of special value to the committee's work. The Executive Director is an ex-officio member of all committees. The Executive Director assigns certain staff members to committees with the concurrence of the committee's chair.

**THIS STANDARD IS MET.**

**Standard B – Institutional Objectives**

The Master of Fine Arts degree reflects the mission of the Maine Media College “to build a dynamic educational community that fosters creative vision, craftsmanship and expression in media arts.” The purposes of the degree program are specific and clear including goals “to provide a focused educational experience distinguished by excellence in craftsmanship, creativity and critical thinking... to foster intellectual and artistic growth, academic success, collaboration and community involvement... and to model professional practices and examine ethical responsibilities...” The College provides ample evidence of identifying and realizing these objectives through its program of study.

**THIS STANDARD IS MET.**

**Standard C – Degree Requirements**

The MFA degree is a 60 credit, low-residency program, that is comprised of 39 studio credits earned through mentored projects or residencies, 11 academic credits earned through in mentored projects or residencies, 4 academic credits earned through fulfillment of retreat requirements, and 6 credits that are studio or academic in nature as deemed most beneficial to the degree candidate. A candidate must fulfill specific requirements, academic and studio, to earn graduate credit. The candidate, with guidance from his/her advisor, determines the appropriate distribution of elective credits. The maximum time allowed for completion of degree requirements is five years. However, students may complete the program in as little as 2 ½ years.

**THIS STANDARD IS MET.**

## **Standard D – Admissions Requirements**

The Maine Media College admission requirements are clearly defined for the low-residency Master of Fine Arts degree program. The College has a unique two-step and the steps are carefully articulated. The first part of the application process begins with prospective applicants submitting materials for review by an MFA Committee followed by an interview (usually by phone). The application process is completed at an MFA retreat where the applicant meets with faculty and currently enrolled MFA candidates. The applicant makes a presentation to the MFA Committee and others in attendance at the retreat describing his/her artistic goals and development, presenting and critically evaluating his/her work and answering questions about the work and presentation by faculty and current degree candidates.

The College does not accept credit from other MFA Programs or award credit for professional experience. Their philosophy is that the program is an integrated, holistic experience “rather than an amalgamation of academic credits.” That said, the MFA Committee recognizes professional experience when weighing prospective applicants for admission. While the College will accept credit from other graduate institutions earned while students are enrolled in the program, it does so on a highly selective basis.

The College has a written set of policies with regard to refunds for tuition and fees, deferred admissions, etc.

**THIS STANDARD IS MET.**

## **Standard E - Academic Programs**

The low-residency program offers students the opportunity to take responsibility for their learning while supporting and encouraging each student to develop their individual artistic vision. Students are admitted who have a direction and creative identity. This is determined through the work, both visual and written, and also face-to-face conversations, all part of the application process. The program is designed for 3 years but students may take up to 5 years to complete the requirements.

Students determine the content of each course and a mentor insures that each student obtains the skills and knowledge needed to continue on the learning pathway.

There was evidence in the interviews with the administration, faculty and students and in the application that the educational program reflects the purposes and objectives throughout the learning journey at Maine Media College. The opportunities students have to evaluate their work is ongoing during each course while working with a mentor. During the twice a year, 4-day retreats, students are expected to participate in critiques and discussions with their peers and faculty members. Students also meet with their advisor during the retreat to evaluate their plan and to determine and communicate next steps, modifying their plan if necessary.

Maine Media College strives to evaluate the programs by listening to students and through weekly scheduled faculty meetings. Student suggestions and faculty discussions have led to constructive changes. An example of this is the evaluation rubric that was created after responding to a student request.

**THIS STANDARD IS MET.**

### **Standard F - Faculty**

The on-site faculty plays an integral role in the success of the day-to-day college decisions. Faculty spent time during the last several months meeting once a week to discuss various facets of the program and make recommendations to the committee that votes at a retreat. The committee is comprised of 10 members plus one student representative.

During the twice a year retreats on-site, faculty, who are members of the MFA Committee, participate. Committee members are both on and off-site; advisors are always on-site. This gives students the opportunity for face-to-face experiences with faculty members. The faculty is highly qualified with varied background and expertise. There is great depth and breath in their formal training and career experience. They are accomplished artists and continue their creative process.

The retreat also gives off and onsite faculty the opportunity to connect and work on changes in the college program. When a student applies there are many steps to the process before they are invited to the retreat. Faculty judges student work but may not understand if the student is intellectually prepared for the work until they meet them at the retreat. All steps of the application have purposes.

**THIS STANDARD IS MET.**

### **Standard G - Student Services**

Most of the applicants to Maine Media College are students who have had some life experiences. These students are confident and have some type of direction, often working in the field already. They have a foundation of knowledge including technical skills. Sometimes they may not know the possibilities and through their creating, learning and researching they find the answers and a refined direction.

The ongoing mentor system in place provides students advising services and helps them to “cross the t’s and dot the i’s. Each student has an advisor who assists the student in creating a formulated plan to complete the degree.

**THIS STANDARD IS MET.**

## **Standard H - Library and Learning Resources**

The college has refurbished a building to create a space for a larger collection of library resources that have been catalogued during the last two years. The diverse collection is available in house only. Students have access to the inter-library loan University of Maine services.

