

Dear University Governance Office,

I am writing in opposition to the discontinuance of the Visual Arts Education Department. I am currently enrolled in this department as a graduate student. I started in the department in 2018. I received my Bachelor's of Fine Arts from KU in 2009 and after several years of being in the workforce, I decided it was time for me to fulfill my dream of becoming a public school art teacher. I contacted KU and was thrilled to find out they offered this degree. Not only did they offer the degree, but I soon found out that it was extremely advanced and one of the best VAE departments in the country.

The education I received, and still am receiving, from KU's VAE department has prepared me much more than my cohorts in the field. I teach Visual Arts in High School right now and I have also taught K-8. The faculty I have worked with and the cohorts I have met in the field are blown away by the creativity, depth and strategies in my lessons. This is all due to the fact that I received top notch art educator knowledge through the VAE program at KU. It's easy for art educators to jump into a classroom and teach the elements of art, how to draw, historical artists, but what is not easy to do is to teach critical thinking skills, big ideas, and studio habits. These are part of the curriculum in KU's visual art education program and these are things that my cohorts did not learn in their programs. I felt extremely prepared on how to teach students what really matters in the art world and how to advocate for my program in my schools. Because of KU's VAE program, I am actually TEACHING the teachers I work with about big ideas and how to bring them into the art room. How to go deeper with students and not teach surface level art skills. This is the type of thing that changes our youth and will in turn, change the world. I think discontinuing the VAE department is an extreme disservice to not only the Kansas community, where most students will end up teaching, but also the entire country. I teach in Colorado and my education has impacted my students and my cohorts for the better.

I've spoken about how the curriculum is far more advanced than a lot of other programs, but now I'd like to speak on behalf of Dr. Kowalchuck. She has a wealth of experience and knowledge that she brings to the classroom, making the information easy to understand. She's warm, friendly, and actually cares deeply about the students she is teaching. She believes in them and wants them to succeed. I'm always amazed by her patience, grace, and ability to connect the dots in a conversation. She's an amazing educator and has made the department exponentially better. I know she will not always hold this position and someday retire, but I trust that she would condense the department down to the most crucial aspects (like what I described above) and create a program that will educate not only KU students, but also the entire community.

Discontinuing this department would be a loss that affects public schools in the area and beyond. Please consider keeping it so our world can have more talented art educators to challenge students to become authentic global citizens who know how to think critically and creatively.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Kelly Kotlinski