Since Maine Media College is a low-residency program non-resident students are encouraged to access their local university libraries.

The Internet and online communities provide resources. The college is promoting the use of the online platform Voice Thread for interaction and conversations. There are many other online resources that could be explored to suggest to students.

## **THIS STANDARD IS MET.**

## **Standard I - Facilities**

The MFA at Maine Media College is a low-residency program. Candidates complete the majority of the degree requirements while working in their own facilities. Residencies workshops and retreats are completed on campus with facilities provided by the College. Candidates may choose to complete other projects on campus as well.

The Maine Media College campus consists of five buildings:

- *The New Imaging Center (NIC)* is a four level, 12, 320 square foot building containing photographic darkrooms, three digital imaging labs, a Digital Service Bureau, and administrative offices.
- *The Ernst Haas Center* is a three level, multi-purpose 6,250 square foot building containing lavatories and photographic darkrooms on the lower level, three dedicated classrooms, the library and a reception area on the first floor, and administrative offices on the second floor.
- *The Campus Residence* is a two-level building comprised of individual bedrooms, laundry facilities and classrooms. The first floor contains three dedicated classrooms, twelve private rooms with private bathrooms (two of which are handicap accessible), laundry facilities, and the house keeping office. The second floor contains a conference room that also functions as a classroom.
- *The Post Production Center* is equipped with Macintosh editing stations that use Apple Final Cut Pro software. A Post Production manager, staff editors, and interns oversee the center and provide instruction and editing services.

- *The Sound Stage* is a 2,400 square foot studio, complete with 400 amps of power, lights, sets and grip equipment for film, video and photo productions.

The Visiting Team toured all of these facilities and left very impressed by the degree to which they lend themselves to the creative environment faculty and administration seek to build. The team was reminded, however, during its tour, that some of the buildings were in need, in the near future, of the renovation and repair that other buildings had already undergone.

It should be noted that the College rents a building in town, Union Hall, which we did not see but which is in its last year of use.

We were, additionally, very impressed by the technical equipment in all areas we saw.

All Health and Safety codes appeared, to this team of lay observers, to be met. It should also be noted that we were assured that all buildings had sprinklers.

Finally, although perhaps not required by the standard and perhaps not required by law, the team suggests that the College consider planning for the installation of an elevator, at least in the building housing administrative offices to afford access to persons with mobility challenges.

### **THIS STANDARD IS MET.**

### **Standard J - Financial Resources**

Maine Media Workshops and College is a non-profit 501 (c) 3 organization. Maine Media funds its programs from a variety of financial resources. Included in these resources are: tuition fees, housing and meal plan fees, individual, community and corporate donations, foundation grants, and fundraising events. In addition, Maine Media has been successful in partnering with industry leaders to sponsor equipment and supplies for its programs. The school is currently engaged in a successful New Vision capital campaign that is funding new program initiatives, classroom and other campus improvements and a \$200,000 scholarship endowment.

In 2008, tuition and fees received for all classes offered at the Workshops accounted for 58% of total income with 91% of this total coming from Maine Media Workshop tuition and 9% from Maine Media College. The remaining 42% of income comes from other support including: 27% housing and meal plans, 13% contributions and pledges, and 2% from other income such as gallery and store sales.

The five-year financial projection is described by the College as based on a conservative estimate of Maine Media College's MFA growth. While these attendance and financial goals are attainable without national accreditation, Maine Media and its

board are committed to obtaining accreditation. The college is presently seeking accreditation through NASAD. Once accreditation is granted, MMC will have the ability to attract more students and to better assist them in gaining financing. An increase in tuition fees consistent with an accredited school will allow for an increase in financial aid to students (including access to federal assistance and loans). This tuition increase will also allow for additional faculty and increased administrative costs associated with increased enrollment.

Maine Media Workshops and College have owned its main campus debt free since March of 2009. This includes the administrative offices, dining hall, classrooms, library, and soundstage. Ownership was made possible through a generous donation.

Maine Media Workshops and College maintain a strong financial balance sheet. Current debt consists of a \$500,000 note taken to fund the initial 2006 purchase of the school's assets. The lender has deferred long-term payments on this note until March 2011 with strong indications that the note will be forgiven. The school has an unsecured revolving line of credit with Camden National Bank in order to cover seasonal needs. The school has not accessed this line for operational expenses since April of 2008.

Maine Media College is able to share administrative personnel, infrastructure, and other overhead costs with the larger Summer Workshops program. This greatly minimizes any financial risk for the MFA program. Maine Media Workshops and College have demonstrated the ability to implement its programs and maintain continuity while remaining financially stable.

**THIS STANDARD IS MET.**

**SUMMARY OF FINDINGS:**

All standards have been met.

**RECOMMENDATION TO THE MAINE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION:**

The visiting Team recommends that the State Board of Education acknowledge that the request from Maine Media College has met the Board's degree-granting standards; and that the State Board transmit the College's request for reaffirmation to award the Master of Fine Arts degree to the Legislature's Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs for consideration during the second session of the 124<sup>th</sup> Legislative Session.